

# An Appreciation Of Kambale Mbokani's Poem 'Esprit Ya Bien'

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## Résumé

Cet article est centré sur l'appréciation du poème 'Esprit Ya Bien' sur base des paramètres ci-après : substance, langue, figures de style, effets de strophe et vers attrayants. Les bons traits du poème qui fait l'objet du présent article sont démontrés au lecteur afin qu'il s'y intéresse. En plus, il est prouvé dans cet article qu'il ne faudrait pas se limiter à l'appréciation d'un poème mais il faut aussi donner son point de vue.

**Mots clés :** Substance, langue, figures de style, effets de strophe et vers attrayants.

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## I. Introduction

A lot of people always try to understand, i.e. to analyze a poem; but, only a few of them have attempted to make an appreciation of some pieces of poetry. The question would then be to know if there is a way which would facilitate or lead someone to appreciate a poem, i.e. to the appreciation of a poem.

In this article, the poem 'Esprit Ya Bien' is appreciated on the basis of (1) substance, (2) language, (3) Imagery, (4) Sound effects and (5) Striking lines.

Note that while reading this article, one should not bear in mind a kind of analysis of a poem but they should know in advance that it is a mere appreciation of the piece of poetry mentioned earlier. In fact, to analyze is to examine the nature or structure of something, especially by separating it into parts, in order to understand or explain it; and to appreciate is to recognize the good qualities of somebody or something (Hornby, A.S. 2015). Thus, my concern in this article is to show to its reader(s) the good features of the poem 'Esprit Ya Bien' and thereafter to draw a personal comment on it since Richard Gill(2006:203) warns: 'Don't be afraid of saying what you think or feel, and don't be afraid of stating what you are unsure about.' It is therefore clear in this assertion that somebody who appreciates a certain poem is not forbidden to supply the reader with his/her point of view. This is why the reader(s) of the article at hand should not be puzzled in case they realize that I have given my opinion about the poem under appreciation.

Accordingly, this article aims at providing the reader with a model of poetry appreciation. Also, it shows to the reader that one should not limit him-/herself to the appreciation of a poem but he/she has to give his/her point of view. Thus, it is possible to appreciate a poem on the basis of the parameters cited earlier.

To cope with this appreciation, I essentially used two kinds of methods: data collection and data analysis. These methods led me, after a lot of thoughts of course, to the production of the present article.

Concerning data collection, the poem 'Esprit Ya Bien' has been of my choice so that I could appreciate it. As a result, I devoted enough time to reading it furthermore for its understanding. Then, I looked at the way Wren, P.C. and Martin (2001) deal with poetry appreciation so that I too would appreciate the poem of my concern here.

For data analysis, my appreciation is based on: substance, language, Imagery, sound effects and striking lines. I also give my personal comment on the selected poem. Thus, to end with this research, I have applied the reader oriented approach which is concerned with how the author is viewed by the audience. In this approach, the reader creates meaning, not the author or the work. Once the work is published, the author is no longer relevant. (<https://www.cliffsnotes.com>) This is the reason why I too give my personal point of view about the piece of poetry I chose to appreciate in this article.

## II. Poem Appreciation

One can not appreciate something he/she does not see or have at hand; here below is the poem which makes the core of the discussion in this article;

*'Give everything you've got  
With a welling smiling heart  
You damned, fucking teacher!  
One of them barked at me.*

*'I have nothing on me', I lied  
'Apart from my faded clothes  
And my smiling shoes  
Take them if you like,*

*And save my precious life.'  
'What the devil do you think we will do  
With your fucking clothes and yawning shoes?  
Roared the frowning stumpy soldier,*

*Who had pointed his machine gun  
Into my left ear.  
'Either you give us money for our drink  
Or you sod off to your blamed ancestors*

*With bullets in your fucking heard'  
The third serviceman growled.  
Before I could make any decision  
About my two dear dollars*

*Carefully hidden in my underwear  
My mind had stripped me down  
To hand my invaluable treasure  
(Which my aunt had given me*

*To save my life from sure death by starvation)  
To quench thirst of drunk but thirsty  
Protectors of people and property.  
'Were you right Oh my mind*

*To prefer slow silent death by starvation  
To sudden, noisy death by bullets  
Fired through my heard  
By the protectors of people and property?*

**(Mbokani Kambale 2008: 101-102)**

In my appreciation of this poetic text, I got inspiration from Wren, P.C. and Martin, H. (2001:452-454) who suggest, in their model of appreciation of a poem, a scheme which should cover the following elements: (1) Substance, (2) language, (3) Imagery, (4) Sound effects and (5) Striking lines. Thus, my appreciation of 'Esprit Ya Bien' is faithfully based on these features as it can be noticed here below.

### **Substance**

Hornby, A.S. (2010:1510) defines substance as being the important or main part of something. It would then be said that one can not pretend to have appreciated any piece of writing without having looked at its 'substance', i.e. its essence.

Essence is, according to [WWW.str.org/articles/100-basic-philosophic-terms\(2016\)](http://WWW.str.org/articles/100-basic-philosophic-terms(2016)), the nature or "whatness" of a thing. The qualities or attributes that make a thing what it is. Here, it is obvious that the components of a poem are worthy for a good appreciation of it. Yet, the constituents are discovered only when one reads it. This is why Wren, P.C. and Martin, H.(2001:452) assert: *'the first thing we must do is to read the poem through, carefully. Then we must ask ourselves: what is it all about? What is the subject? And what does the poet say about the subject?'* Reading is something very important which any person who would like to appreciate a given piece of poetry should take into account. Thus, one should go through a poem several times in order to cope with its appreciation.

In fact, after reading this poem — as the author calls it — I am left with a sensation of oppression, i.e. I realize that there is somebody who is undergoing oppression on one hand and on the other hand there is an oppressor. Doing so, the author of this poem expresses emotion. It is better to acknowledge here that the author of this poetic text has done something positive since *the function of poetry is to touch the heart; that is, to arouse emotion.* (Wren, P.C. and Martin, 2001:452) Therefore, a poem should be felt in the reader's heart, i.e. he/she

should have a certain sensation by reading it. The following verses confirm that the poet discusses the oppression under which the teacher is;

*With a willing smiling heart  
You damned, fucking teacher!  
One of them barked at me.*

The way the teacher is being addressed shows at which extent he is oppressed. It would thus be said that he is helpless since he is doomed to give everything he has got. So, through this poem, the poet describes the awful situation in which the teacher is. Also, he shows that a soldier, holding a machine gun, is more powerful than a poor helpless teacher;

*'Either you give us money for our drink  
Or you sod off to your blamed ancestors*

*With bullets in your fucking heard'*

It is clear here that the teacher is in a situation where he has to make a choice between staying alive with bare hand and continue to keep his fortune but make sure that he drawing to his ancestors, i.e. experiencing death. This reinforces the idea according to which that the persona is under oppression in this poetic text.

### Language

This poem is written in a very simple language and its author chose exact words to express his thoughts. Also, one realizes that the poet is fluent and this is something positive since *we value poetry for its fluency-the feeling that the words have poured spontaneously from the poet* (Gill, R. 2006:151). Thus, the use of appropriate words in a poem should fascinate its reader(s), i.e. the poet should not be redundant in his/her word choices. One should not discover or realize that the poet has been forcing some words where they did not need being used. Each word used by the poet should have sense. That is, it ought to be meaningful in order to convey a certain message in the poem.

It is worthy to remind that language is *a series of sounds, which strung together in groups, which convey meaning to listeners* (RENE P. BOX (1974). So, there is no language without meaning, i. e. each language must transmit a message to the listeners. And, he who speaks any language must understand it first in order to manipulate it for the sake of conveying his thoughts.

### Imagery

Imagery, in a literary text, is an author's use of vivid and descriptive language to add depth to their work. It appeals to human senses to deepen the reader's understanding of the work (WWW.en.m.wikipedia.org). It is then inferred here that for the sake of strengthening the comprehension of their reader(s), sometimes authors use some words in the place of the others. This is not the way of hiding what they mean, as uninformed people think, but it is a way of urging the readers on the further understanding of any passage. Therefore, one does not need to think that literary texts aim at covert communication, i.e. the veiled message or indirect message.

The term *imagery* refers to words and phrases that create pictures that appeal to the sense (McDougal, Littell & Company 1986:134). It is indeed the imagination of the author as discovered in the poem under my discussion through this article.

In fact, the images or figures of style described here below are overtly used by the author of the piece of poetry 'Esprit Ya Bien'. These ones are the following:

- a) The second verse of the first stanza contains *hyperbole* 'a willing smiling heart.' This is an emphasis, i.e. the addresser is insisting on his message by exaggerating in his speech. It is often say that the mood can express what the heart feels. This means that what someone feels can easily be discovered through their faces.
- b) The poet uses euphemism throughout his poem. Tom Gibbons (1979) defines *euphemism* as a word or phrase with dignified connotations which is used in place of one having connotations regarded as undignified or offensive. It is therefore noticed in the poem 'Esprit Ya Bien' that numerous words are used in the place(s) of the others probably because its author would like to show to his readers at which extent the persona (the teacher) is being threatened.

Examples of euphemism found in the poem under my discussion are the following verses: 'You damned', 'fucking teacher!', 'One of them barked at me', 'faded clothes', 'smiling shoes', 'fucking clothes and yawning shoes', 'Roared the frowning stumpy soldier', 'blamed ancestors and to roar', 'the third serviceman growled', 'My mind had stripped me down'...

Respectively, the words 'faded', 'smiling', 'fucking and yawning' stand for old or worn out and the phrases 'barked at me', 'Roared the frowning', 'the third serviceman barked' infer horrifying utterances of the soldier towards the poor teacher. Nevertheless, 'blamed' stands for guilty and 'My mind had stripped me down' means I was completely frightened, and I had nothing to do, i.e. I was in the position of weakness and I did not know whom to recourse to.

c) There are also examples of oxymoron in the last but one stanza and even in the last stanza. These ones are seen through the verses which follow: 'To save my life from sure death by starvation', 'To quench the thirst of drunk but thirsty', 'To prefer slow death by starvation', 'To sudden, noisy death by bullets' It is somewhat awkward that someone whose death is already ensured can save his life by starvation and yet this can still have to lead them to the grave. Through this then, the author has shown that it is possible, for an instance, to accept the hardship of life in order to preserve it.

Note that this poem contains some figures of style. This is a good and positive thing since Peck, J. and Goyle, M. (1987:11) state: '*we read the poem in order to learn about the figure behind it*'. So, a poem can be understood thanks to the different figures that it contains, i.e. the understanding of figures of style in a poem is a way to the understanding of the whole poem. Nonetheless, a piece of poetry is not formed of figures of speech only. In fact, there are other elements which make parts of a poem as I discuss them here below.

### Sound effects

Lines of a poem often end by the same sounds or different ones. When they end by the same sounds, they are said to rhyme and then they are referred to as assonance. But, not all the lines of a poem finish with sounds alike. This is the case of different sounds found in 'Esprit Ya Bien'.

a) The sporadic, i.e. quickened movement of line 1 and 2 of the first stanza, in comparison with the stately movement line 2 and 3 in the second stanza, well echo and reinforce the sense of this poem which is the threat made by the soldier to the poor teacher. So, there is assonance in these verses since they end with the same sounds.

b) There is another example of assonance in the second and third lines of the last but one stanza. This assonance still emphasizes the message of the teacher's disgust due to the undisciplined soldiers' menace. Thus, it is ironical that the persona calls the soldiers 'Protectors of people and property' and yet they do behave like murderers and robbers of people's property. Unfortunately, some DRC military authorities are in the same boat with such soldiers.

c) This poem is written in free verses, i.e. most of its lines do not rhyme.

### Striking lines

The most striking lines are lines 1 and 2 of the first stanza and line 4 of the second stanza. Another striking line is line 1 of the third stanza.

In fact, in lines 1 and 2 of the first stanza, the persona is urged to generosity and seems, therefore, to be generous towards his addresser in line 4 of the second stanza as he says; '*Take them if you like*'.

The first line of the third stanza covers a sense of dignity. 'Life', being precious, is thus the dignity of any human being. The poet recalls the consciousness of the reader about the respect of a person's dignity. Every human being has got right of life and this should thereafter be preserved by each person despite their position in the society. Thus, the verse "*And save my precious life*" sounds more meaningful in this poem since 'life' is invaluable and that once lost, it cannot be regained. 'Life' is not something with which one should jock.

Other striking lines in this poem are all the four lines which constitute the sixth stanza. Through the first line of this stanza, i.e. '*Carefully hidden in my underwear*', the fear of the persona is expressed and revealed. In fact, the speaker is afraid (even before meeting the soldier) of being extorted his "*two dear dollars*" as he calls them in the last line of the fifth stanza. Thus, the persona finds that the good place where he should keep his money is in his 'underwear'. What a pity situation! This shows at which extent the teacher, who is the persona of this poem, is experiencing poverty reason and does not want to lose what he earns from his labour.

Besides, in the second verse/line of the same stanza, the teacher is in position of weakness since he finds that he is doomed to give up to resistance. Therefore, he says; '*My mind had stripped me down*'. This proves that he is ready to give to the soldier what he thought to have been hidden in his 'underwear', i.e. his two dear dollars.

Moreover, the third line of this sixth stanza confirms that the persona is really ready to deliver his two *dear dollars* to the soldier as it can be read; '*To hand my invaluable treasure*'. But, the pity is that what the speaker calls '*invaluable treasure*' was not the fruit of his labour as it is proved in the last line; '*Which my aunt had given me*'. Thus, the persona is so frustrated that he decides to hand what he has been given by his aunt to the soldier. One would then say that what the bible says is accomplished: 'he who has will be given more and he who does not have will be extorted even the little he has' (Matthew 25:29)

I have given here a somewhat detail of the poem '*Esprit Ya Bien*'. The points amplified above in connection with Mbokani's free verse will make surely an attentive reader understand what he/she should look for in good poetry in order that he/she may enjoy it in a better way. But, one should not limit himself/herself to this way of appreciating a poem because the opinion and ideas of an author about his/her own work are not necessarily the most reliable guides toward a meaningful interpretation of a text (WWW.fajardo.com 2012). Therefore, it is possible that the reader of a given text understand it better than its author. Reason why, I preferred to supply the reader of the article at hand with the point which follows so that he/she may be acquainted with my

opinion about the poem 'Esprit Ya Bien' since the understanding of a given poem is not necessarily the same, i.e. each one may have his/her understanding.

### III. Comment On The Poem Under Discussion

By commenting on this poem, I am going to talk briefly about its central idea, the poet's attitude towards the subject of his poem, the signification of certain given lines/verses and the stretched picture in the lines specified. Furthermore, my concern is based on the discussion of the way some sound effects are produced by the poet and the figures of speech that should be found in a poem and how they can be explained.

This commentary is also concerned with the form of the poem 'Esprit Ya Bien' since in many instances, the effectiveness of a poem derives from the tension between the use of the linguistic and formal units (WWW.poetry.org/whatis.htm).

To start with the central idea, this poem deals with a teacher's misfortune and threat. In fact, the poet depicts the bad situation in which a certain teacher is found.

First, the teacher appears to be a poor man since he has got 'faded clothes', 'smiling shoes' or 'yawning shoes'. All this metaphor proves that the teacher to whom the poet refers is actually poor and deserves a help rather than being robbed even the little he has as noticed through this poem.

Next, despite of his being poor, the teacher is undergoing extortion and this is done willingly by soldiers (probably on the teacher's way to his home).

Finally, it is realized that the poem's central idea is the teacher's misfortune due to some undisciplined soldiers.

As far as the poet attitude towards the subject of his poem is concerned, through this poem, I do understand that his great preoccupation is to remind bad hearted soldiers that their duty is not to shoot bullets in the population's heads and rob them their wealth but it is, indeed, to protect them with their properties.

Besides, the poet shows that it is better to accept starvation, i.e. suffering rather than choosing death. This is even what La Fontaine wishes in one of his fables **La mort et le bûcheron** when he infers that it is better to suffer rather than to die (Vanstraelen, p95). It would then be said that one should endure suffering because it seems to be the fate of all the human beings. Thus, there is no way to escape the hardships of life.

Taking into account the significance of certain given lines/verses and the stretched picture in them, my attention has been much drawn on what follows: 'Give everything you've got', 'You damned, fucking teacher!', 'What the devil do you think we will do; with your fucking clothes and yawning shoes?', 'Either you give us money for our drink', 'Or you sod off to your blamed ancestors', 'With bullets on your fucking head'. All these lines/verses have got the ideational function which is concerned with cognitive meaning that is the intimidation of the undisciplined soldiers.

In fact, these verses prove that the undisciplined soldiers are willingly forcing the teacher to give all what he has. This would be the reason why the poet uses hyperbole to emphasize the fact that the teacher undergoes frightening and he is thus doomed to give his property to the soldiers in order to protect his precious life.

Note that, there is no sound effect in the piece of poetry appreciated in this article since not even a single stanza which rhymes. So, the poem in question is written in free verse.

Furthermore, this poem is a kind of a narration, i.e. the persona is simply recounting what he experienced some days before.

Another thing is that the author's ideas are scrambled in this piece of poetry, i.e. he has used enjambment which is the fact of a sentence continuing beyond the line of poetry without a pause Hornby, A.S. (2015: 495).

### IV. Conclusion

This article essentially deals with the appreciation of Kambale Mbokani's piece of poetry 'Esprit Ya Bien'. In the appreciation of the mentioned poem, I have been concerned with *substance, language, imagery, sound effects, and striking lines*. Thanks to these elements, I have shown to the reader(s) the good features of the poem 'Esprit Ya Bien'.

It is proved through this article that an appreciation of a given poem can be based on the parameters cited earlier. Thus, the hypothesis is confirmed here since I have appreciated 'Esprit Ya Bien' and have thereafter given my opinion about it.

Moreover, I have made a comment on the poem which makes the core of the present article. This is why the article at hand shows to the reader(s) that one should not limit him-/herself to the appreciation of a poem but he/she has to give his/her point of view.

Nevertheless, I do not pretend to have accomplished a fair appreciation. In fact other researchers who are interested in poetry may complete me in a way or another and they may even have something to say about what I have done here.

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