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Art and healing: ethical imperatives
in Julien Kilanga Musinde's *Jardin secret*

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This article sets out to analyse a trend in literary (re)positioning in the context of socio-political confrontation. In keeping with the literary approach adopted by Julien Kilanga Musinde in the novel *Jardin secret*, which was published in 2010, the article will focus on defining the ultimate objective(s) of literary writing in a context where the novel genre is perceived as a depiction of the author's worldview. Given the socio-political contradictions and widespread dehumanisation that characterise present-day Africa, it is important to note that Musinde's novel is one of the answers to the political contradictions that impel postcolonial Africa into a situation of endless crisis. In this philosophical novel, the author endeavours to address the misuse of political power. Similarly, he is at pains to decry the unethical use of scientific knowledge. Much as politics is at the core of the narrative, it is important to note that the political vein is nothing more than a pretext used by the author to broach deeper philosophical issues, which are expressed through ethical imperatives. **Keywords:** African intellectual, altruism, ethical imperatives, liberation war, non-violence, renaissance.

To readers familiar with Kilanga Musinde's works, *Jardin secret* comes across as a tad disconcerting. Published in 2010, the novel is peculiar in the sense that it constitutes a departure from the literary approach, adopted hitherto by the author, according to which literacy fiction transcends contemporary socio-political realities.¹ Political issues are manifestly raised in this novel. The novel's non-polemical tone does not bar the author from broaching these questions from a philosophical angle, thus goading the reader into adopting a metaphysical interpretation of the various occurrences in his characters' lives, which lives are an uncanny portrayal of the lives of his contemporaries.

As for the plot, *Jardin secret* depicts an apolitical African intellectual in a country ravaged by perpetual civil conflict. Mwanda, the intellectual in question, is an academic intent on solving the political crisis plaguing his country, the *République des Tropiques*. Forced to join the *maquis*, the protagonist manages to reconcile warring parties by using peaceful means of conflict resolution, whilst refraining from getting any personal gratification for his political involvement. Quite clearly, *Jardin secret* is also an indictment of fifty years of independence in African countries, in general, with particular regard to the Democratic Republic of Congo. Under scrutiny is the political

and intellectual context of the author's country of birth. Using the protagonist's voice, Musinde highlights the supremacy of reason over selfish, political or despotic designs, thus giving the reader a glimpse of the ethical way (voice) propounded by some form of idealistic subjectivity in a world where inordinate political ambition has become a pathological obsession. His desire to combat social injustice through non-violent means can only find expression in the ethical imperatives conveyed to the reader through creative writing.

This article aims to affirm Musinde's dream as an artist through his literary work: the knowledge and practice of metaphysical values can sufficiently trigger transformation of individual human beings and humanity at large. Ethical issues will be discussed as an essential aspect of literature, in the context of the duplicitous nature of the space in which the depicted universe is located.

Juxtaposition of settings

Jardin secret is set in two juxtaposed contexts. The protagonist simultaneously inhabits the dream world and the empirical world, that of the conscious and subconscious mind, to such an extent that the narrator ironically muses, in that regard, that: "this demonstrates that, through dreams, it is possible to live in a parallel world detached from reality!" (23)²

It is apparent that amidst this duality, from the author's perspective, the conscious and subconscious minds do *create* in an inextricably linked manner. The dreamer, "rather than detaching him/herself from life, imbibes it in some form of alchemical mix where, through mysterious phenomena, dreams and the wakeful state coincide" (Matthews 53).

Dominique Zahan explains this phenomenon of duality, as depicted in Musinde's novel, in the following manner: "The self normally and naturally has a point of fission, probably located in the space between the realms of consciousness and unconsciousness. This attribute gives human beings a vast array of paranormal possibilities: bilocation, divination, metamorphosis, etc" (Zahan 19). Bourgeacq weighs in with a value judgment on the components of this duality by using terms such as "profane", to denote the tangible world, and "sacred", to signify the unconscious world (Bourgeacq 736), while, in Breton's view, this duality is an absolute reality or *surreality* (Breton 23–24).

However, this dualistic perception of reality in Musinde's novel brings to the fore a third dimension pertaining to the realm of the ideal. Dreams (musings, oneiric visions) combine with (real) life in order to accomplish the (ideal) dreams. It is a future reality considered as a finality which, in Breton's view, is an object of conquest (Breton 24).

Essentially, the novels presents the character of Mwanda who, while "lying next to his wife", "enters an imperceptible universe" and engages in deep meditation (23).

The act of meditation adds a very subtle transcendental dimension, in the sense that that Mwanda oscillates between two ostensibly distinct worlds by reconciling them. It is, nonetheless, necessary to indicate that the “dream” (oneiric) vision that occurs in the protagonist’s subconscious after meditation coincides with his dream (ideal) in the empirical world. As a matter of fact, Mwanda’s tangible world is one of violence: the *République des Tropiques*. The “tropicality” of this republic could be reminiscent of the author’s country of birth (a tropical country) or a neologism coined by Sony Labou Tansi, subsequently researched and popularised by Georges Ngala and Alexie Tcheyap.³ Nevertheless, for obvious reasons (the author goes to great lengths to avoid perpetuating violence through the description of terror), Musinde refrains from rivalling the author of *La vie et demie* in terms of describing violence. Having determined the pathological status of his tangible world, the author seeks cosmic balance by falling back on the oneiric world instead. Just like Homer’s “Ocean”, which is located “at the fringes of Mother Earth”, far away from the world for which it is “the source and embodiment of Life” (Collobert 24), or even Gide’s “narrow gate” epitomised by Alissa’s personal journal in a novel by the same name, the subconscious world of *Jardin secret* is regarded as a source of life, to the extent that it delivers moments of positivity that foster hope for life. Free and salutary thought subsequently takes root from these grounds for hope. From the perspective of the main character’s private life, this “Jardin secret” (Secret garden) can also be likened to Breton’s *philosopher’s stone*, with regard to its mission of “imbuing human imagination with the capacity and courage to challenge everything” (Matthews 53).

In search of a cure

Jardin secret is a space of secret initiation to life, to logical reasoning based on human values. Literary writing is therapeutic in a “sick” world characterized by violence. This writing of *praxis* is above all a moral treatise and form of political education based on altruism and ethical values. Put across as inexorably moral, these are the values that Musinde posits as a way out of the crisis in which Africa and Africans find themselves.

An altruistic ethics

Jardin secret is an expression of idealism based on recognition and respect for the *other*. Above all, the novel foregrounds “man.” This “man” *pops* out of the closed circle to embrace humanity: “Every morning, before going to work, Mwanda would routinely receive people who would present to him a series of family problems he was expected to solve. He no longer belonged to himself. He was dedicated not only to his family but to all mankind” (8). Located at the beginning of the novel, this excerpt signals, right from the outset, that the subject created by the author has a high sense of otherness: this is a man that takes decisive, down-to-earth action.

Expressions such as “every morning [...], routinely” (8) are used by the author to underscore the repetitive and tireless nature of the main character’s actions. The apogee is reached when Mwanda is described as “no longer belonging to himself” but rather “devoting himself to all mankind” (8). In there lies the expression of a heightened sense of moral imperatives. Musinde chooses not to base his lessons on prevailing political education and habits but rather on moral imperatives possibly already rooted in the human conscience. These imperatives appear rather randomly in various forms throughout the text: direct or indirect, categorical or hypothetical, as there are used by other philosophers (Pierre Laberge 177).

For the most part, Musinde’s text is generally based on the following direct categorical imperative formulated by Immanuel Kant: “Act in such a way that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never merely as a means to an end, but always at the same time as an end” (Kant 150). Or even “But man is not a thing; he is therefore not an object that can be reduced to mere means” (Kant 151). Whereas *man* or humanity is the ultimate focus of Mwanda’s actions, Musinde’s readers are led to believe that the novel is steeped in ethics or the pursuit of *Goodness*. The novel subsequently portrays a “sick man ruined by family issues to be resolved” (8) and “oppressed by the doings of misguided political leaders” (50). Musinde’s *man* cuts a miserable figure: [he is] the “the widow and the crying orphan” (50).

However, the author’s considerations ought to be located beyond the conspicuous realm of simple materialism: “At what point will it be understood that a suffering man matters more than human suffering? On its own, the elimination of human suffering from the world would not guarantee the happiness of humanity in its entirety or, rather, of the non-suffering man” (105). Rather than getting bogged down into describing “man”’s misfortunes (Musinde shies away from describing horrors to the extent that his writing deals with sporadic political incidents rather faint-heartedly (Mwepu 97), Musinde’s novel develops a philosophy of selflessness and hope as a response to the madness occasioned by a chaotic world. The novel cannot be read as a guide or an analytical treatise on the issue of *goodness*, along the lines of the philosophical notion of Speculative Reason (Laberge 275). On the contrary, given the fact that this novel leads to categorical as well as hypothetical imperatives, reading it reveals a dimension that surpasses the mere description of *moral goodness*, which description is superseded and rounded off by introducing an element of moral coercion. The main character in *Jardin secret* is a self-conscious, self-disciplined entity, a potential human being whose advent precipitates the emergence of a world that is ideally human. Musinde’s outlook can be likened to Kant’s in the sense that the ultimate purpose of every action is “man” or “humanity”. Thus, this first imperative to be enunciated in the novel is one of the most important ones.

Hence, Musinde contends that overcoming the crisis “calls for virtuous dispositions which can, in and of themselves, help balance, harmonise and reconcile ideal ends

and the means through which these ends are to be achieved" (26). It is quite clear that Musinde's "reconciliation of ideal ends" echoes Gaston Berger's "reconciliation of uncoordinated endeavours" (Édouard Morot-Sir 313, 316). It is this notion of reconciliation that is posited as an incontrovertible principle of otherness, even in the face of political confrontation.

Theory and practice

By professing a human ideal, Musinde's main character does not come across as a passive idealist whose actions are limited to dreams. In a world where men are hell-bent on exploiting and killing *man*, the novel, *Jardin secret*, individualises its intended reader. It can thus be perceived as a catalogue of moral obligations compiled for the benefit of the African intellectual. Does the author think that African intellectuals have not fulfilled their mission? What does this mission entail?

Jardin secret is founded on dualism: knowledge—awareness, theory—practice, knowledge—know-how. The constitutive elements of these dualistic pairs are not meant to be antithetical. The resulting balance, which ought to be viewed as a form of relative finality in this context, is a function of the harmonious combination of forces undergirding those constitutive elements. Yet, it is this sympathetic harmony that is missing from the world portrayed by Musinde: "A gulf thus emerged between the intellectual and the common good of the people and, particularly, those in power. People in power practised blind empiricism by putting all scientific considerations on the backburner in their actions. In fact, it was a kind of tabula rasa where they solely relied upon their experience or prevailing practice" (11–12). This extract evokes the ascendancy of pure empiricism over conscience in a political context. Politicians cripple themselves by using only one of the two pillars that undergird political action: knowledge and conscience.

In this case, Musinde elects to talk of "blind" (11) empiricism; the qualifier "blind" does not have any meliorative connotations. This deliberate blindness presumably makes for a crippled, foolhardy being incapable of contributing to any salutary enterprise. Noting that the world depicted in the novel is governed by the "blind", on its own, prefigures imminent failure, all the more so because the basis for the emergence of an ideal and humane world is fundamentally flawed. In Musinde's view, "scientific considerations and political decisions or actions must go hand in hand with harmonious national development and the implementation of any policy agenda" (12–13). In this instance, the author hints at a kind of unconditional collaboration where "the man of (political) action" draws on precepts developed by "artisans of theory" (or intellectuals) (14). Having these two elements as the foundation base of the pyramidal structure, of which "man" (as absolute finality) is the apex, would strengthen the structure and enable it to resist any attempts at destabilising it. What about those artisans of theory?

In *Jardin secret*, there is more and more emphasis on the role of the African intellectual. The narrator asks the following questions: "What does the future hold for intellectuals' contribution to society and its advancement after fifty years? What do we expect of them? What will become of their responsibility with regard to the trajectory and progress of the world, in general, and the country, in particular?" (47). These questions are a pointer to the author's intimated view that intellectuals ought to play a role in independent Africa. Over and above the questions raised above, *Jardin secret* defines this role *through the absurd*. Rather than suggesting things that African intellectuals should have done better, the character Mwanda describes what he is doing for the time being: "Now that the country is full of intellectuals in all fields, we thought it was time for the country to make rapid progress towards development [...] Those who were supposed to serve as luminaries have plunged the country into the darkness of folly, human folly as well as the 'absurdity of the elements'" (48). There is a glaring gulf between "light" and "darkness" or "folly", or what is (*hic et nunc*) and what should be (the ideal). In this context, intellectuals use their "knowledge for the advancement of evil" (46). "For example, lawyers use their ingenuity to bamboozle the masses on purpose" (47). They do not wish to be understood whereas, according to certain philosophers, every peace process should be essentially easy to understand (Hare 172).

In *Jardin secret*, language use is perverted for the purpose of prolonging conflict. Lawyers are one example used by Musinde to illustrate this harmful tendency amongst intellectuals for whom "duty" does not mean the same thing [for all people] (Hare 170). Musinde demonstrates that "knowledge is sacrificed on the altar for hero-worshipping leaders" (48–49). In this context of "forsaking knowledge for a chance to hold high office", the author observes that "intellectuals are major ideologues that back regimes"; they are even prepared to block any attempts at openness or oppose any concessions that the state might be tempted to make" (49–50).

However, the author makes it a point to provide a role model: Mwanda. The latter embodies the essence of intellectuals as they should be in a world where human values are sacrificed. Inventing the character of Mwanda in his creative writing enables Musinde to exit the "realm of ideas" by portraying an exceptional man capable of breaking the shackles of the present by personifying humanistic thought. The poetic tone used by the author, in the context of a bitter struggle between Good and Evil amply demonstrates that artistic hope fosters Goodness: "Sadly, there came a time when a voracious hand stretched out, when silence made no distinction between time and space, a time when this greatness born out a wealth of life experience abandoned its own and with it left its soul which extolled friendship, a symbol of humanism and a mind where knowledge and generosity are roused." (91)

"Greatness, experience, guts, friendship, humanism and, lastly, awareness and generosity", such are the attributes used by Musinde to describe Mwanda. The author

praises and *celebrates* what is lacking amongst African intellectuals, namely, the *sympathy* between scientific knowledge and humanistic endeavours. Another moral imperative foregrounded by the author in *Jardin secret* is his clarion call for a mode of political power guided by both knowledge and the conscience. One can only wonder whether all this nostalgia for a “platonian republic” led by *self-conscious* intellectuals might not constitute a form of externalisation of an *in vivo* personal experience. This is what Francastel wants to make us believe: “Thus, the “reality” unfolding before us in the form of signs, behavioural patterns or institutions, requires that we cast on it a gaze which “has, naturally, remained the same right from the origin of the human race; [but] it is not an isolated sense [to the extent that] one can only see what they [already] know” (Francastel 75). This viewpoint is similarly echoed by Gaston Bachelard when he contends that “whatever scientists observe under the microscope, they have already seen it. It could paradoxically be argued that they never discern [things] for the very first time” (Bachelard 146).

By the same token, Mwanda and his dream epitomise the author’s own personal experience as a witness of a chaotic period during which his country was in a state of utter despair. In this case, the author’s point of view gave rise to an object (Francastel: 76). This worldview is, therefore, a reflection of Musinde’s personal experience. In the early 1990s, Musinde participated in the Sovereign National Conference instituted during President Mobutu’s reign. During these meetings, which are mentioned by the author in this novel (46–47), Zairian intellectuals of the time refused to *speak the same language*. Instead, they kept on trying to bedazzle one another.

Non-violence

In principle, *Jardin secret* ought to be perceived as a piece of literature that denounces recourse to violence as a means of combating violence and its attendant barbaric acts. Whereas it is obvious that the *République des Tropiques*, portrayed in the novel as a State where “the people are wallowing in poverty” while grappling with another kind of war in the form of famine, disease and torture” (32), it is equally clear that the author vehemently rejects any notion of liberation warfare (19). What is the cause of violence in the first place? (25). Through this question, the author points to the need to tackle evil by identifying its root causes accurately.

The novel identifies several root causes of violence, namely: disinformation, dire shortage of basic needs, hatred and jealousy (25). Since *Jardin secret* is a novel with a philosophical slant, the author readily foregrounds certain moral imperatives which he considers vital in combating violence. Out of those non-violent imperatives, Musinde regards two (peace and dialogue) as fundamental. It is these two imperatives that will be discussed in the two subsequent sections below.

Put your sword back into its place!

It is important to recall that *Jardin secret* portrays a world marred by violence. The author describes it by drawing on day-to-day life experiences. Writing on philosophy and conflict, Hare and Aubin claim that hardly a week passes without a press report on conflict and that the press seldom reports on the end of conflicts (Hare et al. 167).

The injunction “put your sword back into its place!” (68) ought to be perceived as a direct categorical imperative inspired by Christian literature. Whereas this utterance, as attributed to Jesus Christ in Matthew’s Gospel (26: 51–53), was both monosemic and unidimensional, Musinde uses it to demand that hostilities between all warring parties cease unconditionally.

The kind of violence reported in *Jardin secret* is interminable in the sense that it is cyclical: victims of oppression are also tempted to use violence in their quest for justice (68). The text is unambiguous: violence begets violence and “emancipation through war” is tantamount to “perpetuation of violence” (19). Such is, nonetheless, the plan of the rebel movement led by the character Commandant Mukalamusi (which means ‘cunning’ in the Kiswahili variant of Katanga Province in the Democratic Republic of Congo) (16). Musinde deals with the concept of liberation war philosophy in his own way to denounce Africa’s situation in general, with a particular focus on the situation in central Africa. The mention of “shores of the city whitewashed by sombre skeletal remains left by belligerents” is somewhat reminiscent of the 1994 Rwandan genocide as well as the massacre in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of Congo (1996–98). It could be argued that denouncing violence as a method of liberation struggle also signals the author’s rejection of the Machiavellian viewpoint according to which “it is not restorative violence, but destructive violence, that must be condemned” (cited by Cugno 28). Nevertheless, Machiavelli himself recognises the limitations of his views: “It is very rare for a good man to use reprehensible means to achieve an honest end, or for a wicked man to begin doing good all of sudden, by making good use of usurped power” (Cugno 22–23). However, Musinde’s strength lies beyond the theatre of violence which, potentially and actually, only breeds violence (69). The author takes charge of an entire continent’s destiny by offering *Jardin secret* as a set of human values in a world (*République des Tropiques*) where politicians have completely forsaken their (human) conscience.

Hence, the injunction “put your sword back into its place!” (68) is equally aimed at people in power and the oppressed. Coming across as a call for a cease-fire, this imperative has the potential to break the cycle of violence, given that violence only begets more violence, *ad infinitum* (68). From this perspective, the novel becomes a workshop where principles of resolving conflict through peaceful means are formulated. It could be inferred that Musinde is suggesting that, in its quest for solutions to its numerous crises, the African continent would do well to take a leaf from the book of the likes of Gandhi and Martin Luther King.

But, then again, how can one put an end to violence in a situation where warring parties are not prepared to make peace? In this regard, Musinde considers the moral imperative below to be most critical.

Dialogue

Hare et Aubin contend that “social conflict often results from fundamental differences between groups of people. Those differences could be of an economic, religious or ideological nature or about any issue that might goad people into slugging it out” (Hare et al. 167). Now, to put an end to these conflicts, these two authors suggest that parties involved “begin to engage each other, with each party putting forward arguments that can be understood by the other, and [that they] consider those arguments in order to determine their [relative] validity” (Hare et al. 170).

It is this latter recommendation that is expounded by Musinde in *Jardin secret*. The author advocates “persuasive, discursive dialogue” (24) as another moral imperative in the quest for peace. It is argued in the novel that “man uses violence just to get a chance of being heard” (24). To achieve his goal, the author uses an appropriate literary style to depict the distinction between two different worlds through imagery. The world portrayed in this novel is founded on exclusion, with the totalitarian and opportunistic regime one side and the rebel movement preparing to wage war in order to—ostensibly—restore stability, on the other. Musinde deliberately creates a river between these two antagonistic camps. This river or water body could be interpreted as a symbol of the gulf between two worlds that detest each other. The river, as depicted by the author, does not have any bridges. The absence of bridges symbolises the lack of dialogue between the two camps: the *maquis* and the capital (the regime or centre of power). Apart from the river, there are a myriad other checkpoints. Even more than these numerous checkpoints, the most serious stumbling block, according to the author, is essentially psychological in nature. Musinde believes that “egoism and scheming” are the root causes of misunderstandings between conflicting groups (112).

Much as the recommended kind of dialogue must be both “discursive and persuasive” (24), it is possible to discern the author’s intention to propel his main character (an intellectual idealist and humanist) into the political arena where he could serve as a “bridge” between these two mutually resentful sides that are hell-bent on exterminating each other. Mwanda conducts himself like a philosopher whose real mission is to “facilitate dialogue and discussions on serious issues” (Hare et al 168). The reader cannot but wonder whether, through this character, the author is not trying to salvage African intellectuals in a context where their role is either peripheral or (mis)used for politicking. The most important lesson to be drawn from this novel is that Mwanda plays his role as a mediator to perfection; he remains apolitical by declining the post of Prime Minister, offered to him by the President of the *République des Tropiques* (133).

In the novel, Musinde's similarly suggests that "frank dialogue elicits correct information which [in turn] mediates communication or the convergence of minds" (27). This is an invitation to meet *the other*. It is equally a plea for a kind of otherness that requires that parties "unequivocally put a premium on the supremacy of the conscience and individual liberties while remaining radically critical of existing values (116). Such a stance signifies respect for *the other* as an interlocutor, a kind of respect that must lead to a convergence of minds on the basis of mutual respect. Mwanda's thought process leads him to a quest for insights into human differences. This knowledge is posited as an essential prerequisite for good dialogue (27–28).

During this dialogue, the novel enjoins parties to "get themselves to trust their negotiating partners by consistently allowing themselves to be guided by the greater good and enhancing each other's good qualities" (112–3).

In all cases, Musinde enjoins negotiating partners to keep their hypocrisy in check by being wary of "guileful language" (116) that can potentially scupper any efforts aimed at drawing closer to *the other* through dialogue. This is tantamount to saying that, to understand each other better, negotiating partners must speak the same language. Once again, Hare and Aubin weigh in on the subject with the following philosophical remarks:

If for one party "good" meant "likely to maintain the regime in power", and for the other party "good" meant "likely to advance the revolution", both camps would not even be able to use this word to express disagreement. For then, if one of the parties refers to an act as being good, the underlying meaning is that it helps maintain the regime in power, whereas for the other party, describing an act as good boils down to saying that it advances the revolution. (Hare et al. 175)

It is this very phase of "guileful language" (116) that Musinde urges those involved in peace negotiations to surpass.

Renaissance

As a literary piece, *Jardin secret* is, for the most part, structured around promoting social harmony. It is an ambitious project, in the light of the main character's desire to transform not only his country, the *République des Tropiques*, but also humanity as a whole (70). Whereas Mwanda advocates foregrounding every positive solution (71), at a cursory glance, this approach might seem to a pipedream in a world where the *death wish* is at its peak. Yet, in his musings on existence, the main character in *Jardin secret* discovers that beyond the chaos that dominates humankind, there is always room for restoring human dignity. In a sense, it is the author's imaginative power way of resisting contemporary evil and *re-creating* harmony in a world ravaged by man's selfishness. From a philosophical viewpoint, Musinde conceptualised his personal perception of the *cogito*, based on real-life experience, into a work of art

(Margolin 100). This re-creation of lost harmony is consistent with Margolin and Éluard's perspective on the subject. According to the latter authors, imagination is an asset for the future of mankind, in the sense that "it engenders being" and makes it possible to be anything other than what we are, and to multiply exponentially" (Margolin 107).

"The possibility to be anything other than what we are and to multiply exponentially" as expressed by these two authors *might tie in with* rebirth (to be born again). This is a recurrent theme in Musinde's literary work: it can also be discerned on page 109 of his 2008 novel, titled *Retour de manivelle*. In both novels, the author develops this concept in a similar manner. In his view, rebirth constitutes "the law of the existential dialectics process through which the positive transformation of every being is achieved" (69). However, to get a better handle on this concept, which could be the quintessence of *Musindian* writing, it is necessary, above all, to understand its workings, as explained by the author in the following terms: "Hence, the contradiction, the apparent paradox inherent in the metaphor "to die without dying" intimates change, a [process of] perpetual renewal through which every being dies [in order] to be reborn." (69)

It can be inferred from the above passage that dying is an essential prerequisite for rebirth. This inference could be schematically illustrated as follows: *living* (being born) '!' *dying*'! *rebirth*.

In this schematic model (probably consistent with some syllogistic rationale), it is the second or *minor* premise that is materially problematic and, therefore, calls for clarification. This premise materially contradicts the other two: the *major* premise and the *conclusion*. The material contradiction notwithstanding, the protagonist's thought process requires that "we die without dying" (69). To get clarity on this imperative, we shall refer to Musinde's intimations in his novel, *Retour de manivelle*:

As it were, to become a tree that bears succulent fruit, the seed dies without dying [...] This understanding must goad the youth and the entire nation into a movement where [its] *metanoia*⁴ occurs through a process punctuated by moments of negativity and positivity [or], in other words, moments of dialectical contradiction. (Musinde 108)

The above passage suggests that periods of negativity and positivity are equally necessary in the sense that they both drive *the being's* maturation process. Mwanda thus believes that the chaos reigning in his country "is a necessity which, harsh as it may be, is by no means senseless" (44–5). It is in the same vein that the novel invites the reader to take delight in that era, harsh as it was, in the hope that such insight would lead to individual maturation (45).

Hence, one cannot help wondering whether this perception of the maturation process could be likened to the following Machiavellian perspective:

Human affairs do not stop at a fixed point when they reach their highest point of perfection; unable to rise farther, they go down. By the same token, once they have hit rock bottom, unable to decline [any] further, they rise again, thus alternating between good and evil and vice-versa. (Cugno 24)

Whatever the case may be, Musinde's novel is to be construed as an appeal to the reader, *nosce te ipsum*, inviting them to develop a deeper understanding of themselves. Such an outlook is quite consistent with Pascal's view according to which "if the universe were to crush him, man would still be nobler than that which killed him, because he knows that he dies and the advantage which the universe has over him; the universe knows nothing of this" (Pascal 130). Musinde's "*thinking being*" is symbolically immortal. This leads to the conclusion, through *proof by contradiction*, that when "dying" amounts to death (decay), as opposed to "dying without dying", the individual subsequently loses any possibility of "being reborn".

To give *the being* a chance to survive (be reborn), Musinde requires that people come to understand, respect and take delight in that era, in spite the hardships it wrought on humanity. It is this insight that equips the individual with the self-control and awareness to *start all over again*, in other words, to break with the state in which they have been slumbering thus far (122). Musinde believes that the process of maturation is more important than maturation *per se*: "The great project of human life that we can dream of, as suggested by Albert Camus, is in and of itself less important than the trials [that dream] imposes on man and the opportunity it affords him to conquer his fears and thus come a little closer to its reality" (122). This boils down to saying that to *be reborn*, one must transcend that era or "outdo oneself like Zarathoustra" (70). In this regard, insights into the issue of *being born again* lead to the conclusion that *Jardin secret*, just like Homer's "Ocean", is not only the origin of *getting born* without [the possibility of] *perishing* but also *getting born* and *perishing* (Collobert 23). According to Musinde, *perishing* is but the end result of *non-savoir*.⁵ In other words, *perishing* is not caused by lack of discernment during moments of negativity that generally arise in the wake of human evolution.

Some might regard Musinde's *Jardin secret* as a "kingdom of ends" that could never materialise to the extent that the transcendental values put forward are more about humankind than man (Reboul 189). Such an objection could be justified by the extreme empiricism that characterises today's world. It is, nonetheless, possible to conceive of the victory of art over mundane impulses, expressed in the novel as the triumph of a self-conscious intellectual (Mwanda) over others; it is equally the triumph of the pen and the scribe over *the prince* and his weapons. That the author disregards apocalypse, in a Machiavellian world where it is easier to do Evil than Good, could be justified by the gentleness of the poetic soul (though male, it is as gentle as a woman) and, especially, by the transcendence which resonates with the great Hugo's

clarion call: "during days of wickedness, the poet lays the ground for brighter days [...]. With his feet here and his gaze cast elsewhere [...] it is he who, above the fray, [...] must [...] shine a torch on the future!" (Hugo 1025).

The "here" in the author's writing is also a phase (a model) of essential ordeals encountered in an irreversible process of maturation. The main character in *Jardin secret* is portrayed as a blossoming rose amongst thorns (Musinde 56); the author uses it to "police" the thorns by having them *re-born* as roses. Writing is used by the author, a utopian man (Hugo 1025), to re-think morality by re-establishing, where it is disregarded, a kind of morality based on knowledge and the conscience, but manifest in the performance of voluntary community service for the benefit of society and humanity. Such is one function of art: an ideological vehicle whose finality is *transformationally* therapeutic. If *Jardin secret* were to start a revolution, such a revolution, as observed by Mongo Béti, would be internal and it would exclusively involve the conscience (Djiffack 77).

Conclusion

Beyond the tangible world, in the subconscious mind of a sleep-walking dreamer with sharp discursive faculties, lies the "*Jardin secret*" portrayed in the novel. Hidden from ordinary mortals, this "secret garden", like *the Holy of Holies*, is finally revealed to lay people in the physical world, whose ultimate aspiration is driven by empirically egoistic impulses. Julien Kilanga Musinde does not use this intimate oneiric setting as a maze to confuse the reader, but rather as an *alcove* whence the finest artists prepare and reveal the world to come. It is a new world, a world of the most platonic Ideas, but also a world of free and altruistic self-conscious beings. It has been demonstrated through the preceding analysis that *Jardin secret* is, to some extent, used as pretext by the author, just like Sartre uses hell, to convey his thoughts: a genre of ethical thought which, contrary to Diogenes' approach, is no longer set on looking for an ideal man but instead "makes" such a man through artistically well-considered moral imperatives. Writing thus becomes a workshop where new subjectivities are created, in the same way as masks which negate our own faces, to transform the world so that what our most intimate self may prevail. Viewed in this light, writing delivers a profound message of cosmic fraternity! (Lévesque 647).

That this conscientisation comes with a grace period is of no particular concern to the author. I believe that, through his work, Musinde, in his capacity as honorary Vice-Chancellor of the University of Lubumbashi, has illustratively paid tribute to the motto of his *alma mater*: *scientia splendet et conscientia*. Through this novel, the author has made his Idea (a secret garden) tangible by revealing it to the largest possible audience.

Acknowledgement

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Notes

1. Here, reference is made to novels published by the same author, such as *Retour de manivelle* (2008), *Comme des matins éternels* (Kinshasa: UEZA, 1984).
2. Own translation from original French version. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations of original French text into English have been rendered by the writer of this article.
3. The concept “tropicality” (*tropicalité* in French) is a neologism in African literature, coined by Congolese writer Sony Labou Tansi. It has been popularised by African literary critics, such as George Ngal (“Les tropicalités de Sony Labou Tansi”; “Sony Labou Tansi ou l’engendrement du sens”) and Alexie Tcheuyap (1999).
4. Change in one’s way of life resulting from penitence or spiritual conversion.
5. A philosophical term from old French, sometimes loosely translated as ‘ignorance’.

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