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## **Man's Manipulation of Love: A Linguistic Expose of Soyinka's 'In Paths of Rain' and 'By Little Loving - After Thomas Blackburn'.**

### **Abstract**

This paper captures man's manipulation of love in two poems of Wole Soyinka's entitled 'In Paths of Rain' and 'By Little Loving - After Thomas Blackburn'. Their titles are mesmerizing to the reader. This research problem stems from the dearth of linguistic studies of Soyinka's poems, which in turn contributes to the unimaginable phobia which accompanies the study of his poems. This study is based on Chomskyan Transformational Generative Grammar, which gets to the fabrics of language, by applying the four linguistic levels namely graphology, phonology, syntax and lexico-semantics, in analyzing these poems. Because of the rebuff that meets Soyinka's works by many readers, this linguistic approach revisits his works, especially his volumes of poems and creates an avenue for appreciating his beautiful poems. These two poems are borne out of experiences from relationships between man and woman lovers or husband and wife in the sacred business of marriage. 'In Paths of Rain' discloses disappointment and non-co-operation by the female partner in the consummation of their marriage, which in turn results in no pregnancy. The second poem entitled 'By Little Loving' states the decision made by a male partner to hoard his excitement of love so as to avoid embarrassment which could come from a possible sexual rebuff from a female partner. This decision could equally be made by a female partner where she feels her love is not requited.

**Man's Manipulation of Love: A Linguistic Expose of Soyinka's 'In Paths of Rain'  
and 'By Little Loving - After Thomas Blackburn'**

**Introduction**

Love is an expression of good and healthy feelings between human beings. It could be between people of the same sex or the opposite sex. Love between the opposite sex escalates to a permanent union between the two and their union usually culminates in marriage. Paul in his 1<sup>st</sup> letter to the Corinthians describes love as the most enduring of the virtues and anyone devoid of the feeling of love is like a cymbal.

St. Paul describes love in 1st Corinthians 13<sup>2</sup> thus:

...I may have all knowledge and understand all secrets; I may have all the faith needed to move mountains – but if I have no love, I am nothing.

He further states what love is: verse 4-7

Love is patient and kind; it is not jealous or conceited or proud; love is not ill-mannered or selfish or irritable; love does not keep a record of wrongs; love is not happy with evil but is happy with truth. Love never gives up and its faith, hope and patience never fail.

He summarizes in verse 13 by saying:

Meanwhile these three remain: faith, hope and love but the greatest of these is love.

People's different interpretations of what love means to them end up producing counterfeit love which makes the relationship sour in no distant time.

**'In Paths of Rain'**

As deceitful as the title 'In Paths of Rain' is, the reader is able to capture the main idea in this poem which is disappointment. This is one of such poems of Soyinka's, which trigger off criticism of his works by such critics as Chinweizu et al. Soyinka's works are

generally accused of esoterism, obscurantism and impenetrability. He is also accused of deliberate inaccessibility in his poems, because he ‘yolks together heterogeneous ideas and concepts’. Chinweizu likens his poems to those of John Donne and the neo-metaphysicians Pound and Eliot. This poem ‘In Paths of Rain’ thematically discloses the incompatibility of two persons in the fulfillment of conjugal love. This frustrating situation has pushed the man to complain and compare how even plants successfully spring up with little existence of natural elements like sand and water which plants need to grow even in rocky areas. He observes that seeds and plants can survive in very arid environments if only those factors are present there. He uses this analogy to express his chagrin at the disappointment he meets in his marriage and expects the marriage to have been built and sustained on whatever level of love is found between them.

Graphologically, this poem has eight stanzas of consistent three lines and ends with two lines that are scattered without each completing its line. This goes in accordance with the separation of the man and the woman because of their failure to accomplish the joy of sexual fulfillment. The last two lines are diagrammatically shown below:

Ground skins of the unshelled

handover hand of fire

A kernel’s freak Communion

wind pools in the ash of palm

(lines 25 -28)

The poet uses the imagery of rain as producer of life where it touches vegetation. That is to say that when rain touches the land even in rock grooves, life, that is vegetation, springs up there. Hence the lines:

.In paths of rain, in rock groves, may

These rare instants of wild fox – fires

Write on moments, lives

(lines 1 – 3)

On that premise, therefore, the male persona in this poem believes that the sexual union with a female partner which is described as ‘the moment’s lightning on wire tips’, should result in new life. For him, ‘lightning’ is ascribed to the ‘green light’ from the female partner and the ‘wire-tips’ ascribed to the male partner. The wire-tips must have been generated from ‘wild fox-fires’ (line 2). By this is meant the fiery urge for sexual

copulation. The male persona laments in stanza 3 that his conjugal love-making has not yielded any seed. With high hopes of joyful result from love making, with reassurance of 'birth-teasing' yields, he disappointedly 'unleashed strangled seeds' (lines 9 & 10).

The reason for this unsuccessful love-making, according to the male persona, is the non-co-operating attitude of his partner, who does not dispose herself entirely to match with the 'wild fox-fires' of the male partner, and worse still, she does not submit herself as often as the male partner desires. In short, she denies him sexual union and to that, the male persona refers in lines 9 – 12.

...From wells

Deep in the brute's denials comes

A captive tenderness

The male persona sees himself as a 'captive' when he fails to realize the height of excitement in the love affairs and he blames that on the 'shy lights from your night redress my darkness' (lines 13 & 14). He is shattered and demoralized. The effect of this is stated in the next lines where his 'sable oil still-traps', sensing 'a straining thunder head' (lines 14 – 15). The male partner proffers a solution of ointment to soothe the condition, thus:

'In unguent silt to rest' /Roots of rage held to a lucent stance' (lines 16 – 18).

The female partner should 'Glow-swarms lightening', high thorn-bushes / (lines 18-19) .

In other words, her light this time should be strong enough to burn light thorn-bushes. If this is fulfilled, the male persona will feel happy to view symbols of fruit yielding in their relationship, like 'Flecked mica after rain, plankton,' e.t.c. This state must be sustained 'till the chronicle of severance' (line 22), otherwise any attempt by the female persona to redress the situation after it would have spoilt will not be entertained. He gives such attempts like Gold spelling / lantern sanctuaries around / Birth-point / and chapters ... (lines 23 – 24). Of course these examples are not achievable like 'gold spelling'. The three dots at the end of line 24 show that the reader can make his or her guess. The two scattered lines show how both will separate if the amended situation goes sour. This style is representing the introduction of the freak in Soyinka's writing, occasioned by Ogun in his dual essence of building and destroying.

The Ogun essence of life and destruction is represented throughout the poem through the lexical selection of compound words, which are hyphenated thus:

Fox-fires	stanza	1
Wire-tips	“	2
Fire-surrounds	“	2
Birth-teasing	“	3
Still-traps	stanza	5
Glow-swarms	stanza	6
Thorn-bushes	“	7
Rain-washed	“	7
Birth-point	“	8

In all, they constitute noun phrases except ‘rain-washed’, which is a participial adjective qualifying shores. There are other compound words which are not hyphenated and they represent the man-woman relationship which is the theme of the poem. The compound words are also noun + noun

Thunder head

Wind pools

This composition of noun and noun underscores the ideal equal disposition of male and female partners in the business of love-making.

Syntactically, the poet adjectivises words in order to explain vividly the phenomena in question. Such adjectives fall in the category of possessive pronouns, participial adjectives or possessive nouns e.g.

<u>moment's</u> lightning	possessive	line	4
<u>Trembling</u> hare	participial adj.	line	6
<u>Despairing</u> pause	“ ”	line	7
<u>Strangled</u> seeds	“ “	line	9
<u>Brute's</u> denials	possessive word	line	11
<u>Captive</u> tenderness	adj.	line	12
<u>Shy</u> lights	adj.	line	13

<u>My</u> darkness –	possessive pronoun	line 14
<u>Sable</u> oil –	adjectival word	line 4
<u>Straining</u> thunder head –	participial adj	line 15
<u>Lucent</u> stance -	adjectival word	line 17
<u>High</u> thorn-bushes	„ „	line 19
<u>Clean</u> vial	„ „	line 20
<u>Flecked</u> mica	participial adj.	line 23
<u>Ground</u> skins	„ „	line 25
<u>Unshelled</u> hand	„ „	line 25 /26
<u>Kernel</u> 's freak	possessive word	line 27

There are such coined as well as nonce words e.g.

Thunder head	line 15
Wind pools	line 28

This syntactic arrangement is in tune with Soyinka's word coinage, just to express his ideas. In the same vein some expressions violate the collocation rule e.g. 'gold spelling'. The noun 'gold' should collocate with a noun phrase with the feature /+ concrete / and not with an abstract noun. 'Gold' collocates with nouns, like gold coin, gold mine, gold plate, etc. but here, it collocates with 'spelling', which is a noun with the feature / - concrete /. This expression is used by the poet to create an impossible condition. Soyinka has delved into this theme of love, especially frustrated love, in order to attend to human problems of existence.

The female partner in this poem must have gone against the ingredients of love which are stated by St. Paul. She must have shown lack of patience which St. Paul in his letter stresses that it should never fail. However, both of them try to amend the situation using the solution proffered by the male partner and for which he gives a stern warning that the amended situation should never slack.

In conclusion, the linguistic complexities posed by this poem through its title, have been unraveled.

### **'By Little Loving - After Thomas Blackburn'**

The next poem entitled 'By Little Loving - After Thomas Blackburn' is borne out of embarrassment and disappointment in a love affair, experienced by the persona in the earlier poem entitled 'In Paths of Rain'. This poem is organically linked to the poem before it 'In Paths of Rain' and, unlike the others in this section, it has a different dimension. Although borne out of disappointment in a love affair, the persona has learnt to take a stance that would probably lessen the effect of disappointment and embarrassment. Although the title of that poem is deceptive to the reader at the first instance, it exposes the persona's frustration in love making with his partner. This has led to this present poem 'By little loving', where he cautions himself not to expose fully his deep emotion of love, so that he can control any mishap of emotional disappointment. The italicized adverbial phrase 'After Thomas Blackburn' cannot be ignored.

Graphologically, it stands out from the print of the poem itself and it could mean perhaps the origin of this philosophy of 'by little loving' being applied by the persona i.e. Thomas Blackburn. This poem exceptionally adheres to the conventional four-lined structure of English poetry and with its six stanzas, voyaged into nature as the persona attempts to devise a means of managing his emotions of love for the opposite sex. By this policy of 'by little loving,' he cocks up his emotions for a period of time and as he observes that, he swims against current by bottling up his emotions. He retraces his steps or renounces his earlier decision. This effort unfortunately drives him to an irreversible state.

The syntactic arrangement of sentences in this poem is exciting. For once, the poet has shifted from his usual distorted syntactic arrangements, and this coincides with the persona's statement of 'once' with which he accompanies other adverbial phrases e.g.

By little loving, once	line 1
Once by little wisdoms	line 4
By little dreaming once	line 5
once by little seeing	line 11
By little yearning	line 14
By little spending	line 19
once by little kindling	line 23



This structural arrangement features up to seven times with little variations in the positions of 'once'. He places the word 'once' before the phrases three times out of seven times of similar structure (lines 4, 11 & 23). He places the word 'once' after the adverbial phrases twice (lines 1 & 5) and finally drops the word 'once' twice in the same similar construction in (lines 14 & 19 / by little yearning' / By little kindling/. The significance in the persona's use or withdrawal of 'once' matches with his stage of decision taking. At the initial time he jubilates that he has come up with an idea of not involving himself fully in his love affair at last for 'once'. The position of once changes to initial position as he evaluates his decision and its effects on him. Finally, he drops 'once' as he tries to reconsider denouncing his earlier decision of withdrawing from emotional love outburst. It is interesting to note the gerundic nouns that go with the expressions thus:

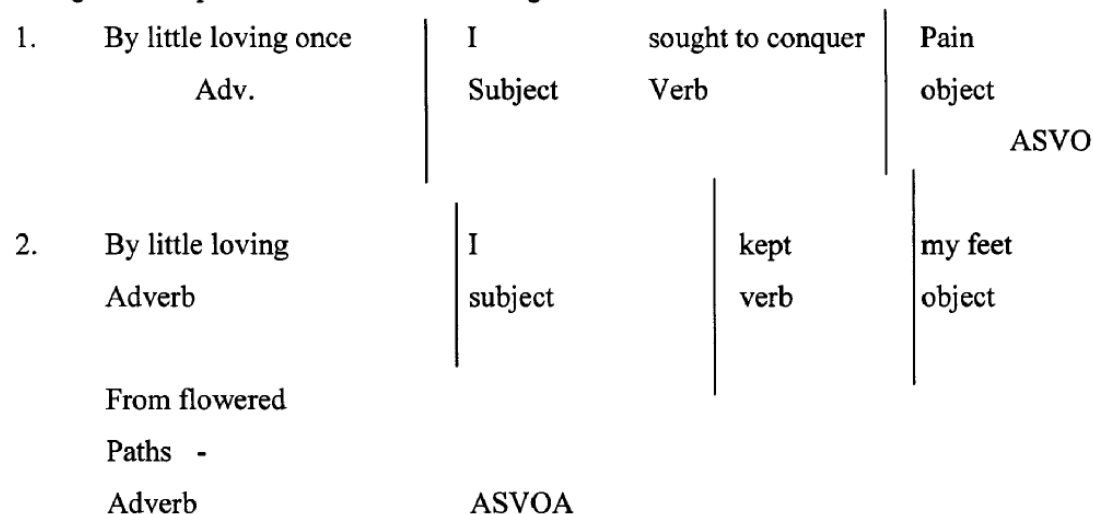
By little + { loving  
dreaming  
loving  
wisdoms  
seeing  
yearning  
spending  
kindling }

The six gerundic nouns summarize the story of the poem. 'Loving' states the type or level of emotion of love to dispose to the opposite sex so as to avoid disappointment of love. The 'wisdoms' need to be noted. 'Wisdom' is an uncountable noun. It is structurally different from the other gerundic nouns. This deviant use of 'wisdom' shows how the persona has deviated from a normal life of a human being by deciding not to give vent to a natural feeling for a love partner. He thinks he is applying wisdom but a negative one, hence the plural marker -'s'. The next in the series is 'dreaming', which follows when a situation goes abnormal and that has helped him in 'seeing' his folly in denying himself the pleasure of relating with the opposite sex through showing of emotion of love. Again, 'see' is a stative verb and should not take '-ing' inflection even though it has been put as a gerund. It represents the confused state which has enveloped the persona. Having

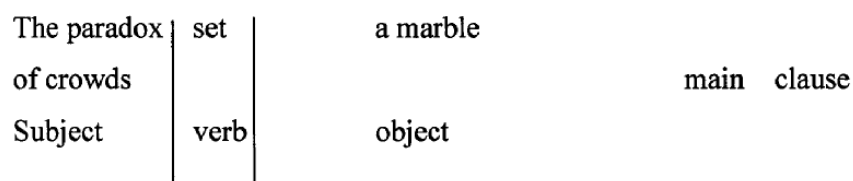
realized his folly, the next gerund is 'yearning'; he now desires to come back to a natural life but he has spent himself so much that he tries to kindle from a desolate state. It takes burnt ash time to rekindle. It may or may not succeed, hence he compares himself with 'phoenix' (line 24) a mythic bird which burns itself and rises from its ashes. By his abnormal decision, he has burnt himself to a heap of ashes "'pyre"' (line 24) of funeral corpse. The pattern that emerges from this repeated syntactic structure touches three levels of linguistic analysis namely: The words are syntagmatically related to the phrase 'by little';

Phonologically, six of them end with the sound /fj/ which produces beautiful rhyme as well as a binding force for emphasis. At the semantic level, the seven nouns are related and share the feature/+ natural acts /. The three levels converge to reinforce each other.

Another syntactic presentation is the poet's maintenance for 'once,' the normal order of words in the English code i.e. SVOCA even though here the order is slightly changed in the positions of the elements e.g.



A complex sentence having one main clause such as:



= SVO main clause + ASVA sub clause

Where	I	fled	for keeping
A	S	Verb	A

Compound sentences e.g. 'I know redemption in the truth of hate yet (I) fled the careful balance'. Another compound sentence is 'Once by little spending I had built a hoard of peace, yet (I) wondered at the hurt' (lines 17 – 20). For the sentence, the first clause represents the normal love life and the other clause represents the abnormal life opted for after the choice of complete withdrawal from love life. The compound sentences joined by 'yet' depict temporal illusion of the binary but opposing status of his decision about love life. That is why the two phases of love life are loosely joined by the co-ordinator 'yet'. After thinking deeply he realizes his folly and retraces his steps to a normal life . The beautiful but complex presentation (in stanza 3) of the persona's experience for the period he made the decision of using 'little loving' to escape disappointment of love from the opposite sex is worth examining

The paradox of crowds set a marble wall  
 Where I fled for keeping. Loneliness feeds  
 On open faces – once by little seeing  
 To the still centre, off the ruptured wheel  
 Of blood.... (lines 9 – 13)

The result of this self-imposed 'exile' he describes as 'paradox of crowds' i.e. his encounter with other people around him is what he sees as a paradox. The next feature of this situation is bound to be 'loneliness,' which he says 'feeds on open faces' (line 11). This paradoxical condition gives rise to collocation disorder in the subject 'Loneliness,' which has the feature /-animate/, taking the verb 'feeds' which is an attribute of animate/human, and the object 'on open faces; which are attributes of human. This absurd situation of the persona gives rise to preponderant use of noun phrases thrown about the whole poem at various instances. This, I believe, is the attempt of the persona to capture and describe the experience he is going through in stanza I e.g.

a bank of bleached... (stanza1)

the night of stealth (stanza 2)  
 the paradox of crowds (stanza 3)  
 the ruptured wheel of blood. (stanza 3)  
 cords of closeness (stanza 4)  
 the wear of pulses (stanza 4)  
 stretch of flesh (stanza 4)  
 truth of hate (stanza 5)  
 a hoard of peace (stanza 5)  
 the thread of waters (stanza 6)  
 phoenix of each pyre (stanza 6)

The pattern produced is (art) + n + of + (adj) + n. This makes for a regularity of structure and musical rendition.

Among these constructions are cases of category rule violation e.g.

Enough, I swore the wear	
of pluses	lines 15 – 16

The word 'wear' belongs to the verb category but it has been used here to belong to a noun class. The effect is to maintain the rhythm of such similar structures. Another category rule violation is the truth of hate (line 17). Hate belongs to the verb category but has been used to belong to the noun class, instead of 'hatred' which will fall off the rhythm if used. The linguistic contribution of the 1<sup>st</sup> person pronoun 'I' is worth highlighting e.g. There is emphasis on 'I' as the persona indicates all he has done, by the assertive verbs e.g.

I	sought to conquer	line	1
I	sought to welcome	line	4
I	kept my feet - - -		5
I	bared the night	“	6
(I)	watched thwarted winds		7
I	fled for keeping	line	10
I	hailed man's eternal lesson		13
I	swore the wear	“	15
I	knew redemption		17

I had built a hoard .. 19  
I fell to dying ... 24

The pronoun 'I' features up to 11 times in the poem; this indicates that the actions revolve around the persona and the decision he has taken not to give out all and to hoard his emotions of love for the opposite sex for fear of disappointment. His rather choosing to exchange love with hate is irrevocable. Phrases are constituted by more of irregular verbs which depict the irregularity and unnaturalness of his decision. The verbs are also of one syllable words, which underscore the determination of the persona to uphold his decision in spite of all odds and even on to death. The last two lines of the poem reveal his attempt of 'by little kindling I fell to dying' (lines 23 & 24).

In conclusion, this poem exposes human nature and how some people respond to issues of life.

In summary, the paper concludes that the two poems which are organically linked in a variety of thematic foci and linguistic levels of analyses, as portrayed in this study, vehemently emphasize the immeasurable importance of copulation between two parties in a conjugal relationship. The absence of satisfactory mutual sharing of this (copulation) leads to irreparable disappointment and incompatibility of the union in the first poem while the second shows painful decision cautiously taken to avert possible embarrassment resulting from the persona's ugly experience in the first poem. This renders a conjugal union torturous rather than enjoyable.

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