KENYATTA UNIVERSITY

SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

LITERATURE DEPARTMENT

MODULE FOR TEACHING

ALT 201: EAST AFRICAN POETRY AND DRAMA

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Introduction to course content, structure and objectives

Course content

I have structured this course such that the student starts by looking at East African Poetry and Drama from the humble beginnings before colonialists came and disrupted East African life style. This is because in my view when we talk of East African Drama and Poetry, we are referring to all those poetic and dramatic forms and expressions that East Africans have created and enjoyed their performance or rendition since their existence. Long before the coming of the whiteman, East Africans were creating artistic works and performing them. They engaged in oral poetry which the whiteman came and called songs. They performed at various functions and ceremonies which were seen as part of the rhythm of life itself. This is what Alembi (1999), calls pre-literacy Poetry but I have chosen to call it pre-colonial Poetry. This is deliberate because East Africans along the coastal strip were already writing poems and performing them way before the whiteman brought his poetry to Africa. To this end, I have included one of the poems of the Swahili people in my discussion. You will find a discussion of *Utendi wa mwana Kupona,* a Swahili classical poem.

Note

We cannot claim that poetry started with the coming of the whiteman. We can only say that the whiteman's knowledge of graphical and numerical writing provided a conducive environment for the flourishing of written poetry in East Africa.

Later on when the whiteman came, he introduced an isolated way of looking at Drama and Poetry. Thus people were confined in buildings and passively listened to poetic renditions or watched drama. Such buildings (specifically called theatre halls) were erected in major towns of the country. They therefore served colonial interests in their quest to subdue the Africans and use their land and sweat.

Then we have the plays on African history of resistance to colonialism and its attendant brutality. Such plays try to establish and restore the pride of heroes of these resistances as national heroes as opposed to how the Europeans had portrayed them as villains. Studying such literature makes us appreciate the fact that East African independence was not just bought by boardroom negotiations as history sometimes makes us believe, but also by sweat and blood. To this end, I have chosen to look at the plays, *The Trials of Dedan Kimathi* and *Kinjeketile*

Many drama practitioners in East Africa are products of Schools and Colleges Drama Festival as well as the Travelling Theatre movement. These two are perhaps the major avenues in which Drama and Poetry flourish in East Africa and a student of drama and poetry needs to know as much. A discussion of these movements of drama has been included in this module.

The relevance of drama and poetry is seen in the manner it inspires the people involved in it to change their lives for the better. This is why it is important for you to study the aspects of Drama for Development in East Africa especially the products of the famous Kamirithu Theatre experience. In this regard, I have chosen to look at the text *I will Marry When I want* by Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Ngugi wa Miiri.

The longest poem that ever caused a literary sensation in East Africa is *Song of Lawino.* In this song (poem) Okot p'Bitek celebrates the superiority of the African culture to the Africans as compared to the western one. He seems to argue that the best way an African can get

cultural fulfillment is by following the instructions of the African culture. Both the form and the content of this poem inform us in a major way about African culture and that is why I found it fitting to discuss it in this module.

Lastly we look at the political poetry and drama in East Africa because politics has shaped the way East African region is today. The major stages of political development are appraised and texts written as responses to such political happenings are considered.

Note

Remember it is always important to understand the background information of a writer and that of his literary text before you can analyse the work.

Course structure

As the name suggests, the course is partitioned into two major sections. The first is poetry and the second is drama. However it is important to note that at some points, you will find the two genres overlapping particularly in the discussions on drama and poetry in the pre-colonial East Africa.

Overall objectives of the course

It is expected that by the end of the lessons in this course, you should be able to do the following:

1. Demonstrate an understanding of the concrete presence of drama and poetry in East Africa before the coming of the whiteman's knowledge of graphics (writing) and numerals

(counting). You should be able to do this by giving relevant examples of dramatic and poetic expressions that existed and still do exist.

2. Appreciate the abundance of East African poetry and drama. This can be done by mentioning the plays and poems written by playwrights and poets from East Africa.

3. Analyse any poem or play from East Africa bearing in mind that content bears heavily on form.

4. Investigate the literariness of any play or poem from East Africa bearing in mind that the content of plays from East Africa draws heavily from the socio-historical, cultural, economical and political circumstances of the region itself.

To sum up this introduction, it is worth noting that I am taking a literary sweep of East African landscape; showing how its socio historical and political events have shaped this literary landscape. I am making a claim that East African Poetry and Drama cannot be divorced from the socio historical and political events of the region because the latter provides the raw material from the former.

SECTION ONE: EAST AFRICAN POETRY

Lesson Two: Poetry in the pre-colonial East Africa

Introduction

It is often argued that Africans never had poetry. However when you critically look at the activities that Africans engaged in, you will find enough aspects of poetry in them. The rhythm if African life itself had a poetic touch. This lesson is going to look at some of the practices of Africans that had a poetic touch. Additionally, we will also look at the practice of writing and performance of poetry along the coastal strip of East Africa.

Objectives of the lesson

It is expected that by the end of this Lesson, you will be able to:

1. Appreciate the pre-colonial East African poetic forms as poetry in their own right.
2. Name at least two poetic forms in pre-colonial East Africa
3. Analyse at least three characteristics of poetry in Pre-colonial East Africa.
4. Investigate the Swahili classical Poetry as part of Pre-colonial East African Poetry

Songs as Oral Poetry in East Africa

As noted earlier on, the rhythm of life of the Africans had a poetic pattern. Africans had a sense of poetry in nearly everything that they did. This poetry revealed itself through the composition and performance of songs. For every activity that they engaged in, Africans composed a song. There were songs for seductions, birth songs, songs for growing up, initiation songs, funeral songs, planting songs,

harvesting songs, songs at the place of work, war songs and many other songs. Songs are simply oral poetry because they observe the principles of poetry. They are creatively and imaginatively conceived, brief in nature, embellished in style and communicate a message. All these songs were geared towards entertainment, socialization and education.

War songs

Before going to war, Africans sung songs to give them courage against the enemy. Nearly all the East African communites trained warriors and therefore they all had war songs. Performance of war songs was not just done before the war but also during and after the war itself. This was one of the ways in which allies would distinguish one another from the foe. The lead warrior would start the tune and the other warriors would simply understand the meaning of that tune. It may be a tune to signal retreat or attack more forcefully or to attack from a different front.

Activity

Write down a war song from one of Kenya's cultural communities. Does it have some poetic elements like stylistic devices and theme?

Funerary poetry

There is nothing as solemn as loss of life. Therefore the best way human beings can come to terms with the loss of their loved ones is by singing the sorrow away. Funerary poetry in East Africa was used to console the bereaved, to implore, command or even chase away death and also to provide some warmth and vivacity to the bereaved. Virtually every community in East Africa had and still has funeral songs.

Note

Funeral poetry has greatly influenced the written Poetry especially in Kenya. See the Poems, *Christine Vakhoya* by Loice Abukutsa in Boundless Voices, *Nyalgunga* by Amateshe in An Anthology of East African Poetry and *The Death of My Father* by Henry Indangasi in Poems from East Africa. These poems have been written following the rules of recitation of dirges.

Ritual Poetry in East Africa

This was Drama associated with rites especially religious rites and rites of passage. Initiation songs and dances were practiced and performed as a way of entertainment, advice and rebuking bad behaviour. During such performances obscenities were sung and fertility dances and songs performed. Initiation Poetry was particularly vulgar in communities which initiated women.

Among the Luhya people of Western Kenya, the male initiation ceremony was characterized by singing and dancing around the village with specially made jingles called *Enyimba*. The initiates would cruise around the village singing and hurling insults or taunting the people who were considered social misfits in the society. Middle aged women would also taunt the initiates and dance very vulgarly to the initiates and challenging them both to show courage and preserve the dignity of their families and villages or risk being sung in the next initiation ceremony. In all these, one can notice the utilitarian nature of this Dramatic form. That on one hand, it was supposed to give the initiates the courage to face the knife while on the other it was supposed to correct the social misfits by exposing their bad actions through song and dance. All these were part of Dramatic expressions that these

people used to engage in and in some parts of East Africa, People still practice these rituals.

Birth songs

There were also songs sung for a new born baby. This was to celebrate the arrival of a new life and to thank the gods for having seen it fit to perpetuate the lineage of the family. At the same time it was also to wish the new born blessings so that it may grow into a respectable person who would bring honour and not shame to the family in particular and the village as a whole. Example of a birth song that is so common in Kenya is the *Mwana wa Mbeli* from the Luhya community

Question

Enumerate some of the rituals that were or are still being performed in your community be they traditional or modern (including religious). Do they involve any dramatic or poetic actions?

Court Poetry

Before the advent of Europeans in East Africa, court poets worked in the Kabaka's palace in Buganda to entertain and inform the people during big feasts organized by the Kabaka. These were highly skilled composers, singers and dancers whose profession was solely to serve the king and the kingdom through performance. That tradition finds contemporary expression in the dramatic works of Ugandan playwrights like Robert Serumaga, Ryron Kawadwa, and Numa Sentango and Elvania Namukwonya Zirimu, who, at least in sentiment, perpetuate pro-royalist theatre in East Africa.

Court poets sang the praises for the King and valiant men of the society. They were literally under the employment of the King and he honoured them by such gifts as recognition, food stuffs, cattle or land.

They exulted and extolled his successes in ruling the people. They also advised citizens to be obedient and hard-working in the society.

Activity

Compare court poetry to the songs that used to be sang during the Moi era of leadership like, *Tawala Kenya tawala Rais Moi, Moi anapenda watoto, Kanu yajenga nchi e.t.c.* Do you find any similarities and/or any differences?

Characteristics of Oral Poetry in East Africa

1. It takes the form of collective responsibility and activity. It is basically expressed in a language, cadence and idioms which the entire community understands and is able to give a collective/ communal response.
2. It has ability to involve a long population of the community since it begs for oral delivery. It is not a preserve of an individual but of the entire community.
3. It also assumes an instant collective/communal response. There is little space for choreographed audiences. All people present are both audience and at the same time performers.
4. It is a performed Poetry that is naturally dramatized. Its performance is spontaneous and not forced. It is taken as part of life itself.

Classical Swahili Poetry

It is believed that the ancient Swahili people living along the coastal strip and the islands of East Africa wrote and recited poetry just like it is done in the modern times. The earliest known Swahili poem of note is Fumo Liongo, which is dated by various writers anywhere from the 14th to the 17th century.

Coastal dramatic Poetry seems to have flourished due to the interactions of the coastal natives with the Arabic world. Swahili Poetry was written in Arabic letters for over three hundred years. The oldest Swahili manuscript so far discovered according to Janheinz Jahn is *Utendi wa Tambuka*, a heroic poem written for the sultan (Fumo) in 1728. Among the later day Swahili poets, we have Muyaka who was born in Mombasa. Muyaka writes and recites on themes of war and politics as well as social lives. Shaaban Robert is another poet who has extensively written poetry on issues affecting the Swahili world. He was a Tanzania native well known for the Ngonjera verses. Other Swahili poets include Matiasi Mnyampala, Amri Abedi and Ahmed Nassir Juma

Activity

Look for the definition of the term 'ngonjera' in a Swahili dictionary (Kamusi)

The Arabic world introduced Islam which depends on the teachings of Muhammad contained in the Qur'an. The Qur'an itself is a highly poetic text and it encourages Poetry. Islamic prayers are also very poetic. These aspects made poetry easily flourish in the Swahili speaking world. Poetry was done for epic, heroic, moralizing and didactic subjects which were all connected with the glorification of Allah, Mohammed and Islam. Therefore anchoring itself in this religious

setting, the Swahili Poetry started off as mostly religious in content but gradually became more secular. It is believed that Muyaka bin Haji (1776-1840) from Mombasa is the man who secularized the Swahili Poetry, bringing it 'out of the Mosque and into the 'market place' and the outside world.

Swahili language itself is easily pretext into Poetry because it is rich and diverse. Swahili tradition allowed presence of expert amateurs and professional reciters and this helped preserve the accuracy of the text.

Performance of Classical Swahili Poetry

Classical Swahili Poetry conforms to the rules of Swahili antiquity. It is that in which a poet feels with the Swahili philosophy, thinking and expression. These verses were recited when a suitable occasion arose. For example, Mwana Kupona, one of the highly acclaimed ancient Swahili verse would be recited by mothers to children at any time or place. However, difficult and longer verses were recited when people happen to be gathered in a suitable milieu. A member of the society who was known to be a professional reciter of a certain poem was called upon to perform as the audience made timely and appropriate interjections and contributions. Therefore such poetry would be heard in family circles or wherever friends were gathered or even a random group. A random group may be at work or a communal gathering or during sailing or fishing or any other social gathering.

***Utendi wa Mwana Kupona*: A Swahili Classic[1]**

Note

[1] The text of the poem *Utendi wa Mwana Kupona* and its English translation that I have used in this module comes from J, Allen's work titled ***Tendi***.

The following notes on *Utendi wa Mwana Kupona* are supposed to be read alongside the poem itself. To help you achieve this, I have appended a copy of the poem at the end of this module.

This is one of the best-known ancient Swahili poems. *Utendi wa Mwana Kupona* is fairly short poem with only 99 verses. It is also fairly easy in language and rich in form and content. It was written by Mwana Kupona, an ailing lady in Pate to her daughter Mwana Itashima binti Sheik. Classical Swahili verse was written to be sung and Mwana Kupona's poem may be treated as a 'feminine' poem, written by a woman for her daughter and to be sung by mothers to their daughters or any other women.

This is a didactic poem, the advice of "Mwana Kupona" upon the wifely virtue. It comprehensively depicts the model ancient Swahili wife. Mwana kupona commences her poem by a general advice presented as religious and social teachings. She implores the daughter to be steadfast in religion, have good manners and be trustworthy and honest. A woman, accordingly, has five masters to whom she must get approvals from in her life.

These are:

1) God
2) God's prophets
3) Her father
4) Her mother
5) Her husband

Mwana Kupona seems to take exception of the first and the last. She advises the daughter to respect, fear and worship God for it is enshrined in Religion (vs 12).

La kwanda kamata dini	*The first thing is to hold*
Faradhi usiikhini	*stead fast on your religion*
Ma sunna ikimkini	*not rejecting the ordinances of God,*
Mi wajibu kuitia	*and when possible it is your duty to follow the traditions.*

Then she goes on to soundly advise the girl on the do's and don'ts in life. But one realizes that she dwells so much on the issue of loyalty to the husband and good wifely virtue. Other themes that come to the fore include the ancient Swahili philosophy, religion and the place of the woman in the society.

This poem was passed on orally and in manuscript to generations of young girls being prepared for wifehood. We also need to note that this poem is a clear statement of the ancient East African ideals of wifely virtues and how extensively the patriarchal ideology diffused itself into the lives of women. The poem in essence justifies male chauvinism and condemns a woman to subservience. A submissive wife is praised and submission in a woman is exalted. To say that a woman should live her life pleasing her husband is to reduce her to his servant. But we also need to understand that those were the dictates of the society and they were put in place to maintain societal harmony.

Note

The poem was passed orally from one generation to the next. It is only later on that it was written and distributed as a written text.

One also notices that the whole structure of the poem seems to revolve around benefaction by doing good and also the relationship between approval and good fortune in this world and the next. This argument is strengthened by considering the type of actions described and recommended in the poem

Things to think about on this subLesson:

1. Is Mwana Kupona justified to advice her daughter to serve her husband so submissively?
2. What is the place of the woman in the family?

3. How do you think a man should threat his wife in the family and how should a woman treat her husband?
4. Carry out a mini research of how women were treated in your community and how they are treated now. Which treatment do you find better?

Question:

Read carefully the text *Utendi wa Mwana Kupona* and identify some of the major themes present in the text.

References on this Lesson

Allen, J.W.T. (1971). *Tendi*; *Classical Swahili Verse*. London, Heinemann Educational
Jahn, J. (1960). *A History of Neo African Literature*_
Amateshe, A. D. (ed) (1988), *An Anthology of East African Poetry* Nairobi, Longman.

Lesson Three: Poetry that Praises African Culture

Introduction

Creative writers have sought to argue through their works the superiority of the African cultures against foreign cultures on the African soil. This has been necessitated by the onslaught on African culture by foreign cultures. East Africans have not been left behind in this debate. Writers from East Africa who have creatively joined in this debate include Francis Imbuga in his play *The Burning of Rags*, Austin Bukenya in his play *The Bride,* and Okot p'Bitek in his poem *Song of Lawino.* We shall analyse the latter text in this lesson.

Objectives of this Lesson:

By the end of this Lesson, you should be able to:

1. Name some of the writers who have written texts praising African culture
2. Evaluate elements that make African culture rich
3. Discuss at least three aspects of style in *Song of Lawino*
4. Show the elements that make *Song of Lawino* a representation of African culture.

Song of Lawino by Okot P'Bitek

Song of Lawino is a long poem that defies Western forms of Poetry and uses the African traditional song form to condemn the Western culture as epitomized by Ocol and his new found love Clementine or Tina. It also praises the traditional culture in all its respects as embraced by Lawino the singer or the poetic persona. Through Lawino's eyes, we see the way the Western culture has been used by Africans to

undermine their own culture. Okot uses Lawino as his mouthpiece to articulate not only issues of culture but of economy, politics as well as social and religious implications. He offers the stakes to the reader or the listener to judge for whether Lawino's plea is mere fabrications; figments of her imaginations or real problems that face the present day Africa.

Song of Lawino, first written in Acholi as *Wer Par Lawino*, has relevance and popularity in the present world. The question of the impact of Western civilization on African civilization that the conflict between Lawino and her husband Ocol symbolize is a thorn in the flesh of many scholars of African studies in the present world. Up to date there are lamentations of the onslaught on African culture through Western media, language, technology, diet among others.

The setting of *Song of Lawino* is a kind of traditional marriage court that was set up in order to settle cases of marital problems. It is the setting that allows the author to use taboo world.

Okot p'Bitek writes about twelve songs (chapters) that are strung together by a general theme of superiority of the African culture and the one poetic persona Lawino. These are as follows:

1. My Husband's Tongue is Bitter,
2. The Woman with whom I Share my Husband,
3. I do not know the dances of White People,
4. My name blew like a Horn among the Payira,
5. The Graceful Giraffe Cannot Become a Monkey,
6. The Mother Stone Has a Hollow Stomach,
7. There is no fixed time for Breastfeeding,
8. I am Ignorant of the Good Word in the Clean Book,
9. From the Mouth of which River?
10. The Last Safari to Pagak,
11. The Buffaloes of Poverty knock the People Down,

12. My Husband's House is a dark Forest of Books,
13. Let them Prepare the Malakwang Dish.

Throughout the song, Lawino speaks, laments, warns, cries, mocks, jeers, accuses, as her husband and the elders or villagers listen. The response given by her accused husband is given in the *Song of Ocol,* which is a different text altogether.

Lawino starts by accusing her husband of being very disrespectful and abusive both to her, to her mother, to her aunt and to her clan in general. We pity her especially through the words and the idiom she adopts to portray her husband's gross misconduct.

> Husband, now you despise me
> Now you treat me with spite
> And say I have inherited the stupidity of my aunt (p.12)

This beginning alone tells you who the protagonist and who the antagonist of the song are. She goes on to tell the clansmen to listen to her as she pours forth the insults that her husband heaps not only on her but also on her aunt and on all the clansmen in general;

> He says my mother is a witch
> That my clansmen are fools
> Because they eat rats
> He says we are all Kaffirs (p.13)

Then she goes on to reveal that the husband doesn't just stop at that. His hatred is directed to all Africans and black people in general.

> He says black people are primitive
> And their ways are utterly harmful
> Their dances are mortal sins
> They are ignorant, poor and diseased

In this manner, Okot explains how the alienated African is the most dangerous person to the national cultures of Africa. Through his slanders, the alienated African despises African medicinal herbs (which incidentally cures diseases and from which many Western medicines have been made).

Lawino's and Ocol's quarrel ceases to be a normal domestic one and becomes a symbolic struggle between the cultural nationalists and the cultural critics who are victims of Western cultural imperialism. Lawino goes on and brings into her accusations Clementine, her co-wife who she simply refers to as the woman with whom I share my husband. Tina aspires to be a white woman in a black skin. She does everything the Western way including walking, talking, eating and beautifying herself. We are told that all these have left her looking sickly and ugly.

> Brother, when you see Clementine
> The beautiful one aspires
> To look like a white woman
> Her lips are red-hot
> Like glowing charcoal
> She resembles the wild cat
> That has dipped its mouth in blood
> She resembles the wizard
> Getting ready for the midnight dance
>
> She looks like the guinea fowl
> She looks as if she has dysentery
> Tina looks sickly
> And she is glow moving
> She is piteous sight

These and many more are the comparisons that Lawino says Tina looks like after using the Western cosmetics and aspiring to be like a white woman. Okot purposefully brings in Clementine to show that African can never be like Europe. If we apply European standards in developing African languages, politics, economy, social status and

anything in Africa, what we shall get is an inferior quality which is neither European nor African. Tina is the epitome of the present African woman and man who is neither African nor European. She has no cultural base and she has nothing to refer to.
This theme is again alluded to in the fifth song i.e. The Graceful Giraffe Cannot Become a Monkey. Lawino despises the measures of beauty in terms of hairstyle, dresscode and use of body modifications. She says that in the African setting every kind of hairstyle had its place in the society. Long unkempt hair was for mourning, thick and curly hair is for everyday purpose and plaited hair is for dance ceremonies. For cosmetics, butter from cow's milk or fat from edible rats is used.

In all the tirades that Lawino says, she keeps on repeating the phrase 'Let no one uproot the pumpkin in the old homestead'. A pumpkin is a delicacy among several communities of East Africa. It symbolizes the cultural food of these communities and uprooting it variedly may mean setting in hunger it nurtures the people. By emphasizing that it should not be uprooted, Lawino is saying that culture must not be killed just because a new home has been made or found.

Okot also uses Lawino to step up African's pride in their diet in the chapter that reads The Mother Stone Has a Hollow Stomach, Lawino praises the African kitchen, foods and ways of cooking. She talks of ways of food preservation. She alludes to the fact that African foods make one strong and healthy. Such dishes she says include millet, bread, meat of various animals, beans, peas, fish, dried cucumber, simsim past, dried white ants; cassava and sorghum. These are foods that are known to protect the body and make one healthy and less prone to diseases.

On time, Lawino feels that her husband has become a slave of time just like a European. He has no time to live his life because he has very many things to do. He cannot talk to his wife who he considers wastes time. In her opinion one should not be conditioned by time but rather by the dictates of social life. For example, a baby is fed when it cries and not at specific times. Children go to bed when sleep comes into their head and wake up when it leaves them. A child is washed when it is dirty and not because it is time to wash it. Time therefore is used to produce and not to waste or to destroy.

Religion is a sensitive issue and it must be observed within the dictates of the culture. Imposing ones religion on a different culture is a recipe for confusion and chaos. That is why Ocol and other Christian converts are portrayed as following religion they half-understand. It becomes something that people simply practice without believing yet religion is hinged on belief and faith in what you believe. The catechist is said to should incantations to the learners as they shout them back to him.

He shouted words at us
And we shouted back at him

He shouted angry as if he uttered abuses
We repeated the same words
Shouting back at him
As when you shout
Insults at somebody's mother!

We repeated the meaningless phrases
Like the yellow birds
In the lanajawara grass

This seems to challenge the rote learning which does not encourage active listening or proper comprehension. Instead learners are forced to memorise things that evaporate once they step outside the cold teaching hall.

Note

From the above discussion, it becomes clear that these Christians do not believe in this religion. There faith is wanting because they do not understand its pillars.

With the advent of Christianity people adopted meaningless names that Lawino puns like Jemcon, Paraciko, Tomcon, Gulyelmo, Yroko instead of names with African meanings like Apiyo, Acen, Adoc, Adong, Otoo e.t.c.

Names are meant to show one the season of his/her birth or the situations surrounding his/her birth.

> Some names are names of sorrows
> Alobo, Abur, Ayiko, Woko
> That fate has thrown
> A large basket to be filled
> With dead children

Lawino questions some of the things Christians simply believe without understanding. For example how comes Maria conceived without knowing a man. What was there before Christ was born. Where did God get the soil for moulding the entire world? These questions are typical of village ignorance but they raise critical questions as to why Africans abandon their way of worship and follow a foreign fake 'god'.

Politics in the modern society serves the purpose of disintegrating households and eventually the whole society. In this text, people create parties which are meaningless and are not able to unite the society. Ocol's brother is in a rival party with Ocol and they don't see eye to eye. They all shout about unity yet ironically they are not

united. The irony is that if the brothers rae not united, how can they claim to have the capacity to unite the wider society that is divided into tribes. On the contrary, Traditional politics preached and practiced unity. This has led to what Lawino refers to as 'The Buffalos of Poverty' that knock the people down; 'pythons of sickness' that swallow the children and ignorance that 'stands there like an elephant'. Politicians and leaders are compared to warlords who are tightly locked in bloody feuds, eating each other's liver.

As the text ends, Okot through Lawino makes a passionate plea that we go back to our cultural roots and as Achebe puts it, 'look out where the rain started beating us' or where we went wrong. Lawino prescribes an elaborate cleansing ceremony to be performed to her husband, Ocol, so that he may be readmitted into the fold of his people and take up his royal position as a prince and not a slave to the whiteman. She recommends that her husband should be prepared for a Malakwang dish that will restore his manhood and his royalty and get him out of this slavery to the whiteman. He should not uproot the pumpkin in the old homestead. He should take up his rightful duty as the defender of this pumpkin.

Note

The subject matter of this poem is the strength of the African culture to the Africans as opposed to foreign cultures. All the themes gravitate around this subject. The themes include; politics, religion, economy, time management and even the question of beauty.

Manipulation of language

Okot uses quite a number of linguistic features to make his point. These include:-

1) Use of Song Technique
2) Imagery
3) Symbolism
4) Taboo Words
5) Irony
6) Use of caricature, burlesque, lampoons and parody

We shall only discuss the first four literary techniques. You can read and identify examples of the other literary techniques on your own.[2]

Use of song technique

Okot contravenes most of the European style of writing a poem and adopts an African style of giving a long narrative. Therefore, if one wants to make an effective criticism of *Song of Lawino*, he/she must discard the western strait-jackets of the parameters of fitting words into some form of pre-medicated frame and call it a poem. One has to go back to the African culture and specifically the Acholi culture. This is not just a poem and neither is it a song because it is not singable. We are told that after composing it, Okot went to his mother and read it to the mother who was an expert Acholi singer in her own right. The mother asked him to sing it and he was unable.

The style of this poem is a blend between Acholi traditions where Poetry was delivered orally by an expert individual with the English tradition of stanzas, Lessons, rhymes, schemes, paper layouts e.t.c.

Okot uses the idiom of the Acholi to effectively capture their oral tradition and exploit it using his western knowledge to come up with something that is not only acceptable in both worlds but also good to look at, to read and to identify with. Following the success of this text, he wrote its sequel *Song of Ocol* and others like *Song of Malaya* and, *Song of Prisoner.* All these songs adopt the same technique.

[2] For a discussion on the use of lampoons, irony, caricature, burlesque and parody in this poem, please refer to Mugubi's module for teaching ALT 300: Stylistics and Literary Techniques Pp. 174-181

Imagery

Perhaps the most conspicuous feature of style is the heavy use of imagery. Every object and subject is compared to some other object, subject or animal in the African Kingdom. Innocent objects like electricity are referred to as the Rain Cock (lightening) just because the two have a characteristic of striking people. A brassiere is referred to as a cotton nest and Tina's shrivelled breasts are referred to as cow-hide. This creates mental pictures in the mind of the reader hence conveying the message vividly. Additionally it enriches the style of the text for it makes the work beautiful to read. For example, the reader is called to witness the way Tina has disfigured herself in the name of beauty through imagery.

Her lips are red-hot
Like glowing charcoal
She resembles the wild cat
That has dipped its mouth in blood
Her mouth is like raw yaws
It looks like an open ulcer
Like the mouth of a fiend!
Tina dusts powder on her face
And it looks so pale;
She resembles the wizard
Getting ready for the midnight dance

The images also authenticate the poem as a true reflection of the African oral traditions. Particular imagery we can single out is similes let us examine the similes in the following extract;

The white man's stoves
are good for cooking
whiteman's foods
for cooking the tasteless
bloodless meat of cows
that were killed many years ago
and left in the ice
to rot
for frying an egg
which when ready

is slimy like mucus.

for boiling hairy chicken
in saltless water
you think you are chewing paper
and the bones of the leg
contains only clotted blood
and when you bite
it makes no cracking sound
it tastes like earth

they are for warming up
tinned beef, tinned fish
tinned peas, tinned beans
big broad beans
tasteless like Cooco.

The similes that have been italicised not only create humour but also ridicule the western culture which is alien to Lawino which again to the reader will seem repugnant. The thought of eating food that is comparable to mucus, tasteless like soil or like Cooco is not just repulsive but also laughable. It is even more laughable when the people who consume such food claim to have superior eating culture. Lawino's disgust and dismissal of the western culture that has encroached on her culture is well brought out in this use of similes. The use of these similes therefore makes the delivery of her attitude and the message she is putting across to the reader more powerful than it would have been had she simply used ordinary language.

Symbolism

Okot uses many symbols but the one that brings the general subject matter of the poem is the pumpkin. The pumpkin is a delicacy that is loved by many East African communities. Uprooting it is like taking away the source of livelihood of the community hence inviting hunger and to the worst famine. It is a traditional dish, easy to make and quite satisfying. In *Song of Lawino*, the pumpkin assumes even greater

significance. It is seen as a dish that gives cultural strength to those who have lost it. It is seen as culture itself that must be defended from foreign intrusion. In summary it is the embodiment of the purity of African culture. She says that the ways of the Africans and their custom are not easily breakable not thin, not hollow. They are solid, good and their roots each deep in the soil.

Question

Identify other symbols in the poem and explain their use especially how they have been used to bring out the themes in the text.

Taboo Words

As stated earlier, taboo words are easily used in this text because the setting allows their use. This is a kind of village marriage court in which minors are not allowed. It is a stage of elderly people and children have no business in such a setting. Lawino uses this stage to say all the things she wants to say without fearing the presence of children who are not allowed to hear obscenities from elders. For example she claims that her husband's tongue is as hot as the penis of the bee and that Tina's breasts are completely shrivelled up, they are all folded dry skins.

She also alludes to the fact that a man's show of manliness is seen in the arena. 'No one touches another man's testicles' simply means no one provokes the other one by snatching his girl and goes away scot-free. She accuses Ocol of wearing the western culture (clothes) so that he may hide is inferior understanding of the African culture. This she uses a metaphor thus,

Perhaps you are covering up
Your bony hips and chest
And the large scar on your thigh
And the scabies on your buttocks

She alludes to the sexual process as a gardener planting seeds.

Periodically each woman
Sees the moon
And when a young girl
Has seen if for the first time
It is a sign that the garden
Is ready for sowing
And when the gardener comes
Carrying two bags of live seeds
And a good strong hoe
The rich red soil
Swells with a new life

Obviously the moon is periods of the menstrual cycle, the garden is the woman, the gardener the man, the good strong hoe is his manhood, the two bags his the testicles, the live seeds the sperms and the swelling with a new life is the pregnancy that results from the planting process (sexual intercourse).

Okot uses the poetic license bestowed upon creative writers to use these taboo words to shock the reader into paying attention to what he is saying. A reader who reads such words is scandalized and will instantly want to know what issues are these that author is communicating. Therefore the poet uses the taboo words as a stylistic strategy to lure the reader into paying attention to the issues of concern in the text and tocommunicate serious issues affecting the African people who have abandoned the solid ways of their people. In the court tribunal, we all stand accused of neglecting Lawino and her ways. We all stand accused of having embraced Clementine, an artificial woman with fake values while disregarding our very source of livelihood (Lawino).

Further on, we are told that Ocol's testicles have been smashed by the weight of books in his office. This means he has lost his manhood – the vitality – that makes him an African master. Instead he has become a praise singer of the whiteman, He is a stooge to the Muzungu.

Activity

Write an essay by the title, 'The use of Irony and its implication on themes in Okot p'Bitek's poem *Song of Lawino.'*

Revision questions

1. Taban Lo Liyong summarises the *Song of Lawino* thus "Lawino is no more than a village simpleton, unable to understand the complexities of her worthy westernized husband, Ocol". Do you think this criticism is relevant to Okot p' Bitek's intentions in *Song of Lawino*. Explain your response
2. 'The song is a flowering of the tradition of orature. It is an incisive critique of bourgeois mannerisms and colonial education and values.' In your opinion, can this statement be seen as a summary of the themes in the text?
3. 'Lawino is not only a village woman whose husband has gone wrong; but she is also an archetypal national figure who aims to speak for all people or an issue of national concern.' Do you agree with Ngugi wa Thiong'o's assertion?
4. 'Lawino's particular crisis is not simply presented as a private tragedy but also a national one. It makes an appeal to public sentiments.' Comment on this statement.
5. Draw a parallel or a comparison between Okot p'Bitek's *Song of Lawino* and *Utendi wa Mwana Kupona*

Lesson Four: East African written Poetry: A Stylo-thematic Analysis of Selected Short Poems. (Part I)

Introduction

This lesson and the subsequent one are specifically designed to look at some of the written short poems in East Africa as a way of helping you appreciate poetry from this region. There are so many written short poems from East Africa that we cannot exhaust them in one lesson or even one course. Therefore I have chosen to narrow down to only written and published poems. Again there are so many written and published poems and most of them appear in anthologies. Some of the anthologies from East Africa that you are likely to come across include:

1. Poems from East Africa by David Cook and David Rubadiri
2. An Anthology of East African poetry by A.D. Kisa Amateshe
3. Boundless Voices: Poems from Kenya edited by Arthur Luvai
4. My Mother's Song and other Poems by Micere Githae Mugo
5. Tides of Time: Selected poems by jared Angira
6. A Chequered Serenede to Mother Africa by Mutu wa Gethoi
7. Words the melt a Mountain by Taban Lo Liyong
8. Make it Sing and other poems by Marjorie O. Macgoye
9. Echoes Across the valley edited by Arthur Luvai and Makokha Kwamchetsi
10. Song for the Sun in Us by Okello Oculi
11. The Lianja Epic by Mubima Maneniang'

Once more I am forced to narrow down to one anthology. For purposes of this course, I have picked on A.D. Kisa Amateshe's, *An Anthology of East African Poetry.* I have specifically chosen this anthology for the following reasons:

1. It has a number of poems from each of the three East African countries,
2. It is one of the best known anthologies, after *Poems from East Africa,*
3. It has poems with a variety of themes and style,
4. It is readily available on the market and even in rural areas.

Objectives of this Lesson

By the end of this lesson, you should be able to:

1. Categorize poems in any anthology,
2. Identify the poetic person in any poem,
3. Locate features of style and their functions in a poem,
4. Discuss tone, mood and attitude as integral elements of a poem.

Keyword

Stylo-thematic analysis involves looking at the features of content i.e. themes, mood, tone, attitude and even feelings and the way they have been brought out in a poem using the varied and different features of style in order to make and/or give meaning.

Classification

An Anthology of East African Poetry edited by A.D. Kisa Amateshe has ninety poems mostly from East Africa but some are by writers from as far as Malawi. Amateshe puts these ninety poems in a logical progression of three parts. The first part is made up of simpler poems (or so does he say). The second is made of less easy poems and part three has difficult ones. I shall not use this partitioning in my analysis for the simple reason that I believe no poem is difficult or easy. It all depends on a reader's exposure to criticisms of poetry and his/her own understanding of the poem in question. What may be seen as difficult to one reader may not be seen as difficult to another reader.

Of the ninety poems in the anthology, I have selected a sample of ten poems from East Africa. I have classified them under three categories. These are social poems, poems on economy, and lastly poems on politics. In this lesson, we shall look at social poems while in the subsequent lesson; we shall look at poems on economy and politics.

Note

There are other poems in this anthology that may not fall in these classes. Therefore do not take this classification as the final word. You are free to challenge this way of looking at them and then suggesting your own criteria of classification.

POEMS ON SOCIAL LIFE.

These are poems that deal with issues like birth-day celebrations, growth, achievements, failures, love, marriage, weddings, tragedies, death and other rites of passage. They mostly inform us on the interactions of humans as social beings.

In the anthology most of the poems fall under this category but for purposes of analysis, we shall use the following;

1. *Wedding eve* by Everett Standa
2. *The Death of my Father* by Henry Indangasi
3. *The ways of the World* by Richard Mabala
4. *A Leopard lives in a Muu Tree* by Jonathan Kariara

Other poems in the anthology that may fall in this category include *I Met a Thief*, *When I see the beauty of my beloved*, *Destiny*, *I will cling to your Garment*, *Despair*, *Extensions*, *Betrothed*, *Come My mothers son*, *Witness*, *At your feet*, *Death at Mulago*, *By the Seaside* and *Armanda*.

***Wedding eve* by Everett Standa**

Wedding eve is a poem in which the persona who is a bridegroom-to-be is self- examining his conscience concerning his relationship to the bride to be. He is asking his conscience important questions wondering whether the bride to be will live upto his expectations or she will simply desert him when his fortunes start dwindling. He wonders whether the lady loves him truly and genuinely or she loves what he can provide (the future she saw in me. Line11). These doubts nag his

conscience until he is divided between going ahead with the wedding arrangements or cancelling it all together. At last, he decides to go on with it but on a condition; that like a chess player, he will be careful on how he lives with his woman. He will wait for the lady to make a move before he makes his. What he will be doing in life will depend on what she does. She will make a move and then based on that move, he will make his move. That way, they can ensnare each other in an everlasting bound of marriage. Look at the last line;

Hoping to win against each other.

This line indicates that the persona knows that life with this lady may not be a bed of roses because he knows little about her and she knows little about him (secret dreams) yet they all have expectations from each other. Therefore as they live together, they will pursue their expectations each hoping that his or her expectations will be the ones to be meet or realized. Therefore 'hoping to win against each other' means that each one of them will be fighting to have his/her hopes and expectations realized in that marriage just like chess players hope to win at the end of the match.

Key word

A persona is the character who tells the story in a poem. He is the one who we hear his/her voice in a poem. He is sometimes called the speaker. For example the persona in the poem *Wedding eve* is a bridegroom who is probably just about to tie the nuptial knot.

Activity

1. Imagine you are the bride whose bride groom is having these doubts; Write a poem in response to his doubts.

2. Imagine you are a psychiatrist listening to this bridegroom; write a poem counseling and advising him

The themes that emerge strongly from the poem are faith in love and fear for the unknown. The bridegroom doubts his faith in the love that the bride will shower unto him. He knows he is risking by agreeing to share his life with a woman he knows little about. He feels like running away but reason tells him not to because he has come too far to abandon.

Question

Do you find this poem relevant in today's world?

This poem is very apt and of social relevance in today's East African society where we are having a lot of failed marriages. Time and again we hear news of how a couples wedding has been disrupted because the bride or the groom has been found to have withheld certain vital information about him/herself.

Poetic devices in the poem.

Standa uses a kind of conversational tone between the persona and his conscience. The persona asks his conscience leading questions about this woman who he is about to marry yet he is not so sure of. The persona exposes his fears to his conscience in the first lines of the poem and in the last five lines, he gives a conclusion. By making the persona give a conclusion, the poet metes poetic justice in the poem such that the reader is not left in suspense wondering whether the persona cancelled the wedding or not. The last five lines assure the reader that the persona eventually married the woman. I find this stylistic aspect a very new and novel idea because although people are ever conversing with themselves, rarely do you find poets making a

character hold such a fruitful conversation with their consciences. In this case, the conscience is seen as a bosom friend to the persona such that the persona is so free with it that he can confide in it his fears. He can pose rhetoric questions which he does not expect answers. These questions give the reader an opportunity to reflect upon the issues of lack of faith in love and the fear of the unknown.

Keyword

Rhetoric questions: These are questions that carry information yet they do not require answers or immediate responses. They are meant to help the reader ponder on issues under examination.

The persona asks:

What magic can I use?
To see what lies beneath
Her angel face and well knit hair?
To see her hopes and dreams
Before I take the oath
To love forever?

The above questions do not require responses yet they are manifestations of the fear the persona has; that the hopes and dreams of the bride may be too much for him to handle or fulfil. If only he knew them, he would know how to make himself ready for them.

Standa writes the poem in such a way that vivid images of the possible betrayal of the persona by the bride can be pictured in the readers mind. This is what is called imagery.

Keyword

Imagery is a stylistic aspect in which a poet uses words that tend to create vivid pictures in the mind of the reader. Under imagery we have techniques like metaphors, personifications, similes, vivid descriptions,

metonyms among others.

The persona uses imagery as he wonders if the bride will desert him when he is most vulnerable; ‘leaving the naked me To love without hope’ (line 13, 14)

The word ‘naked’ is used metaphorically to mean that the bride may leave him exposed without material wealth and investments (future).

The word ‘face’ in line 15 is personified in such a way that it is given a human attribute of wearing a smile; ‘will that face she wears…’

The whole of stanza 4 (lines 19-23) is rich in imagery. The lady is likened to a clever passenger in a faulty plane who wears her life saving jacket and jumps out (walks out of marriage) leaving the pilot to crash. The faulty plane in this case may represent the life the two will be leading together while the pilot who crashes into the unknown is the bridegroom. Additionally, walking out of the marriage is likened to jumping out of a faulty plane. These similes enhance our understanding of the fears of the bridegroom on the wedding eve.

Activity

Do you now find the poem understandable? Read through it again and attempt to find the meaning of the following stanza;

Will she continue to love me?
When the future she saw in me?
Crumbles and fades into nothing?

The Death of my Father by Henry Indangasi

This poem is a philosophical explanation and justification the persona is giving for not doing his custom –bound duty of mourning his father. African customs demand that the bereaved should mourn their dead especially if the dead is such a close kin as the father. That is why we have funerary ceremonies like 'tero buru' among the Luo tribes and Okhukoma among the Luhya clans of Kenya. So there is no way the persona who seemingly is an East African cannot mourn his father without a proper explanation.

Question

Demonstrate your understanding of the term funerary ceremonies. Give examples from your own community.

The persona starts by describing his late father and the picture the reader gets is that of a man who lived a hard and difficult life. He then goes on to extol the tools of trade of the deceased and the products of that trade. Next he draws the interconnectivity between his life, that of his father and that of his son. Lastly he gives reasons as to why he cannot shed tears for his father because the fact that he is alive attests to the continuation of the life of his father in the present day. Again the fact that his (persona's) son is alive assures of the continuity of the fathers life. The father lives in his son and grand son. To the persona, life is transmitted and preserved in our progenies and thus, there is no need to mourn a dead parent as if his life is lost.

The persona adopts a solemn mood as he reasons out with the reader. This solemn mood helps him lay bare the facts to back his philosophical argument of there being no reason to mourn a dead parent. At times, he changes his mood into a sarcastic one especially when he tells of the life of his father who made dining tables, chairs,

wardrobes and other wood wares yet he died in a mud house on a bed full of bed bugs. This is a man who worked so hard to build mansions for the colonial masters yet he could only afford a mud house and could only dream of freedom and happiness. His son took over this dream of happiness and freedom and pursued it (made it his song and his love). Therefore the persona suggests that his fathers dream of happiness and freedom will be realized in him

Another way of looking at this text is that the persona seems to be saying he shall not mourn the death of colonialism era in which he was born. He says so because the post colonial society has characteristics of the colonial society hence he doesn't see the need to say that colonialism is dead. Colonialism shall forever live but disguised and regenerating itself in those who took over in what can be referred to as neo colonialism

Note

The speaker does not want to mourn his father because according to him, his father is him and him his son (line 28). Therefore mourning his father would be like mourning his own death and that of his son. It will mean that he is dead and his son is also dead.

The poetic techniques that come to mind as you read the poem are vivid description, imagery, sarcasm as well as philosophical reflections. The father is described as having been a hardy man who had sunken cheeks, unkempt grey hair, hard; course sand-paper like hands e.t.c. These descriptions leave a reader with a mind picture of a man who had endured a life of difficulties yet he was a man with a skill in carpentry. There is again a suggestion of colonial exploitation here. People could work for colonial masters yet the pay was not enough to even build a descent house and buy a descent bed.

Question

Looking at the preceding discussions on this poem, identify and write down how the poet has used techniques of sarcasm and philosophical reflections.

Activity

Compare this poem to Christine Vakhoya by Loice Abukutsa in boundless Voices, We shall not mourn the dead by Helder Neto in When Bullets begin to Flower, Son of my mother by Okot P'Bitek in Poems from East Africa and Nyalgunga by Amateshe in An anthology of East African poetry. Do you think that these poems fall under one classification which we can call funerary poetry?

***The Ways of the World* by Richard Mabala**

In the previous poem, we have seen the poetic persona, a son, who is proud to carry on his father's dream in pursuit of freedom and happiness; a son who sees his life as a continuation of his dead father's life hence sees no reason to mourn his father's death. By contrast, the son in Richard Mabala's poem, *The Ways of the World* is ashamed of his father and what he is doing to young girls. The poem starts by the speaker spotting a youthful well-shaped lass at the bus stop. He describes her as a sexy beautiful youngster who he deliberately decides not to stalk because she is but a secondary school student. But when he goes to a bar the same evening, he is shocked to find the same school girl, but now in a casual outfit (which again exposes her sexy shape so provocatively). What is more shocking is that she is getting cosy with the speakers own father. There is an irony here. The speaker had deliberately refused to seduce the girl out of his respect

to her status as a school girl. This essentially means that the speaker perceived the girl as an under age. However his own father who is much older, elderly and probably married is making advances at this school girl. The speaker storms out of the bar in silent revolt to this social injustice.

What follows in stanza three is even shocking but to be expected. The speaker meets this girl once more at the bus stop. The young lady, who probably is not mature enough to know how to protect herself against unsafe sex, is now heavy with an unwanted and illegitimate pregnancy. Her beauty is all gone and her once inviting shape is now disgusting.

The poet structures this poem into three stanzas, each stanza representing an incident in which the speaker sees the schoolgirl. There is a logical progression of events. In stanza one, the girl is looking attractive and ripe, stanza two a shameless man takes advantage of this ripe and gorgeous figure and the last stanza is the product of the advantage the man took of the girl in the second stanza. The whole poem is a cry of the moral rot and decadence witnessed in the society where fathers are sexually abusing their daughters. The persona is a man who is enchanted by the physical features of the girl but is forced not to pursue her because she is in a school uniform. However when he sees the same girl in casual wear and with another man, he feels jealous until when he sees who that man is. The covetous feeling turns into sorrow because his own father has beaten him in the quest for the girl. When he meets the girl again, she is a pitiable sight having lost all her sensual and provocative demeanour. He feels disgusted and utters a holier-than-thou sentence;

Oh! What are we doing to our daughters?

To me this sentence fits not just his father but also him (the persona) because had he been the first to meet the girl in the bar before his father did, chances are that he would have done exactly what the father did i.e. woo the girl and probably make her pregnant. So, line 47 in my opinion is a self-reproach to all elderly men, who lure young girls into bed for sexual adventure. The persona and his father are representatives of such men. This is bad not just because it introduces the young girl to premarital sex but it is risky at this age of incurable sexually transmitted diseases and infections.

You will therefore realize that the feelings of the persona change in each stanza according to the conditions of the instances in that stanza.

Question

1. Does the language the persona uses to describe the school girl, tell you that he is interested in her? Select specific words or phrases and explain them.
2. Analyse the use of imagery and how it helps you understand the theme of teenage pregnancy in the poem.

Activity

Compare the main theme in this poem and the main theme in Everett Standa's poem, *The Pregnant School Girl*? Do you think these two poems fall in the same category which we call, social tragic poems?

***A leopard Leaves in a Muu Tree* by Jonathan Kariara**

In the previous poem, we have seen how elderly men behave badly and sin before God and against school girls. In this poem, we see how elderly men mess with their fellow elderly men's wives. This is one poem that carries heavy euphemism since it touches on taboo areas and is a frank admission of failure in sexual matters. You will agree with me that not so many people will admit having failed to sexually satisfy their spouses. However the speaker is bold enough to admit that his 'upright post at the gate has fallen' (his manhood cannot rise to the occasion)

Keyword

Euphemism: A word that is used in the place of another word that may cause discomfort or embarrassment to a reader. Euphemism is used in order to make a harsh, gross, vulgar, taboo, crass or sensous word more palatable to a reader.

The Muu tree in this poem is seen as an agent of evil for it harbours the offending man (leopard) who has undesirable characteristics. The leopard is portrayed as opportunistic for it takes advantage of another man's sickness (sword rusting in the scabbard) to sexually exploit his wives. This exploitation leads to the wives giving birth to speckled and mottled lambs (not pure breed). It is even made worse when the leopard turns on these lambs and eats them. It means that the offending elder brother (line 18) to the persona, sleeps with the persona's wives and turns around and also sleeps with the children born out of this union. This is pure incest that cannot be condoned. Thus we can understand why the speaker wants to cut down the Muu tree (the dwelling place of his brother) and scare away the leopard, the

incestuous man who sleeps with his own children. He is a social outcast and I think the persona is right in wishing to send him away.

Note

The poetic devices employed in this poem are symbolism, imagery, euphemism and repetition.

Question

What does the repetition of the phrase, ‘I am besieged’ mean to you? Of what significance does it have in telling you the situation and fears of the persona?

Activity

When a man cannot rise to the occasion and has several wives, what should the wives do? Respond referring to the poem and giving or drawing examples from the society you live in.

Lesson Five: East African written Poetry: A Stylo-thematic analysis of selected Short Poems. (Part II)

Introduction

This lesson is a continuation of the previous one. You will remember that I classified the poems in Amateshe's anthology into three i.e. poems on social life, on economy and on politics. We have already discussed poems on social life. In this lesson, we shall continue and look at poems on economic life and politics.

Objectives of this Lesson

By the end of this lesson, you should be able to:

1. Name atleast three poems on economy in the selected anthology,
2. Define the term political poems,
3. List atleast three political poems in the selected anthology,
4. Discuss tone, mood and attitude as integral elements of a poem.

POEMS ON ECONOMY

These are poems that dwell on activities people engage in as they seek sources of livelihood and to etch a living. They are poems that allude to the struggles that human beings undergo in search of the basic human needs of life, food, shelter, water and security.

In Amateshe's *Anthology of East African Poetry*, the following can be regarded as some of the poems on economy:

Turn boy by Mabala
The Guilt of Giving by Erapu
The Motoka by Luzuka
Ploughing by Noah Ndosi
Song of the Worker by Songoyi

A Johannesburg Miner's Song by King'ei
Mother of Children by A.D. Amateshe

I will analyse the first three poems under this category. You are free to come up with your own analysis of the other poems.

<u>Turn- boy</u> by Richard Mabala

On the literal plane, this poem tells of a story of a polite young man whose work is to pack and unpack loads and baggage to and from a bus. This work seems enormous for his young body especially when he has to pack heavy loads like the sacks of coconut he loads on the bus in the poem. The loads he has to carry are too heavy to be lifted single-handedly but the boy has no otherwise but to load and offload them. The other passengers feel indifference and apathy to the plight of the boy until one of them who has been in the same position points out to them that the boy will waste away very soon if he doesn't stop carrying such heavy loads. The passengers empathize and sympathize with him at this point.

The loading and offloading of goods and loads of passengers to and from the bus is essentially a courtesy service that bus operators offer their passengers. However some passengers take advantage of the turn-boys employed by the bus companies to subject them to carrying heavy loads that they cannot carry themselves. The turn-boys cannot refuse because such passengers will report to their bosses who will waste no time in sacking them. So the turn-boys are exploited and they know it but they have to endure it for the sake of their jobs. They know if they loss the job, finding another one will be very hard. You can therefore deduce that the turn-boy in this poem is being economically exploited.

On a literary plane, this poem goes beyond just the turn boy and looks at how the rich exploit the poor. The turn boy may be seen as a representative of all the working people who toil and moil yet earn so little. They toil and moil for the benefit of the rich who are so roguish, arrogant and inconsiderate just like the kanzu'd old man. The rich are always afraid and uneasy with what they are doing and that explains why the kanzu'd octogenarian has to supervise the turn-boy as he

suffers under the weight of the coconut sacks. The old man is a mean, inconsiderate and mistrustful person who represents bourgeoisie merchants who always strive to make the maximum profits while investing minimally. They will suck every once of energy from the unfortunate workers in order to enrich themselves and those of their type. He represents those who value material wealth over life and happiness/comfort.

Poetic devices

To bring out the above issues of concern and character traits, the poet employs quite a number of technical devices. Mabala (the poet) starts by drawing the readers attention to the coconut merchant who is said to be 'a bulging kanzu'd form'. The word 'Kanzu' is a Swahili to mean frock. The poet decides to say Kanzu'd man in describing the merchant so that we may examine him critically. This is a poetic device called **neologism.** Kanzu is a clad associated with Islam, a religious sect that professes equality among all the people of the world. Yet the actions of this kanzu'd man do not exhibit any equality. This in itself is irony.

Keyword

Neologism: This is a style of forming words from other words that do not exist outside the context of their use. Such words can be formed through affixation and compounding. The word 'kanzu'd' is an example of neologism through affixation.[3]

The beginning of the poem has imagery. We are told that;

The bus squealed sluggishly to a halt.

[3] For a rich discussion on neologism and any other literary technique, read Mugubi's module for teaching ALT 300: Stylistics and Literary techniques.

Squealing is usually associated with the noise made by chicken yet here the bus is said to have squealed. This is giving inanimate things attributes of animate things which in a word we call **personification**. The alliteration that abounds in the above mentioned statement serves to create musicality as one starts the journey of reading the poem. This musicality aspect lures you into reading even more. There is also lexical deviation where the poet employs foreign words. The Swahili words in the poem are used deliberately for two purposes.

Question

Identify the use of foreign words in any poem and explain the purpose of their use.

The first purpose is that they help you the reader to understand the setting of the poem i.e. a Swahili speaking world and most probably Tanzania. The second purpose is to help you the poet contrast the character traits of the poor and the rich. The poor ones like the turn-boy use polite and respectful Swahili words like ‘Shikamoo baba’ and ‘jameni’ while the rich can only callously respond ‘Marahaba’. Also remember that this Swahili greeting has no equivalent in English so the poet has no other way to translate it other than leaving it as it is.

Question

Pick out other imagery words in the poem and explain their use.

Activity

Between the turn-boy and the kanzu'd man, who do you identify with and why?

<u>The Guilt of Giving</u> by Laban Erapu

This is a fine example of a poem that strikes you by suddenly letting you share in the expression of what you always know or feel but never formulated it in words. Right from the title, the poem is startling and interesting for we do not ordinarily associate guilt with giving. The poet uses the pronoun 'you' to make the poem sound like a direct address to the reader who is 'you'; forcing you to accept the experiences recollected as if they are your own. The persona assumes a 'holier-than-thou' attitude and uses this attitude to directly attack and accuse 'you' and the crowd for having neglected the poor ones in our society and calling them bad names like heap of rags. The speaker seems to be saying that it is because we regard beggars as pollutants in the society that we treat them as heaps of rags and not human beings.

Activity

Have you ever seen beggars on the streets of your city or town? What was your first reaction regarding them? Did you see them as a nuisance, as thieves or as economically challenged human beings?

The poet argues that poverty reduces human beings to a low level where other human beings refer to them as heaps of rags (line 1) or a louse that creeps about (line4). Erapu satirizes the social hypocrisy and calls for concerted efforts to fight poverty as means towards making us

human. The beggar can only get human dignity if he sheds off those rags that point to his poverty. In the last line, the persona alludes to the fact that this vice of looking down upon others as heaps of rags is not innate but we learn it and so we can undo or ‘unlearn’ it.

Poetic devices

As suggested earlier, the title of the text itself is an **oxymoron**. We do not associate giving with feelings of guilt. When you give someone something, there is no need of feeling guilty. In deed you feel exalted and happy for your generosity. But here the author associates guilt with giving because when you give someone something and you do not want other people to see, then it is possible that you may feel guilty when other people stare at you hence the guilt of giving. Many people do not feel free to give beggars money because some beggars are pretenders and it is hard to distinguish between a genuine and a fake beggar especially when they are on the street.

As you read down the poem, you will meet such words as silent presence, grotesque gratitude and impenetrable patience. The examples given here have words that do not normally match in meaning and they are rarely used together in one sentence. When a person is present, we expect him/her to talk and not just be silent. Grotesque is a bad thing or sinister while gratitude is something holy and good. In the same way something impenetrable must be having bad qualities yet patience is a virtue. Therefore the use of the aforesaid oxymoron words serves to capture the attention of the reader to read further to unravel the mystery that is inherent in their oppositions. In the same way it is hard to unravel the meaning of oxymorons, so it is to determine whether a beggar is genuine or fake.

Keyword

Oxymoron is an expression composed of words that are collocated (put) together yet they have different and in deed .opposite meanings. Therefore oxymorons operate at the level of semantics.

Activity

Identify other oxymoronic titles and phrases. Examples; the married bachelor, a clever fool, a relevant problem e.t.c.

A key metaphor in the text is the use of the word ‘louse’. This is a word used to refer to the beggar. A louse is something we associate with filth although it resides on ones body and feeds on it. It is bad for one to have lice especially when that person is clean outwardly. So if the society is clean and there are louses (beggars) in it, then the society is not cleaning itself well. It is not helping its people well hence others turn into beggars. The poet achieves a clear comparison between the louse and the beggar on one hand and the city and the society on the other hand.

Question

Find other words of imagery in the poem and explain their use.

<u>The Motoka</u> by Theo Luzuka

The persona in this poem is a tomato seller and he/she looks at the government from a mesmerized peasant's point of view. The poet makes this peasant use the minister's vehicle which seemingly is a long limousine car to expose the excessive powers and privileges that government officials enjoy. Therefore this poem deals with both economical and political issues.

The persona uses words that suggest hyperboles which we can assume are products of rumours of the market place. Because the whole poem is hinged on unsubstantiated and unconfirmed facts, it is bound to have a lot of **hyperboles**. The minister's vehicle is said to have a TV set, a radio station and gears. A vehicle of such features is in-deed expensive and buying it for a government official is wasting public funds because the minister does not need all those features in his vehicle for him to discharge his/her duties. These are some of the strategies African government leaders use to squander public funds. Elsewhere a hyperbole intertwined with similes has it that the vehicles movement is compared to how a Lyato sails while its speed is as fast as that of a swallow. Additionally, this vehicle is designed in such a way that the minister can enjoy a sexual affair 'while driving in the back seat with his darly between his legs without the driver seeing a thing.' (Lines 12-13). The hyperboles are meant to draw your attention as the reader to the many privileges that the immoral ministers enjoy.

Despite these hyperboles, the issues that the poet wants to put across are real. Issues of excesses of government officials and ministers sneaking into campuses and stealing young ladies are well brought out in the poem. Another serious issue conveyed is the idea of political doctorates where University authorities award non-deserving politicians doctorates of Honoris Causa so that such University chiefs

may enjoy political favours, patronages and protection from those politicians.

Question

Compare the way Luzuka in the *Motoka* handles the theme of sexual exploitation against young girls and the way Mabala handles the same theme in *The ways of the world.*

Activity

Have you ever heard that a politician has been awarded a doctoral degree in your country? Do you think the politician truly deserved to be recognized?

Amateshe (1988:7) argues that this poem is **conversational** and hence allows the reader to be drawn into the conversation by forcefully being the active listener to what the speaker is saying. The poet makes the persona speak as if he is addressing a friend or colleague at the market and that friend happens to the reader. The starting line inevitably draws you into the conversation; 'You see that Benz sitting at the rich's end?'

It is like a signature tune that welcomes you into the poem. And correspondingly the last line of the last stanza signs you out;

> You just wait, I'll tell you more
> But let me first sell my tomatoes

There is a way in which this poem evidently draws its expressions from ordinary everyday to day market speeches which is very rich in literary language use. Right from the title The Motoka, the poet uses a **localized English** word corrupted from the word Motor Car. The title itself tells you the kind of person the persona is (a not well schooled person). It helps the poet deviate from the normal English to attract the reader's attention. Another instance where the poet localizes English is when the persona says; 'it belongs to the Minister of Fairness'. The speaker means to say Minister of Justice but because he/she is unschooled in English, he/she translates Justice as fairness. Remember in most East African languages the words justice and

Fairness are synonyms and can be used interchangeably. In other languages, there is no word such as Justice so the closest is fairness.

When the poetic persona speaks of 'the glory of the motoka's inside having robbed the market women of words,' he/she is still using a metaphor in a localized expression of English. We associate robbing with bad people like gangsters who violently snatch your wealth yet you cannot help it. The glory of the motoka is compared to such snatching of words from the mouths of these market women. The vehicle is so sophisticated that you cannot afford not to look at it and marvel at its complexity.

Question

Identify other instances where the author uses localized English in the poem.

Activity

Translate the word Justice in your vernacular language. Does it have an equivalent or must you use a statement to define it?

To sum up the discussion on this poem, let us look at the phrase *literate thighs of an undergraduate.* Thighs cannot be literate but an undergraduate lady who has thighs can be literate. The poet takes a part of a person to represent that person. This is usually called metonymy.

Keyword

Metonymy is a poetic device where a poet uses an attribute or a part of something to stand for the whole of that thing. In the above case, the thigh represents the undergraduate female student who entertains the Minister

POLITICAL POEMS

These are poems that respond to human activities associated with governance and leadership and the welfare of states or countries. Poets world over respond to political situations of their time and place in a bid to advice, warn or psych the people for or against certain decisions or ideologies on governance and leadership. In the selected anthology, the following poems may be considered political;

1. *Analogy* by Bahadur Tejani
2. *Facelift for Kafira* by Imbuga
3. *Their City* by Okola
4. *Yet another Song* by Rubadiri
5. *Groaning for Burial* by Mnthali.
6. *Epistle to Uganda* by Leteipa Ole Sunkuli
7. *Maji maji* by Yusuf Kassam
8. *The Anniversary* by A.D. Amateshe
9. *To the Shameless one* by Imbuga

I will only analyse the first two poems in this module. You are free to analyse the rest of the poems.

***The Analogy* by Bahadur Tejani**

In our earlier discussions, we mentioned that when analysing a poem, it is important to look at the title carefully. This poem is a good example of the importance of the title in the content of a poem. The title analogy refers to some form of comparison or representation. So once you read the word analogy, you will be looking for what is being compared to what. What resembles what or what parallels what. And as one plunges into the poem you start getting the resemblances in the first stanza

> Tonight
> In the beggar
> I saw the whole
> Of my country

The beggar then becomes the analogy of the country. This beggar suffers from leprosy which is the analogy of corruption in the country.

This leprosy has been caused by a worm which is an analogy of bad leaders. The beggar is ailing just like the country's economy is ailing. You can see therefore that the title Analogy is very appropriate to the content in the poem.

Keyword

Analogy is a word used to show the resemblance or correspondence of two things.

At the beginning of the poem, the persona adopts a contemptuous attitude against the worm but at the end his attitude turns into doubt. He wonders whether the beggar is better off dead than alive or if the beggar is simply pretending. Let us look at the last two stanzas critically in order to unlock the message of the poem. The poet asks whether killing the beggar (country) would subdue his pain which is greater than death itself. This is a paradox because death finishes one and one cannot help another person by killing him. What the poet then suggests here is that drastic and painful decisions have to be made for the country to heal from the ills of corruption and bad governance. In the last stanza, the persona poses;

> Or pity?
> Is he cheating?

The persona doubts whether the beggar is simply pretending to be ill. I am sure you have heard of stories of very well to do people going on the streets begging for money which they later use to buy plots and grow rich by night. Therefore if the beggar represents a country, then it is normal for one to think that a country can do better than it is actually doing. The fact that the country has so much resources yet it is ailing economically is dubitable and that is why the persona thinks

that this is simply pretence. The beggar (developing country) can remove the worms (bad leaders) that cause leprosy (corruption) then he/she will be normal instead of begging from passers-by (developed nations)

Note

The beggar is likened to an underdeveloped or developing country that is ravished by the worm of corruption. Leprosy is equated to the ailing economy as a result of corruption. The persona doubts the idea that the country is indeed sick economically.

***Facelift for Kafira* by Francis Imbuga**

This is one poem that dwells on the hope for third world countries ailing from economic malaise whether self inflicted or accruing from natural calamities. Imbuga in the poem envisages a situation where Africa and in deed all the whole third world will emancipate itself from the political and economical downturn through such committed and dedicated leaders like the persona. In this poem the reconstruction and rehabilitation of Africa is seen to be nigh and supreme. This goes in complete contrast against the pessimistic view of Africa as a land ridden with political and economical turmoil. For example Chinua Achebe in his text, *The Trouble with Nigeria* insinuates that the problems of Africa emanate from its poor political leadership; that Africa has poor leaders.

The persona in the poem is an African leader who is singing his song of dedication, taking his vow of commitment and making his declaration of availability to serve his country, *Kafira*. This is especially seen from the way he repeatedly says that he will take it, ‘a challenge well cherished’. The key word here is ‘cherished’ because not so many

people cherish their challenges especially when the challenge involves serving others and not themselves.

Right from the title to the body of the poem, there is suggestion of cleansing of country in question, which to me suggests a third world African state.

Keyword

Kafira is a convoluted word version of Africa. In this case it means a third would nation in Africa. The use of this word and its meaning can also be deduced from Imbuga's other texts like, *Man of Kafira* and *Batrayal in the City.*

'Facelift for Kafira' would therefore mean giving Africa a new meaning of life by re-inventing, renovating, repairing, resuscitating and purifying its cultural, economical, political and social structures which were vandalized and destroyed by colonialism, *Trapped in the vices of the mighty,* (line 12). In the main body of the poem the following words suggest purification of Africa:

Lines 18-19, it is that will rekindle
that fire that burned gently
Beneath your maiden name

Lines 25-26 With luke-warm water and soft cotton fingers
I will wash you gently each passing day

In the first stanza, the poetic persona makes a direct address to the reader as 'you.' 'You' in this case is not the reader as was the case in Laban Erapu's *The Guilt of Giving*. 'You' in this case is a country, Kafira' which we have already said that it may be any country in Africa. The persona suggests an intimate and warm relationship between him and his country Kafira. This is a way of reconnecting and bonding between the leader (poetic persona) and the country (Africa)

In the second stanza, the poetic persona acknowledges that his country was indeed impurified, ‘You’ve lost something of that purity’ (line 2) and ‘Your smile is no longer, The first cockcrow of each passing day, and your walk is the walk, Of a tired traveler.’ (lines 5-8). However he goes on to exonerate Kafira from having participated in this process of impurification and exploitation because Kafira was the ‘innocent one’. ‘Trapped in the vices of the mighty,’ means that Kafira was caught in the economical and power struggles of Europe (mighty colonialists). You will remember from your history lessons that in Europe there was a scramble for Africa in which representatives of European countries met and divided Africa and allocated their countries potions of Africa; as if it was a piece of cake.
The subsequent stanzas then go on to show the persona’s willingness, readiness and interest to dedicate himself to the service of his nation.

Poetic devices.

To bring out the subject matter and its attendant themes, the poet has used several technical devices. The one that stands out is his diction. The author has adopted a **diction of hope**. The words used and the way they have been arranged show that the author has hope for Africa which can be made even better through its leadership, ;washed gently each passing day.’ He uses this diction to send a message of optimism that things can in deed get better indicated by such statements as, ‘I will rid you of that foreign smell’ and ‘what purity!’

Additionally, there is **repetition** of the statement ‘a challenge well cherished’. This statement is repeated in lines16, 24 and 34 and it is meant to emphasize the persona’s readiness in reviving his country. Another repetition can be seen in line 17 ‘And now is my turn.’ The words ‘my turn’ are repeated to emphasize the availability of the

persona in taking his responsibility of reconstructing and rehabilitating Africa from cultural and ideological colonialism.

There are quite a number of **metaphors** used in this poem. In stanza one, Africa is compared to a woman who lost her purity. In stanza two, it is compared to a traveller who is tired from walking. This is supposed to show how sluggard the process of growth and development in Africa has been affected through wanton exploitation. In the third stanza, it is compared to a meek rabbit which is trapped in the vices of the mighty. Here Africa is seen to be docile and meek it was undeservedly pulled into the struggles for power. But after being cleansed of this foreign culture which in the poem is also metaphorically referred to as 'foreign smell', Africa is compared to an object that shines brightly. This is to show that Africa's national structures in terms of culture, economy and politics will grow and be recognized just as a shiny object is easily recognized.

Activity

Read the poem again this time more keenly. Attempt to unravel the meaning of the second last stanza

Then tomorrow they will come and say,
Look, what tears of joy!
What purity!
What warmth, KAFIRA!

To end the discussion on East African written poetry, I need to recap the fact that good poetry observes economy of words to pass a message. This economy of words is achieved by means of poetic

devices. East African poets have used quite a number of poetic devices to achieve this end. However what distinguishes East African poetry from any other poetry is its close reference to the East African situations.

SECTION TWO: EAST AFRICAN DRAMA

Lesson Six: Drama in Pre-Colonial East Africa

Introduction

When we talk of drama in pre-colonial East Africa we mean those expressions of drama that the early people of East Africa engaged in before the white man came and disorganized their lives. We are interested with how these people found avenues of releasing their natural dramatic vent in their day to day lives. We shall start by looking at some of these dramatic expressions and then look at their characteristics.

Objectives of the lesson:

It is expected that by the end of this Lesson, you will be able to:

1. Appreciate the pre-colonial East African dramatic forms as drama in their own right.
2. Name at least four dramatic forms in pre-colonial East Africa,
3. Analyse the characteristics of Drama in the Pre-colonial East Africa.

Drama hinged on Oral traditions, rituals and customs

It is sometimes argued that Africans lacked any sense of organized Drama. However a study of the history of East Africans in pre-colonial days reveals that indeed they had some form of enactments that were geared towards socialization, education and entertainment. Africans always entertained themselves by use of songs, mime and dramatized narratives that had a story and a lesson to learn. We shall discuss the songs under poetry.

War drama

Ole Kantai notes that after winning a war, the Maasai Morans usually engaged in a mock war to show the people how the enemy fell under their spears. Young boys aspiring to be Morans got a chance to learn skills of Moranship. These young boys could practice these skills among themselves in the grazing fields or in the playfields. All these mock fights were enacted and they produced a Dramatic vent among the early people of Maasai.

Hunting Drama

Before going for hunting, African tribes tried to imitate the actions of the animals they were interested in catching. A hunter would for example paint himself the colours of an antelope, then his fellow hunters would try to catch this fast-running animal without spearing it. All tricks and skills would be revealed during this enactment. These skills would be used in the hunting field or in the bush. The enactment is not just about entertainment but also about learning the skills of survival in a place infested by ferocious animals, wild poisonous snakes, thorny scrubs and bushes. Therefore this goes a long way to prove that drama was utilitarian in the early East African communities. As one or many hunters try to capture the antelope, others pose possible dangers. One would act like a ferocious snake attacking the hunter, another would act like a rhino that charges at the hunter, yet another one would act like a thorn or a poisonous leaf which when it comes to contact with human flesh, it makes one itch.

Drama of traditional political succession

Some of the Drama in pre-colonial East Africa could take days, weeks, or even months. Among the Agikuyu of Kenya, for instance, there was the Ituika ceremony held every twenty-five years or so. It marked the handing over of power from an older generation to a younger one.

According to Kenyatta in his book, Facing Mount Kenya, the Ituika was celebrated by feasting, dancing and singing over a period of six-months. Laws and regulations of the new government were embodied in the words, phrases and rhythmic movements of the new songs and dances. How Ituika came to be was always re-enacted in a dramatic procession. Central to all these varieties of dramatic expressions were oral poetry, dance and occasional mime.

Funerary Drama

When a person died, the community mourned. There were those who wailed and uttered words of praise, farewell and blessings upon the dead one. Others would just wail. This would be done in a singsong, a dirge or in action. The action may imitate the fallen person; what he/she used to do when he/she was alive or just some unrelated action. But the best form of funerary drama in East Africa was by the Luo of Kenya. Christened *Tero Buru*, this action- packed mourning period was characterized by waving of twigs, cutting of branches and a general pandemonium once it was announced that an elder of the village had passed on. The announcement was usually done by the elder wife (also called Mikai) of the deceased. Generally the action took the form of a war enactment in which imaginary enemy was beaten by the charged male members of the society. It was usually a scary scene that left women, girls and boys scampering for safety. The action was accompanied by loud wailing and cursing death for having robbed the community of a sage.

Miruka, O. (2001) in his text Oral Literature of the Luo, says that;

> *Tero Buru* was ideally performed before burial in classical Luo tradition. On such a day, all the cattle in the homestead and the village are collected and taken to graze in the wilderness by the sons and other young men in the village who decorate themselves with leaves, tendrils and dust. They carry clubs, spears and other weaponry as well

> as whistles. Their return is a stampede punctuated by singing dirges, dance and *Sira*, a mock fight with death where the mourner enacts spearing or clubbing death – The mourners run around helter skelter chanting and welding their weapon in a very aggressive fashion. The women meet the *tero buru* team at the gate and accompany them into the homestead singing their dirges and doing the sira in their own fashion. (Pp. 16-17)

This classical Luo funeral performance is obviously varied in some ways to the *tero buru* we see in the present Luo funerals.

Summary

Characteristics of Pre-colonial Kenyan Drama

1. It was not an isolated event. It was part and parcel of the rhythm of daily and seasonal life of the community. It was an activity among other activities and it drew its strength from those other activities. It relied on communal survival.
2. It was entertainment for it involved enjoyment of the activities.
3. It was an activity of moral instruction.
4. It was utilitarian in nature.
5. It could take place anywhere – wherever there was an 'empty space'.

Note

a. African Drama was functional. It served a purpose within communities and cultures that is much greater than simply that of entertainment or diversion.
b. African Drama was directly related to the ritual, seasonal rhythms, religion and communal roots.
c. The nature of the contemporary African theatre and Drama draws upon traditions, beliefs, and needs that are not remote in time but which co-exist alongside it. Therefore it can only be fully understood in the context of its historical roots.

Activity

Identify some of the rituals that were carried out in your community and carry out a survey on what forms of Drama were performed during this rituals.

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Lesson Seven: Drama in Colonial East Africa

Introduction

In this lesson effort is made to look at the forms of drama in East Africa which the Europeans employed or encouraged during their colonial rule. Therefore we shall limit our discussions on the period between the entry of the Europeans and the take over of power from the tribal chiefs until when the time they gave way for independence by handing over power to African national chiefs.

Objectives of this lesson

By the end of this lesson, you should be able to:

1. Identify the expressions of drama encouraged by colonialists in East Africa
2. List the uses of dramatic expressions by the colonialists
3. Explain how some of these dramatic expressions worked.
4. Outline some of the professional theatre centres established by colonialists during the colonial period.

Drama to reinforce colonial rule

Scholars in African studies have argued that the period of formal colonial occupation in East Africa provided the 'womb' out of which poetry and drama that worked against African indigenous theatre was born.

European observers treated Africa as either a 'tabula rasa' without any dramatic or poetic tradition, or as a source of primitive, atavistically obscene rituals, which indicated its inferiority to the supposed 'superior European culture'.[4] With this twisted thinking in mind, the European settlers, colonialists and missionaries went about breaking the indigenous forms of drama and poetry and setting European-like

[4] See Cagnolo

structures and outfits. The Europeans levelled an attack on these indigenous arts from these five fronts;

i) The Church (mission)
ii) The School
iii) Professional theatres
iv) Didactic village drama
v) Prison Drama

Church and Mission Drama

Upon arrival in Africa, many missionaries saw many of African traditions, cultures, practices and dramatic activities as the works of the devil which had to be fought before evangelization could take root in the hearts of Africans. They devised a strategy of using drama as a way of reaching out to “the lost sheep” in Africa. This was because the missionaries were finding it hard to convert Africans by merely preaching to them and telling them to abandon their ‘heathen’ ways. So, stories of bible characters like David, Saul, Jesus and Samson were put on stage to help attract natives to the church. After the show, Priests, Pastors and Missionaries would talk to them and possibly convert them. The white missionary would also encourage the converts to take part in such Dramatized Christian celebrations as the nativity, the birth, the passion and crucifixion of Jesus, Story of Nebuchadnezzar, the Garden of Eden, the prodigal son and the Asenscion of Jesus to heaven. Some Africans who took part in such celebrations felt privileged to be associated with the ‘mzungu’ and so they were easily converted through drama.

Didactic Drama

This was encouraged by European settlers and colonial agricultural agencies that used it as class demonstration exercises meant to enlighten the natives on the new ways of life and farming.

Didactic drama is a kind of drama/theatre for development in which the audience is given training or instructions through participatory

performances. This drama used elements of pre-colonial performing arts such as dances, songs and narrative motifs to teach Africans new agricultural extension programmes as well as the supposed importance of adherence to colonial expectations like hygiene.

Drama therefore was used to show such ideals as better homes, healthier children, and better plantations among the native populations. Extension officers told natives to act an improvised play in which points to be emphasized like the importance of building a grain store or new farming methods were acted out. The hare who was the trickster hero in mythical oral culture of the Africans was depicted as the progressive farmer who embraced colonially sanctioned methods while the hyena would represent the farmer who clings to African methods of farming. This was intended to make the alien ideas of farming seem relatively familiar to the natives. This didactic drama was found particularly useful not only in agriculture but also in other fields of colonial administration including primary health care, savings, importance of paying tax etc. The hare was presented as a law abiding native who paid his taxes on time, took his children to health care centres and saved regularly. The hyena was presented as one who was always in conflict with the authorities over taxes, who took his children to traditional herbalists, and the children eventually died and who never saved any money for emergencies.

Summary

In summary, the didactic drama campaign among East African colonial communities used the powerful ability of dramatic satire to twist the consciousness of the African audience by projecting new role models with which African natives were supposed to identify with; models who portrayed perfect traits of a colonized African.

Professional Theatres

Many other European controlled theatre buildings were erected in the major towns like Mombasa, Nakuru, Kisumu, Kitale and Eldoret between 1948-1952. In Mombasa there was the Little theatre, in Nakuru there was the players theatre, in Kisumu there was garrison theatre, in Eldoret there was the Uasin Gishu theatre, in Kitale there was the Kitale club and in Nairobi there was the Kenya National Theatre. Further afield in Uganda there was also the Uganda National Theatre. But the famous was Donovan Maule Theatre currently known as phoenix players or professional centre.

1) To perform European plays aimed at comforting and reassuring Europeans in East Africa.
2) To perform European plays aimed at manipulating and socializing the indigenous natives into the requirements of colonialism and capitalism.

Europeans needed to localize their culture East Africa by setting up cultural, recreational and leisure structures on African soil. These structures were to provide an environment in which the whites could define themselves and their Europeanness in contrast to the black African culture by which they were surrounded. The cultural and national theatres were to act as symbols of cultural solidarity and superiority among Europeans.

In 1946, plans to establish and build a national theatre in Kenya and Uganda, were meant to provide a meeting point to the Europeans together in a leisurely manner where they could compare notes on how colonialism was flourishing. Shakespeare's and other European plays were performed to entertain and bring a British feeling to the colonial

clerks, soldiers, administrators, farmers and settlers in Nairobi and Kampala.

Annabel Maule in her text *Theatre near the Equator* chronicles.

> "The National Theatre had been conceived in March 1946. Building had started in August 1951 and now it was being opened by Sir Ralph Richardson to a Full House of VIP's on November 6, 1952. (P. 27)

Prison Drama

Political prisoners and detainees were encouraged and forced to take part and produce slavishly propaganda plays which denounced Mau Mau and praised and glorified colonial regimes and administration. Ngugi, (1981: 38). Those who did not take part in it were mistreated and subjected to harsh conditions. Prison drama just like other colonial dramas was meant to make the European superior and make the African look inferior. It was supposed to make the African look at the European as an infallible and invincible man.

The School Drama

The colonial masters encouraged school going boys and girls particularly in secondary and High Schools to engage in drama as part of their extra-curricular activities. In East Africa, plays of English origin were staged in European controlled schools. The students attempted to perform pieces from the classical European canon for the annual school play and Shakespeare was the favourite. The school Drama started as an inter school Drama Festival held as a co-curricular activity between 4th-7th April 1959 at Pangani Girls. Only six high cost secondary schools book part in this Festival. This encouraged European students to be like the Europeans they were and African students be pseudo-Europeans who admired and adored European culture while rejecting African ways. In Kenya, the pioneers of the school drama included Graham Hyslop, Peter Allnut and Norman Montgomery

(Kasigwa 1994). Alliance High School for example had an annual speech day event in which Shakespeares plays were performed. Ngugi records that between 1955 to 1958 when he was a student there, Shakespeare's, As you like it, King Henry IV, King Lear and A Midsummer Night's Dream were performed.

Note

It is also important to note that all the literature texts that were studied in secondary schools in colonial East Africa were written by European authors and poets.

Activity

Do you think the colonial era incubated the process that led to the present drama and poetry in East Africa?

References on this Lesson

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Lesson Seven: Anti-colonial Drama in East Africa

Introduction

After East African countries had attained independence, some writers sought to write plays and poetry about the events and personalities that had denounced and fought against colonialism. The texts also condemned colonialism and its effects. Some of these writers include Ebrahim Hussein who wrote about Kinjeketile in his play *Kinjeketile* and Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Micere Mugo who wrote on the famous Mau Mau leader Dedan Kimathi in Kenya. This lesson discusses the historicity of these personalities and the events that surround their resistance to colonialism. Then it goes on to give a literary analysis of one of the two texts.

Note

We shall discuss the two personalities but will only analyse one text i.e. Kinjeketile. It is upon you the student to read *The Trials of Dedan Kimathi* and form your own opinion.

Objectives of the Lesson

It is expected that by the end of this Lesson, you should be able to:

1. Write a brief history of events that led to the Maji Maji uprising in Tanganyika and Mau Mau uprising in Kenya.
2. Explain the relationship between the History of Maji Maji and the play *Kinjeketile*.
3. Explain the relationship between the history of Mau Mau

resistance and the play *The Trials of Dedan Kimathi*

4. Show the contemporary relevance of the two texts in the present East African situations.

The Resistance to Colonialism in Kenya

The following discussion is meant to open your understanding of the events that led to the Mau Mau uprising which provided the subject matter of the play *The Trials of Dedan Kimathi.* By now you should be aware that Dedan Kimathi the lead character in the text was a very senior person in the ranks of the African army that fought for Kenya's independence. Infact he was a Field Marshal in The Land and Freedom Defence Army which is better known as Mau Mau.

The struggle for land and freedom in Kenya did not start with the armed struggle engineered by Kimathi. It started with board room diplomacies between a few learnt Kenyans and the whitemen and took a gradual process such that by the time Kimathi and other fighters came to the scene, all methods of negotiation and diplomacy had failed. The struggle started with the resistance against the following repressive laws and requirements imposed by the Colonial government against Africans:

- Land belonging to Africans had been forcefully taken from them and they were forced to stay in infertile and congested places.

- In 1915, the Kenya colonial government passed the Crown Lands Ordinances; a law which said that Kenyan Africans must be taken to European farmers to work for them whether they like it or not. Also African men were to pay hut tax for each of their women: even if one had 30 or 40 wives, he was forced to pay taxes for every house for them.

- The Kenya Colonial Government appointed Headmen and Chiefs among the loyal Africans. These ones in turn molested their fellow Africans by:
  a) Forcefully taking people's property
  b) Demanding offers of sheep, goats, chicken e.t.c to appease them.
  c) Forcing mature girls to work for them especially in household chores like cutting firewood, fetching water. All these were done without pay or recognition.

Africans formed organized associations like Kikuyu Central Association, Kenya Association Union and others which were used to protest against this inhuman treatment of their fellow Africans. Personalities who fought such ideological and boardroom wars included Harry Thuku with the Kikuyu Central Association and Kenyatta with the Kenya African Union. But when the colonial regime outlawed such associations and ruled out freedom of Assembly, in early 1850's the war moved from a political movements to a guerrilla forest organized military movement. This gave rise to Kenya Lands and Freedom Defence Army which was later baptized Mau Mau. It gave rise to such guerilla warfare experts such as Dedan Kimathi, General China, Stanley Mathenge and General Kago. One of the fighters in this war Waruhiu Itote in his book *Mau Mau in Action* comments:

> "Our fight was not a single, organized campaign, carried out by a trained discipline and well equipped army. It was often disorganized and fragmented. People worked and fought independently, but all were driven by the same spirit and the same needs." Pg 5

The needs Itote talks of are those of freedom and liberation. During the war, there was always suspicion due to collaborations with the colonial master. Government spies had been planted among the fighters and they leaked secrets of the defense movement to the government leading to arrests and killing of many loyal Mau Mau fighters. We see such betrayal captured in *The Trials of Dedan Kemathi* when Wambararia, Kimathi's brother, deserts the army and betrays him.

The settlers and white farmers had African assistants who they called Nyapara's. These had the task of supervising the African workers on white farms. They were treated with some dignity and were entitled to a raft of privileges such as:

1) Full-creamed milk

2) A salary of 30-45/= per month especially in Nakuru District where many white settlers owned large farms.
3) Could easily access Mzungu's house
4) Sometimes his house could be near Mzungu's house away from ordinary settler
5) Was not allowed to work and his hut tax was waivered

During the war, these assistants were easy targeted by the Mau Mau for betraying the African cause. Many of them turned to being homeguards. Home guard was a defence army formed to counter Mau Mau activism by Africans loyal to the colonialist. They enjoyed privileges such as those of Nyapara's and were allowed to carry guns and use them against Mau Mau. It is this clash that sometimes makes historians argue that Mau Mau was an intra-tribe clash among the Kikuyu's in which Kikuyu's pro-colonial administration and Kikuyu's anti-colonial administration went for each others necks.

Mau Mau was fought by recruiting fighters through oaths. Many of the diehard fighters were asked to take oaths of allegiance to fight and protect black sovereignty and kill or expel the whites who had taken over land and take Africans to subjectivity.

Types of Oaths administered:

1) The Warrior Oath – for fighter (spears and armory)
2) Solidarity Oath – taken by holding a ball of soil (to fight and protect land)

The oaths, traditionally speaking, bound the warriors to one another and ensured that they would not run away from battle and dessert their fellow men. It is this oathing that sparked the declaration of a state of emergency in 1952 and the Mau Mau war started in earnest oathing was mainly encouraged by K.C.A. and K.A.U.

Note

It is important to understand the situation that surrounded the creation of the text *The Trials of Dedan Kimathi* because such understanding will enable you effectively analyse the text. The history that I have outlined above will help you understand why Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Micere Mugo create a Dedan Kimathi who is a larger than life character.

Summary of the text, *The Trials of Dedan Kimathi*

Many African theatre workers shared a strong feeling that African theatre needed to reject Western theatre traditions (especially passive audiences) and explore the indigenous heritage. One direct outcome was to build alternative stages more attuned to an African theatrical tradition. In Kenya, an interesting experimental open-air stage was built in Kamirithu.

An attempt to harness the African peasantry's spirit of the collective performance was demonstrated with the historical epic *The Trials of Dedan Kimathi* by Ngugi and Mugo. The play is about the 'Mau Mau' military campaign of resistance to British colonialism in Kenya in early 1950s (see discussion above). During the research for the material to script the play, the authors visited villagers who revealed that Kimathi was clearly their beloved son, their respected leader and they talked of him as still being alive.

The playwrights create a Dedan Kimathi charged with mythical strength a hero who escapes death at the hands of the colonialists through a kind of spiritual metamorphosis into a revolutionary symbol. The temptations offered by various characters, the colonial soldier, Shaw Henderson (first, in a liberal guise, later as a fascist torture) and capitalist stereotypes (European bankers, Asian traders, African

entrepreneurs) fail to divert Kimathi from his commitment to the total liberation of Kenyan Masses. [13]

The trajectory of the play is from heroic gathering of that power and commitment in Dedan Kimathi's character to its transfer in the form of spiritual/political solidarity to the Kenyan masses (represented by the Woman, the Boy and the Girl). This power of Dedan Kimathi's spirit (the sense in which he is seen to be still alive) is meant to transfer to the audience as a way of igniting them in their struggle against neo-colonialism with the same flame which served in the struggle against overt imperialism.

The Historical Resistance to colonialism in Tanzania

In Tanganyika, Germans lured their entry into the land of Tanganyikans. Once they had been welcomed, they took control of all that belonged to Tanganyikans. They disorganized their socio-political and economical lives and forced them to submit to their rulership. They introduced taxation which was paid through exchange of grains and livestock and these were easily found by the subdued Tanganyikans. Then the Germans insisted that the tax be paid in form of coins (money); something that was so alien to Africans. The German authorities used to send clerks and interpreters to various colonial African chiefs to collect tax. It was so difficult for Africans to find these coins which were so rare. They had to sell their property and labour to the German to get the coins which they eventually paid back to him, in form of tax.

At the same time, Germans employed some of the Africans who started harassing fellow Africans by virtue of their privileged positions. They did this by signing treaties with the native chiefs. Under the stewardship of Karl Peters, a ruthless German administrator, the

whitemen made swift but firm infiltrations into the hinterland of Tanganyika, conquered the natives and imposed their rule on them. Karl Peters formed the German East African Company (Deutsche Ostafrikanische Gesellschaft), which he used to establish German authority in the land.

Due to all these malpractices visited upon Africans, they decided to rebel and the rebellion in Tanganyika was done at different times in different places. First was a revolt led by Abushiri bin Salim at the coastal region of Tanganyika. They resisted because they simply wanted their freedom. However, the Germans were powerful and they crushed them into submission.

The second and greatest opposition to German authority in the nineteenth century came from the Wahehe under their able leader Mkwawa and popularly known as the Hehe resistance. Mkwawa was such a powerful leader who had consolidated his power by exhorting 'Hongo' (some form of custom duty) from those who traded or travelled through his or in his empire before the coming of the white man. When the Germans asked him to pay tax, he resisted and engaged them in a war that lasted about four years i.e. 1891 to 1894. Many Germans as well as Africans were killed in this war but eventually the Germans won. In October 1894 Mkwawa was found dead after shooting himself. His head was taken to Germany.

But perhaps the best known resistance against the Tanganyika was the Maji Maji rebellion. This was inspired by a prophesy by a certain Kinjikitile Ngwale who it was believed was sent by God to save the people from German oppression.
The Maji Maji was preceded by a movement called Jujila or Jwiywila which was a secret communication from one individual to another. It

had information to the effect that at Ngalambe a powerful *Mganga* and medicine which would make the white man more vulnerable had been found. It was further added that ancestors had not died but they were being looked after by God who would show them to those who went to Ngalambe. The Jujila was soon followed by pilgrimages to Ngalambe. Once at Ngalambe, Kinjikitile put the pilgrims in war groups called 'Litapo' and they performed a military training jig called 'Likinda.' After the Likinda, people were given medicine, a drop of water smeared on the body and a long list of prescriptions which they had to believe, observe and adhere to. Among the prescriptions was that Maji Maji soldiers should not come into sexual contact with their wives, they should not eat cassava or simsim or pigeon peas. Kinjikitile Ngwale warned all who came to him to go back and work for the German and wait until when he would give signal for the commencement of the war. Apparently, some people were so charged that they started the war without warning. They became impatient and uprooted some shoots of cotton from a German farm hence sparking the war.

In other places like the Ungoni area, some of the Ngoni tribesmen doubted the water. They started by testing it on a dog. They administered it on a dog and speared it. The dog died. Then they tried it on a young man called Mgayi; he also died. However, the people still believed and hoped that it would work when used for the purpose of fighting the actual enemies, the German and anyone who sided with him. So they went to war. At first they managed to take a few settlement areas of the German. They killed and scared the Akidas (German hand-helps or homeguards) to submission. But the German administrator, Von Gotzen, having panicked at the success of the natives, ordered for reinforcement from Germany. Mercenaries and weapons were brought and the German retaliated, killing thousands of

natives especially by the cannon fire (which in the text is referred to as the Big fire, *Moto Kubwa*). The natives were subdued.

The German administrators were not satisfied by just subduing Africans; he went ahead and ordered the burning of all granaries of Africans and any grain stores. All food crops were also destroyed. This set in a famine that had never been witnessed in the history of the tanganyikans and claimed many Africans and the remaining ones become too weak and too disorganized to fight. They were effectively under control and the German could now use them as he wished.

Literary analysis of ***Kinjeketile*** by Ebrahim Hussein

Introduction

This is a fine example of a play written in an African language spoken in over five countries of the continent. It was originally written in and performed in Swahili in 1967. Kinjeketile alludes to the historical Maji Maji rebellion of 1905-1907 in Tanganyika against German colonialism but articulates larger issues that concern Africa. (see the preceding discussion)

The nationalist concern of dissolving ethnic differences towards a cause for the benefit of all is explored. The story deals with the way a religious leader Kinjeketile, calls for an intertribal unity by offering a revival of indigenous beliefs to counter German imperialism. Kinjeketile is an intriguing individual who is divided between loyalty to a traditional ancestral past and to a modern ideology of resistance to colonialism. He is weighed down after he saw African peasants die en masse by the German gun yet they had taken the water that was supposed to make them immune to the bullets. These doubts can be seen when he reflects,

> ‘ A man gives birth to a word. And the word … grows …it grows bigger and bigger. Finally it becomes bigger than the man who gave it birth.’

With the growing doubts in the validity of the revelation from Hongo, their spirit about the Maji, the leadership of the movement slips from the ideological control of Kinjeketile to the military organization of Kitunda the appointed army trainer.

History of the play

The historical source of the play was a programme of extensive research done among peasant communities by the author (Hussein) for Gwassa, G. K, a junior historian at the University of Dar es Salaam at the time the author was a student there. In fact the peasants contributed a lot to the creation of the play in that they gave from their memory and from their original music the songs, dances and even some pieces of dialogue. Kerr (1995), tells us that the play was popular with these peasants for a variety of reasons,

> 'The plays popularity therefore derived from its analysis of the relationship between pan- ethnic unity, different modes of leadership and historical determinants, portrayed in an accessible theatre form with roots in popular memory and culture.'

What this means is that the play was received enthusiastically by the peasants who had suffered so much under the yoke of colonialism because it reminded them of what they had gone through, because it spoke to them in a language they can understand and because it drew a lot from their own culture. Thus the student group who performed it for the first time avoided performing it to elite audience in theatres and instead went to perform to proletariat and peasant audiences as Kerr (1995)confirms,

> ' This was particularly noticeable when they (student group) took the play to Nairobi, avoided the prestigious Kenya National Theatre, and instead performed in a community hall in a high-density area to a wild excited and very non- elite audience.'

Issues of Concern

This historical event has been used by the playwright to address issues of tribalism, poverty, neo colonialism, and misuse of religion, exploitation, superstition and the stereotyped role of the woman in the

African societies. These forces have continued to eat into the nerves of the socio-economic and political institutions. To the Wamatumbi, 'Maji' is a symbol of unity and infallibility. To the larger society 'Maji' would symbolize a redemptive force to dechain us from the bondage of servitude brought about by the aforementioned forces.

In *Kinjeketile*, ***tribalism*** becomes a stepping stone for the German rule. As Kinjeketile puts it, they are a small, constricted, isolated band of people. (P.5) he therefore advises the Tanganyikans to abandon their tribal differences and unite for their common goal. To him unity is an emancipatory tool for a collective bargain for freedom. We see that disunity had made the communities go to war against the German while disorganized. They do not want to unite for they consider each other cowards. They fail to take Kitunda's instructions seriously because he is Mmatumbi the tribe considered as women. One can look at the disaster that befalls Tanganyikans in the light of the Rwandan genocide. Thousands and thousands of Rwandese lost their lives because of the tribal acrimonies. The Tutsi and the Hutu tribes of Rwanda became hostile to each other and let weapons sort out their differences. Kinjeketile is therefore used by Hussein to show how deadly the ethnic affinities can be used to people's undoing.

Secondly Hussein shows the root cause of tribalism and negative ethnicity. People have no time to work on their farms because they spend long hours toiling in Kinoo's, (the white man) farm with lukewarm pay that goes to paying poll tax and hut tax. The size of the farm keeps on increasing by day hence the work of these people. That means that they do not have time to work on their farms at home. Kinoo's farm is increasing because he keeps grabbing the Africans land hence denying the labourers the king source of wealth, land. The expected result can then be seen. The Africans become so ***poor*** that

they cannot afford food for their daily consumption and Bi. Bobali's child dies after consuming poisonous roots.

Poverty_has reduced some people to traitors, according to Kitunda when he argues and justifiable so that,

' …we are a hungry people, and hunger drives us to betray one another' p.5

Poverty as portrayed by Hussein is a reflection of what happens in our contemporary society. Our leaders grab large tracts of land such that one person is said to own land equal to a whole province of the country while millions of others are squatters on unproductive plots of land.

In *Kinjeketile*, Hussein explores the theme of neo colonialism. In physical reality the colonial masters have left African countries, but psychologically they are controlling their activities from abroad. Africa is held captive to its own freedom. This is the kind of freedom that Kinjeketile refuses to be party to when he argues that it will be sheer futility to drive out the Germans and let in Seyyid Said to control our bodies and spirits. He doubts the good will in Hongo's words when he says that they will be strong and drive out the red soil and then become the children of Seyyid Said. Kinjeketile is emphatic that the Tanganyikans cannot be strengthened by use of some dubious aid from outside' (p.29). The playwright then is arguing that we can only rely on ourselves to solve our own problems instead of relying on some imaginary aid. Africa, this light, can be understood to have enough resources to solve its own problems without begging from outside.

Religion or misuse of it is another of the large issues that can be found in this text. Since the Wazaramo believe in Kolelo and the Maji brought by Kinjeketile is from Hongo the god of the Wamatumbi, then the Wazaramo's cannot fight believing in the water. In fact they cannot join the Wamatumbi's in fighting the red soil. What this tells us is that the religion in this society is a tool of disunity used to divide the people

for it binds them against co operation even if it is for a common good. It takes Kinjeketile to persuade the two sides into believing that god is only one and is referred to using different names by different people. To the Wamatumbi he is hongo while to the Wazaramo he is kolelo. Religions have been causes of a lot of conflicts in our contemporary Africa. In parts of Nigeria and even Kenya, christians and moslems keep fighting and burning churches and mosques in the name of defending their different religious interests.

The subtheme of ***superstition*** is also explored under this theme of religion. Wamatumbi belief that Hongo, a spirit who lives in water, has given Kinjeketile Maji which when drank makes one bullet proof. They all drink he water and blindly troop to wards the Germans big gun assured of their infallibity. They become so disillusioned when they realize that they are not at all protected by the water for the bullets still kill them. They turn and blame Kinjeketile despite him having warned them against impatience.

Exploitation of the Africans by the white man is another theme. He brings this issue to the fore when he presents the peasants as having to work for Kinoo the white oppressor without any pay. He keeps grabbing their land while his brothers in oppression the administrators demand that these peasants pay poll tax among other taxes.

This falls squarely in line with what happens in our present societies where workers are subjected to all sorts of taxations while they earn very little. Such workers are overworked to sustain the few bourgeoisies who know nothing but to demand for increase in their pay, allowances and increase in anything that enters their pockets.

Related to the exploitation is the issue of ***brutality.*** The peasants and their families are treated with less regard to their human rights. They are overworked, they are mercilessly beaten when they try to resist, their daughters are raped for cheap pleasure and god knows what

other brutality is inflicted upon this people. Due to this forced hard labour, the men cannot rise to the occasion and satisfy the sexual needs of their wives for after the days work at the Kinoo's they are tired and so needs enough rest. One of the women is in agony because her husband, '...immediately flings himself on the bed and sleeps like a log.' Pg11.

The Askari shamelessly grabs Chausiku from her hapless and helpless parents and takes her to the Nyapara who rapes her. Such a young unripe and innocent girl is introduced to sex through rape. To add an insult to an injury, her mother is fully aware that the brutes are raping her but she cannot help because she is weak and her husband has been beaten to unconsciousness. Kitunda seems to be absorbing the brunt of this brutality more than any body else. He is again beaten to unconsciousness when he protests against being beaten while on the farm. Perhaps the climax of brutality comes when the white man's gun mauls thousands and thousands of the freedom fighters leading to the arrest of Kitunda and Kinjeketile who we are told are again whipped to unconsciousness.

Oppression is also another issue which can be discussed in the light of the above arguments on brutality.

Note

While the subject matter of the play *Kinjeketile* is colonial resistance, its themes include need for unity, tribalism, misuse of religion, oppression, brutality and exploitation.

Activity

Show the relevance of themes we have discussed above to the contemporary East African situation.

Characterization

The play has about twenty six characters that one can see their roles as being divided in three i.e. the oppressor, the sell outs and the oppressed. It is because of this oppression that the oppressed reject and dare the oppressor to a war.

The main representatives of the oppressed are Kinjeketile, Kitunda and their families. The sell outs include the Mnyapara and the Askari while the oppressors are represented by Kinoo who we actually don't meet on stage but whose presence is heavily felt.

Kinjeketile

He is a Mmatumbi seer who keeps preparing traditional medicine in the house. We first meet him when he opens his house and dances in a trance to river Rufiji as if powerful forces are pulling him there. Being a seer his services include relaying messages from the gods of Mmatumbi to the living people and the means of getting this message is by meditating and disappearing into the river for some time. This is seen when he comes from the river with a message of water that will enable the Tanganyika's fight the Red soil. This message with all its inadequacies he says comes from Hongo.

But being a wise and patient man, Kinjeketile understands the need for unity amongst the people facing the German in battle because he realizes that the message is dubitable. On the other hand he refuses to denounce that Maji is a lie because so far it has withstood the test as the best unifying factor. Kinjeketile's argument is that if what the Tanganyikans need is unity and the water provides that unity, then it cannot be a lie. He knows the power of his word and that is why he cannot denounce Maji

> '…the moment I say that people in the north south east and west will stop fighting. They will fall into hopeless despair. They'll give up' (p.53.)

In his confrontation with Kitunda who is all eager to blow the war trumpet he tells him, 'Give me time to think. Have the patience to wait.'

He understands that the people need to learn the ways of the white man and train men in military skills before they face him in war.

> ' …we must learn how to fight, how to use guns. We must be soldiers.' P.18.

His responsibility as a leader is seen when he commissions Kitunda to train an army in skills that will enable them win. But above all he preaches the need for unity and self reliance in this war. He knows the power of strength from within that can only be acquired by unity when says,

> '…we will be strong: but not by being strengthened by some dubious aid from outside. We will be strong because this strength comes from us- our own strength. With this we will fight and we will win. Have patience.' Pp28-29

Kinjeketile also shows the power of religion in a desperate situation. He makes the people believe in the power of Maji because they are convinced it is a bullet proof aid from their spirits. . Thus they believe that what comes from the gods cannot be wrong and so if the mediator between them and the gods says that they unite and fight as one, they cannot object. They seem to be ready to go to war even without the weapons because their gods have willed that no German bullet will penetrate them. Religion thus becomes the opium of the masses. Politicians and church leaders in our contemporary society use the religion to enrich themselves as can be seen in Mulwa's Redemption. The arch swindlers gather the poor people who are urged to contribute

generously and receive blessings in return. When Kitunda kneels to touch Kinjeketile's garment, the people blindly follow suit.

The theme of revenge or the quest for it by Kitunda is highlighted by Kinjeketile. He admonishes Kitunda not to go to war to revenge the atrocities that have been inflicted on him especially when he is beaten on the farm as well as when his daughter is raped.

Kitunda

He is a Mmatumbi who like the rest is forced to work on Kinoo farm. His wife tells us that he and others work so hard yet their wives lack food in the house to offer them.

> '…our men work a lot….when my husband comes from the plantation, I have no food to give him.'

We meet him coming from the farm with the rest of the men. He has been beaten thoroughly in the course of the day by the Mnyapala. He is cursing and swearing to his attacker.

Kitunda is a keen and observant character. He knows that for the people to fight the white man they have to be armed with weapons similar to his. That is why he advises the people to steal guns from the askaris and seize them if need be and do every thing to see that they have got guns. Due to his keenness he prescribes the key factor of their betrayal is hunger because the sell outs want to fend themselves without undergoing as much suffering.

Kitunda plays a leadership role in the text. The responsibility to build and train an army falls on him and he does it with a fair amount of success as he tells us;

> '…day by day we are growing stronger. Yesterday and the day before yesterday and today our brothers have come to join us. Soon we will be ready….'

He is a pragmatic leader who can work with people from different tribes and with varied behaviour; some civil others resistant. This is evident for he bonds a Mrufiji with Mngoni, Mzaramo with Mmakonde and others. In case of anything going wrong any where he is charged with the dynamics of coming up with a solution and effecting that solution in practice. A case in point is when Kinjeketile disappears and he is at the forefront in the organization of a search party.

In himself, Kitunda is a realistic man although we see him naïve at first. When Kinjeketile possessed with Hongo announces that he has Maji, it is Kitunda who first trusts him allowing others to blindly trust the Maji. Later on when he realizes that the Maji does not work he urges the people to go on fighting regardless of the water. A war has been started and it must be seen to its logical conclusion so he reasons.
Kitunda helps reveal to Kinjeketile that the forces that inspired him might be wrong. Through their conversation, he questions the source of Maji and the motivation to go to war.

> ‘ ….how do you that it was Hongo and not another spirit? If this is Hongo, then why does he say that we will be the children of Seyyid said after winning the war? (P.28.)

As we have seen earlier Kitunda has personal reasons for taking part in the war. His daughter is dragged away to be raped by the askari’s yet he cannot defend her. Through this incident, we can clearly see the oppression of the people as being physical and psychological as well. The raped lady is traumatized together with her defenseless father and this then makes the people to rise up in arms and say enough is enough.

Bi. Kitunda

We meet her at first a very inquisitive lady, sending her daughter to the Kinjeketile's to spy what they are cooking in these lean times. She had also spied on Kinjeketile when he had mysteriously disappeared down the river in the middle of the night. This observation makes her conclude that Kinjeketile is up to something. This then acts as foreshadowing of the events that later unfold.

She critically surveys nature and comes up with startling comments on the prevailing conditions. She observes that Bi. Bobali's child must have died of poison after consuming poisonous roots and that if men do not work, then there is going to be famine. In deed it comes to pass.

Like her husband, she tries to rescue her daughter from the hands of the askaris but she is beaten and shoved over. Torn between her daughter who is beyond rescue and her husband who has passed out after being beaten, she opts for her husband and tries to resuscitate him. She abuses the men around and calls them 'women' and 'yes men' who cannot rise to defend their own. In a way then she charges these men who later own take part in the war.

Through her we know that the men in this society are almost incapacitated and fear protecting their women folk from sexual abuse by agents of the colonialists.

Chausiku

She is a young virgin girl brutally assaulted sexually by the human dogs in the form of the askaris, the agents of doom. This poignant incident gives her father the bitter ness that propels him to war.

Her meeting with the snake at the Kinjeketile is a bad omen both to the society in general and to her in particular and we see it happening later own. There is blood bath and she is sexually molested.

She represents the thousands of girls who were defiled by the callous ambassadors of the oppressors (Askaris) or even the oppressors themselves during colonialism in Africa. Her presentation can be equated to that of the character, the Bitch in Austin Bukenya's *A People's Bachelor*. The Bitch was sexually assaulted by the colonial governor at a tender age and this affected her to the extent that she lost interest in sex hence simply doing it for fun.

Askari

He represents the self proclaimed henchmen of the white oppressor. His tasks of duty as a collaborator include beating his fellow Africans on Kinoo's farm when they stand up to stretch themselves (they are supposed to work without getting tired), soliciting cheap pleasure from women and in return exempting their relatives from the days work among other inhuman activities. He beats Kitunda on the farm and he accompanies the mnyapale to Kitunda's to take Chausiku for defilement.

Summarily then, his work is to bootlick the master and in turn make sure that the other Africans do the same if not better than him. The sad part of his collaboration and all the injustice he does to his own people is that he gains nothing from it. Neither his situation nor his status in the society does improve. In fact he becomes an enemy of the people.

He is a representative of the social misfits in the society who should be done away with just the way a dentist uproots a stinking tooth from a mouth.

Summary

It can therefore be argued that literature, arising from the society must inevitably attend to the historical processes of that society. Ebrahim Hussein in his play *Kinjeketile* and Ngugi and Micere Mugo in *The Trials*

*of Dedan Kimathi s*ought to recreate this history in a literary manner but without distorting the facts. They sought to restore the pride of place of these historical figures by looking at them as the true heroes of East African's independence. To do this, they portrayed these historical figures from the point of view of the peasants who had suffered under the colonial yoke.

In *Decolonizing the Mind* Ngugi asserts that,

> Trials of Dedan Kimathi was a call for revolutionary theatre depicting the masses in the only historically correct perspective positively, heroically and as the true makers of history.

It is important to note at this point that the two plays were written after extensive researches conducted among the peasants who knew these heroes of the fight for independence.

The role played by these historical figures in the fight for liberation had been distorted by Europeans and their African sympathizers. They had sought to portray them as terrorists who had resisted civilization of Africa at large and East Africa in particular.

One may be tempted to think that if these plays are such didactic and meant to serve the aforementioned functions, then their aesthetic, quality is wanting. An analysis of the plays as we shall see reveals otherwise.

Activity

Read carefully the play, *The trials of Dedan Kimathi* and analyse it the way that I have analysed *Kinjeketile.*

Further Reading

Waruhiu Itote: (1979) *Mau Mau in Action*, Nairobi: Transafrica

Kanogo, T. (1987). *Squatters and the Roots of Mau Mau,* Nairobi: E.A.E.P.

Kinambo I.N. and Temu A.T. (eds) (1969) *A History of Tanzania,* Nairobi: East African Publishing House,

Gwassa GCK (1969) *The German Intervention and African Resistance in Tanzania.*

Mapunda O.B. and G. P Mpangara; (1968) *The Maji Maji War in Ungoni,* Dar es Salaam: East African Publishing House.

Wachanga, H. K, (1975), *The Swords of Kirinyaga*

Lesson Nine: The Travelling Theatre in East Africa

Introduction

The crucial problem that has faced East African literary artists is attempting to create drama and poetry that has a relationship between performers and the audience. Most theatre companies are in urban areas where a minority of the citizenry resides. The majority in the native villages get little if not none of these theatrical experiences.

In order to break out of this narrow way of operation, several university-based drama outfits resorted to a pattern of activities which have lead to the rise of the traveling theatre. In East Africa, The Makerere Free Travelling Theatre and the University of Nairobi Free Travelling theatre are examples of this pattern.

Objectives of this Lesson.

By the end of this Lesson, you should be able to:

1. Identify the role played by universities across East Africa in advancing the practice of Drama and poetry in East Africa.
2. List some of the activities that members of the travelling theatres engaged in.
3. Outline some differences between the three travelling discussed
4. Enumerate the major stages of development of the Kenya Schools and Colleges Drama Festival.

Makerere Free Travelling Theatre

This was an outfit of lecturers and students of the University who decided to come together and take theatre to the people by touring around Uganda performing plays for the people in the language of the people. It made its first tour in 1965. It was largely influenced by the popular Uganda theatre of Wycliffe Kanyingi. Initiated by David Cook,

Margaret Macpherson and Betty Baker, the project was financed by the University itself, Ministry of Planning and Community Development and British Council, Esso Petroleum Company all of Uganda.

Its aim was to provide a popular drama amongst the general public of Uganda. Rehearsals lasted fir a minimum period of five weeks. Performances were entirely by students at Makerere University and the relatively long preparation and rehearsal period was partly geared towards welding the individual performers into a cohesive team motivated to travel.

Because the Makerere Free Travelling Theatre toured a very wide area, the plays chosen were very varied in language, cultural background and complexity; the idea was to have a wide repertoire which could fit almost any performance situation.

The plays on the first tour in 1965 included six in African Language and seven in English. Those in African languages were mostly in Luganda, Runyoro or Rutoro the three mostly spoken languages in Uganda.

The variety of plays on the tour was partly determined by the variety of performance areas. Some African language plays (such as those in Luganda or Runyoro) were restricted to particular linguistic groups that spoke or understood those languages.

Generally the plays had to be flexible enough to adapt to a great variety of venues as well as the different audiences e.g. the Bantu speakers and the nilotic speaker. This adaptability made the theatre able to communicate with a variety of popular audiences. Something peculiar realized in successive years was that the elite people of Kampala, the capital city, were not attracted to this form of theatre. No wonder when the troupe staged its shows to raise funds in Kampala Theatre, the attendance was extremely small. But when they toured other areas the responses by the peasant audience was quite impressive as cook says.

> ‘I was struck by how much, relatively, less wealthy of our audience gave hundreds of people to whom ten cents was a lot of money preferred it eagerly; and how relatively little the professional, substantial spectators (including Europeans) contributed Cook, David, 1965; Report of the MTT, 1965; research paper University of Makerere, Kampala.’

The publicity campaign was a direct one that relied on members of the troupe cruising through town with loud-speakers announcing the shows just before they took place, a technique backed up by processions of performers dressed in a variety of costumes. This system worked so well bearing in mind that British Council had provided a fleet of landrovers vehicle, Esso Oil Company fuelled them. Cook estimates that the total 1965 audience attendance was at least 17,000. Often the audience was so big it strained the resources of the hall.

This kind of audience forced the actors to reject the bourgeois technique of keeping distance between actors and audience and adopt the more participatory active audience, a technique that borrows heavily from the indigenous African Theatre. Sometimes the audience reaction was so noisy that one would have thought it was ‘a kind of mime before a football final match’ end the audience blew whistles in celebration.

This adaptability of participatory enthusiasm and intensity of popular audiences points to its main strength. This troupe genuinely sought to break out of the bourgeois theatre (especially the proscenium arch stage). In so doing, the Travelling Theatre made important organizational and aesthetic transformations designed to improve the relationship between performers and popular audiences.

University of Nairobi Free Travelling Theatre

This was another theatre outfit of lecturers and students. It was associated with fairly established authors such as John Ruganda, Kenneth Watene and Francis Imbuga. Early 1970's theatre lecturers at the University of Nairobi tried establishing a traveling theatre movement but the organization and requirement was overwhelming for them. It took the skills of the experienced John Ruganda who had participated in it at the University of Makerere (Uganda) to help them kick start it. In 1974, Ruganda with the help of some lecturers from the University took a handful of well-rehearsed student actors on the road to act wherever they were welcomed – in school, market places, social hall e.t.c. All the performances were free and whoever wanted to watch was invited.

In the mid-1970's, however, under the direction of Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Kimani Gecau, it embarked on a more radical policy of touring the country performing politically committed plays such as the Swahili version of Ngugi and Mugo's *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi.*

Funds for touring around the country were raised from advertisements placed in the programmes as well as from the University administration. This venture was very useful for it trained many theatre practitioners who eventually went out to try it and the first beneficiary were schools. Many graduates were involved in the School Drama Festival as playwrights, directors, choreographers and adjudicators.

The University of Nairobi Free Travelling Theatre was however not as strong as that of Makerere University in terms of organization, structures, versatility and content.

The Kenyatta University Travelling Theatre

This is a Drama outfit that was formed to take care of the dramatic talent flowing in the undergraduate students at the Kenyatta University

after the establishment of the culture week festival. Many performers in the festival felt the need to have an organized club that could provide drama beyond the culture week festivities.

Under the guidance and leadership of Maurice Amateshe, now a lecturer in the Music Department of the same University and with a little help from the then Vice Chancellor, Prof. George Eshiwani, the students managed to come together and organize a series of play productions in and out of the University. The most memorable play was *The Successor* which was performed in Kenyatta University, Kenya Science Teachers College, The British Council auditorium and other places around the country.

The first members of this theatre club eventually became very powerful and able theatre practitioners with its leader, Amateshe, being retained by the University in its Performing and Creative Arts Centre where he served until his appointment in the Music Department. Janet Kanini was taken as an actress at the phoenix players professional centre and later on moved to journalism with a local television (NTV). John Kiarie popularly known as KJ teamed up with other comedians to form the Redykyulass Company and is currently trying his hand on Kenyan politics. Caroline Nderitu grew to become, perhaps, the best known poet in Kenya who writes and recites poems on an international scale.

The members also direct the dramatic forms and choreographe dances that accompany them. In the later years, Kinyanjui Kambani, one of its successive leaders wrote a play *The Carcasses* which was very successful. It has since been adapted into film.

KUTT as it is known is a purely non-profit making club which seeks to exploit and harness the talent of creativity among its members. It stages plays and encourages its members to write scripts of plays, narratives and poems.

Of late the group has sought to partner with corporate institutions while KUTT offers entertainment, the institutions offer financial support. Perhaps KUTT is better known for its performances of schools set books. Every year since its establishment, the troupe goes to different parts of the country performing the plays and adaptation of novels and short stories to secondary school students at a fee. At times, members of the troupe who are students in the Literature Department engage the secondary school students in literary discussions of the literature set books.

Kenya Schools and Colleges Drama Festivals

> Therefore this was a period of experimentation and it was proved that the use of traditional Dramatic forms added freshness to the Western Dramatic forms. The most memorable play presented at the festival was Makwekwe written and produced by Charles Wandiri in 1981 the play was in Osotsi's words, an example of superb craftsmanship at all levels of play production.
>
> Osotsi et al pg 214

Schools Drama Festival had been previously under the leadership of expatriate staff at the Ministry of Education but in 1979, the First Kenyan African Drama and Literature inspector, Mr. Wasambo Were was appointed. Under his stewardship, the festival took a drastic departure from the past. Instead of being staged only at the Kenya National Theatre year in year out, Wasambo directed that it be taken to different parts of the country each year. He also directed that the colleges' festival which had been running as a separate festival take place together with the secondary schools one.

In 1981, he engineered the entry of the primary school category into the festival. Hence the Drama Festival took the shape it has now under the stewardship of Were. The other major change at the festival came in 2003 when Alembi Ezekiel engineered the overhaul of the primary school plays to fit the needs of child-centered approach. His

argument was that primary school plays were plays acted for children and by children and hence they should subscribe to principles of children's literature (Osiako et al (2003).

The schools Drama festival started in 1949 as European Drama Festival but when other races were incorporated, it later changed its name to Schools Drama Festival. This festival was organized on a competitive basis and this called for innovations. This festival grew especially in the seventies moving away from Shakespeare and his approved colleagues through one Petit bourgeois's living room versus the African hut to a more genuine attempt at representing the setting as was seen from the subject matter that now seemed to reach the majority of the people.

Of particular interest is that each time a playwright wanted to add freshness to a staler stage, the traditional songs, dances and practices rituals were invoked. The climax came in 1971 when a play in Maasai language Olkirikiri was crowned the winner of the year's festival.

Today, the Festival prides itself as one of the largest entertainment shop in the whole East African region. Every year, Kenyans are treated to nine days of plays, Dramatized dances, Dramatized verses and Dramatized Narratives from the eight provinces of the country. The Dramatic techniques and the content in the items presented are emphasized by a panel of the adjudicators selected by the Ministry of Education –Kenya to judge and rank the teams. Although Ministry officials would like us to believe that the Festival is a co-curricular activity that allows students to exercise their creativity, one realizes that the cut throat competition for prizes dangled during the Festival, invites participation of other theatre practitioners who are neither teachers nor students. This in turn stifles the participation of students in terms of scripting, choreographing, directing and even stage-managing. Students become machines to be fed with information,

which they regurgitate on stage. Being, an educational co-curricular activity, one would expect that teachers would encourage the participating students to come up with scripts that they will Dramatize.

It is worth noting that many of the theatre and Drama practitioners today are both products and disciples of this Festival. This perhaps is one of the major reasons which you as a student of Drama and Poetry in East Africa, needs to appreciate this Festival. It has made a big impact on the practice of Drama and Poetry in Kenya that studying it becomes a necessity rather than a luxury to you.

Questions

1. Describe the contribution made by Wasambo Were in the growth of the Drama Festival in Kenya
2. In your opinion, what is the common feature in the three Travelling theatres we have discussed above?

Lesson Ten: Drama for Development

Introduction

We are aware of Theatre for Development (TfD) because it is the one we hear most of the time. This is a theatre practice that seeks to actively empower the participating masses with knowledge and skills that can help them change their lives. TfD in Africa emerged as a conscious effort to assert the culture of the dominated classes since it aims to make the people not only aware of, but also active participants in the development process by expressing their wishes and acting to better their conditions. TfD therefore seeks to bring together the people of the dominated (lower economic class and to instruct their

knowledge acquired by acting so that they can participate in their own economic empowerment).

The success of TfD rests on the two basic principles of participation and conscientisation. Participation is where the TfD practitioners explore the people's social performance modes in order to create a theatrical performance which the people are familiar with and are free to take part in. The people are all united in taking part in it. Conscientisation is the use of this theatrical performance to advise, warn and inform the participating masses on the ways they can empower themselves. Therefore participation in familiar performance modes serve as a launching pad for intervention in what Kerr (1995) refers to as 'the sugaring of the didactic pill.'

TfD is based on the Marxist philosophy which says that true liberation doesn't come by the sword but it comes as an idea and that theatre should offer this idea. The oppressed must simply be given options that will enable them resist ideologically their oppression. Theatre then becomes a tool for empowering the people with ideas.

When the people have come up with a theatrical performance and its premier show performed, writers who may be part of the performers may come up and write a play based on that performance. The written play is what I am referring to in this discussion as Drama for Development (DfD).

Objectives of this Lesson:

By the end of this Lesson, you should be able to:

1. Define Theatre for Development and Drama for Development.
2. Discuss the reason why literature needs to respond to the issues

of the society that creates it.
3. Summarise the text *I Will marry when I Want*
4. Outline the Kamirithu Theatre experience.

One then can argue that every drama is DfD because drama is meant to inform and change the lives of its recipients. In a way such an argument can be true but one needs also to know that most DfD have specific political and economic themes as we shall see with *I Will Marry When I Want*. It is a literary response to the power struggles between the classes namely the haves and the have-nots. That is why Ngugi says that Drama should be used as a tool and weapon in the class struggle and it should be used to raise critical consciousness of the underprivileged or otherwise oppressed masses.

Several scripts have been written out of theatre for development experiments in East Africa. Of them all, *I Will Marry When I Want* is the most known due to its radicalism and the effects it created to its writers and Kenya at large.

The Kamiriithu Community Theatre Experience

Kamiriithu is a village in Limuru some 30 kilometres from Nairobi. The peasants living there decided to have a sought of communal theatre in mid 1970's under the leadership of Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Ngugi wa Miiri. The people of Kamirrithu organized themselves into a sought of organized theatre club that performed plays meant to highlight causes to their especially poverty and how to overcome them. They used the traditional forms of theatre which draws its raw material from the real life experiences of the performers themselves. They performed in Gikuyu language which was a medium readily available to them. Some of the plays performed at the Kamiriithu community centre were, *Ngaahika Ndenda* (*I Will Marry When I want The Trials of Dedan Kimathi,)* and *Maitu Njugira (Mother Sing for Me).*

I Will Marry When I Want

This is the English version of the script of *Ngaahika Ndenda* a Gikuyu play that Ngugi wa Thiong'o patched together after its performance in 1977. Ngugi in *Decolonising the mind* posits that:

> "The research on the script of Ngaahika Ndenda, the writing of the outline, the readings and the discussions of the outline, the auditions and rehearsals and the construction of the open-air theatre took in all about nine months from January – September 1977."

Thus then the people were fully involved in the creation of the performed text.

Confronting the class differences depicted in *I Will Marry When I Want* demand a true revolutionary spirit. Such is by virtue of the contention posited by Ngugi [1981] that it is the dominant class which wields political power, and whose interests are mainly served by the state and all the machinery of state power, like the police and the army and the law courts. For instance Kigunda's attempt to physically challenge and subdue Kioi brings him to the discovery that the law favours the rich. It is within such a framework that the oppressed lack a voice of representation within the state machinery that art becomes their only solace. If such art, especially drama, manages to enlist the participation of the people as actors in the drama of their own life struggles, true revolutionary drama is born. Such drama will need to make two sacrifices: firstly, it will need to explore a new language. Here language is understood not only in terms of verbal signs but also in terms of the totality of communicative devices deployed in literary communication. Secondly it will need to extent the methods and standards of artistic performance to accommodate the participation of ordinary people and their level of artistic perception and socialization. The result of Kamirrithu was a theatre of the oppressed in which the peasant's and workers acted out their predicament in the context of

neo colonial society driven by class contradictions. The popularity and revolutionary appeal of the play brought the banning of its staging by the government of Kenya.

I Will Marry When I Want is an attempt to dramatise the exploitation of the workers and peasants by an evil alliance of foreign capitalists and indigenous middlemen under the guise of economic development. Such manipulation of the people's consciousness is disguised by Christian religious propaganda. The general perception and the underlying questioning of the legitimacy of capitalist production relations in contemporary Kenyan society provide the thematic basis for the play.

The plot is straightforward but carefully crafted around the centrality of the class question in capitalist society. Kigunda, a farm labourer possesses a piece of land which his employer Kioi covets and together with his business partner Nditika, they will stop at nothing to take the farmers land for a factory project which they propose to undertake with their western partners. Likewise the relationship between Kioi's son and Kigunda's daughter provides a basis for the conflict in the play and furnish the material for the exploration of the realities of social experience in class society. The play not only exposes the hypocrisy and cowardice of the bourgeoisie and their repressive use of law to cow their victims. But the awakened consciousness of the workers and peasants is able to penetrate the cocoon of their ignorance and rise defiantly against their oppressors.

Another concern in the play is the nature of capitalist exploitation and its implication to the life of different classes of in the society. The love affair between Kigunda's daughter and Kioi's son is based in inequality. He summons his beloved by hooting at his car horn and cannot be

seen in the house of his father's slave. The contradiction created here is of affluence that cannot give people the basic needs of life like the need for love. Kioi's son cannot get love from women of his class and therefore goes to the lower class in search of it. However because material wealth rules the upper class and makes them look superior, he cannot enter the house of the lower class people and get his loved one. He does not want to be seen to be entering it because that will mean that he is willingly associating with them.
Njooki, states that rich families marry from rich families and vice versa. We can understand this statement from the point that marriage is not necessarily a product of love but of circumstance. The rich marry from rich to protect their egos and their wealth while the poor marry from poor families to avoid rejections by rich families and to escape being caught in the web of deceit that characterises the rich families.

The fact that the play inclines towards didactism makes it flat in terms of literary techniques. The authors so were preoccupied with grappling with the class question and how it hurts the society economically and socially that they put little attention on the literary aspects of the lay. There is little euphemism and figurative language, which might have helped them hide their intended message from the government authorities who were interested in censoring art. The flatness of the play made its message easily accessible to these government agents who fell upon the Kamirithu Cultural and Education Centre and razed it to ashes. They also banned any performance of this play to the public.

Flat as it may be, one cannot fail to notice one or two stylistic aspects that are characteristic of such participatory drama. As such you will find the use of songs, foreign words (especially Gikuyu words) and other African folklore material that are specific to the Agikuyu

community. Remember this play was initially conceived and written in Gikuyu before it was translated to other languages.

Lesson Eleven: Political Drama in East Africa

Introduction

Since independence the East African region has had a tumultuous political situations ranging from revolts to military takeovers. Many innocent people have suffered in that process. Political developments have been varied in the three countries with Tanzania enjoying relative stability under Julius Nyerere its president while Uganda bearing the brunt of political instability characterized by military takeovers and coups. Kenya had its share of instability although it was not on a large scale as that of Uganda. This lesson seeks to capture some of the most volatile political contexts in East Africa and how East African playwrights have creatively captured these political times in there plays. We shall look at texts by two most prolific political literary writers of East Africa, John Ruganda and Francis Imbuga. For purposes of our analysis, we shall only look at one play from each playwright.

Objectives of this Lesson:

It is expected that by the end of the lesson, you should be able to;

1. Summarise the political events in Kenya that led to the writing of *The Successor*
2. Briefly discuss the Ugandan political situation since independence to the time Museveni took over the reigns of leadership
3. Analyse the texts *The Successor* and *Shreds of Tenderness*

POLITICAL EVENTS IN KENYA

After independence, Kenya became a multiparty independent country with two major parties i.e. Kenya African National Union (KANU) and Kenya African Democratic Union (KADU). KADU voluntarily stepped down in favour of one partism. Hence Kenya became one party state. KANU ruled under Mzee Jomo Kenyatta until 1973 when he died. But just before he died, his close political allies got so concerned because the constitution demanded that in the case where a president dies, his vice-president succeeds him. The president's allies were so tribal in thinking that they wanted a fellow tribesman of the president to take over in the event of his death. They didn't want the vice-president who was from a different tribe to automatically succeed Mzee Jomo Kenyatta. These politicians labelled the Kiambu Mafia sponsored a lobby group under the aegis of Change the Constitution which was agitating for the overhaul of the constitutional cause that mandated the vice-president to take over the reins of rulership in the event that the president died. They wanted it to be changed so that anybody else could be selected from the Executive cabinet to vie for that seat[5]

However their efforts were defeated when the then Kenyan Attorney General Charles Njonjo advised the president against such a move saying that the citizens will accuse the president of tribalism and discrimination. The president died on 22nd August 1978 before the strife had been fully settled and his vice-president Daniel Toroitich Arap Moi took over as the acting president. After three months an election was held and he won with a landslide hence becoming the second president of Kenya. He was to rule until 2002 when the people revolted against his chosen heir, Kenyatta's son Uhuru, and opted for Mwai Kibaki.

[5] For a better understanding of the political events that took place in Kenya in the 1970's, read Phillip Ochieng's book, *The Kenyatta Succession.*

The events that led to the succession battle just before the death of Kenyatta in 1978 might as well have shaped Imbuga's mind in creating *The Successor*. This is a story of machinations and political manoeuvres that an individual engages in order to take over the reins of political leadership. Parallels can be drawn between the real events in Kenya and the creative world in *The Successor*. Other critics have argued that the events in Central African Republic in which Denis Bokassa overthrew the government to become the president might have shaped Imbuga's thinking in creating *The Successor*.

THE *SUCCESSOR* BY FRANCIS IMBUGA

As has been hinted on earlier in this Lesson, the setting of this text can better be understood if one has at hand the political historical events of Kenya especially around 1976. at around this time, a few individuals in and around the government formed what was then called change the constitution group and their aim was to block certain individuals from ascending to power should the president die or be incapacitated. As the tempestuous debate over who should succeed the aging president raged on, Imbuga made his contribution by artistically recreating these prevalent politics of intrigue and chicanery in a play *The Successor*. This play was performed for the first time in May 1979 by the University players, nine months after the then president Jomo Kenyatta had died. Imbuga conceals the link between the Kenyan politics and his play so much to the extent that it is only a keen reader who can unravel that the society in the text is a reflection of the wider Kenyan society. Compared to Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *I will Marry when I Want*, *The Successor* is a concealed version of what was and what is happening in the society. Generally, Imbuga's creative texts are transparently hidden responses to the major upheavals and the teething problems in Kenya and African at large. (Ruganda 1989).

There are those who have seen Masero as a reflection of Central African Republic under Bokassa's regime.

Summarily, the text focuses on the struggle for power among the leaders of Masero, a semi modern state that is led by Emperor Chonda and deputized by Jandi, Oriomra and Sasia in that order of seniority. One of the chiefs, Oriomra considers that the highest seat of Masero, is up for grabs and he deems himself the right person to grab it. But there are obstacles that must be overcome or be eliminated. So he identifies possible weaknesses in his fellow chiefs and other people who matter in the succession race and explores the possibility of taking advantage of these weaknesses to spin him to be named the *Successor* to the sitting emperor. He takes advantage of Sasia's gullibility; Dr. See Thro's refugee status and the Emperor's fits of making hasty judgments as well as his strange dreams. In chief Jandi, he takes advantage of his prime anger as well as his refugee status. He attempts to eliminate the other senior leaders so that he can be left as the sole heir to the throne. He does this by first prompting the Emperor to name his *Successor* and concurrently getting rid of his rivals in the race to the throne. To prompt the Emperor, he convinces, Dr. See Through, a diviner in the village, to interpret the Emperor's dream to his advantage (P.11). He moves fast to eliminate the most eligible persons and top on his agenda is Jandi and Sasia. Originally he had planned to trick Sasia to kill Jandi and then blackmail him. But when he realizes that Zira, Sasia's girlfriend, who is a cousin to Jandi, is pregnant, he changes his plan to accommodate her. Zira then is convinced by Oriomra and Sasia to falsely accuse Jandi of incest. Jandi is tried and found guilty. He is sentenced to banishment. Oriomra is on the verge of winning when a loose end in the plan snaps. News that Jandi has drowned reach the land, and Zira is tormented with a guilty conscience for having falsely accused Jandi hence leading him to his

death. So guilty is her conscience that the only way she can clear it is by confessing of her heinous accusations. Sasia feels that this is going to be scandalous and so he attempts eliminating her hoping that Oriomra will cover him but to his dismay, Oriomra deserts him and even attempts to murder him. Zira, amid her pains manages to reach at the Emperors palace and makes a confession leaving Oriomra accused. Sasia is rescued from the hands of death by the diviner. Jandi who had all along been hiding in the shrine of God of peace (dwelling place of Dr. See through) resurfaces and reveals himself to the emperor. The mystery is resolved and Oriomra, who is symbolic of bad and selfish leadership in most African societies, is unmasked and found guilty. He is taken to the Shrine of god of peace to shake hands with the truth. Jandi is named the *Successor*, symbolizing the start of the journey to healthier leadership and a better society.

Scene by scene analysis of *The Successor.*

The text is divided into two parts. Part one has three scenes and part two has two scenes. Part one serves as the exposition where the author introduces the characters and the conflict and heightens it. Part two climaxes and resolves the conflict

Part one Scene one.

It opens with Dr. See through, a high priest of Masero supplicating to the infant sun for blessings over the day. It is worth noting that the author opens the text early in the morning which is a stylistic way of saying that this is the introduction and we are setting forth at the start of the day. Dr. See Through then sends his assistants to the caves of hope and the paths of peace. These two assistants had been singing a song which again the author uses to alert the reader of the themes in the text.

Ndiegu akazia Kusuma akima umawana

Umwana Akazia kusuma akima ndiegu
Ndiegu baba
Ukalilanga guu
Zunu zunu zunu

A loose translation of the song would be

Ndiegu went out in search of food and did not share it with his child
The child also went in search of food and never shared with Ndiegu
Ndiegu is now crying. Why are you crying guu
Zunu zunu zunu

This is a song of *selfishness* and *greed* hence these are some of the themes the author highlights in the play. When a father doesn't give his own son food, that father is grossly selfish and is not worth being called father. And when the son in turn goes out in search of food and doesn't share with his father, then that family is lost. The song warns the reader and the audience that the play we are about to read or watch is hinged on themes that surround the bad effects of selfishness and greed. And in deed it turns out to be true. Take note also that the use of the song in the text affirms Imbuga's idiosyncratic style of using African songs in his texts. The fact that it is a Luhya song authenticates the text as a production from Africa and much more particularly East Africa. Again it is Imbuga's style to use songs in his texts.

The author also introduces Zira in this scene. Zira represents the common person in Masero and her dilemma can be seen as dilemma's of those people whose resources have been defiled by leaders. Her entry is marked by the hooting of an owl, which in the African tradition is considered a bad omen. It is a sure sign that the infant sun potents catastrophes and the silence that follows the hooting signifies the sinister underground activities that will go on in the day. Zira has come to confirm whether she is pregnant or not to which the diviner confirms positive, and a boy to be precise. She is advised to get married immediately and to the right man. As Zira leaves, the Diviner is at loss

of words for he thinks it should not have happened to this Pamalika's daughter who danced so well during the emperors coronation that the people who were present said that she was good enough to marry a chief and not just anybody.. Take note that the Diviner remembers Zira as a good dancer, which is a positive quality. Zira will be required later in the text to defend her positive image but she will fail. While still looking at Zira's retreating figure, Oriomra catches him (Diviner) off guard and gives a comment that momentarily throws the diviner off balance.

She walks well doesn't she? P.4

Note

Oriomra seems to have come at the right time because he comes to learn very confidential information which he later on uses for his selfish ends. He learns that Zira is pregnant.

When we encounter Oriomra at the beginning he is a humble man who strikes us as an intelligent one. He is well versed with history and philosophy of his people and keeps on referring to them as he talks with the diviner. We love him for the way he invokes pity in the diviner and he impresses us with his knowledge of migration patterns. He impresses us as a peace loving citizen who cares for the future of the empire and its children. However at the end of the text, we realize that he is exactly the opposite of what he purports to be. The author therefore warns us to be wary of this sweet tongued people who can easily convince us to our graves.

In this scene, we also come to learn that the emperor is visited with a strange dream and he had send Oriomra to the diviner to inform him

that he (The emperor) was to visit him the afternoon of that day so that he can unravel it. Oriomra delays relaying the message until very late. He seizes the opportunity to arm twist the diviner to tell the emperor a simple but very lethal lie, in the cause of unraveling the dream. He wants the seer to interpret the dream in such away it will be known that the emperor needs to name his successor as a matter of immediate urgency.

Things to note in Part one scene one

1. The author uses the infant sun to signify the vulnerability of this society
2. Zira is seen as a representative of the common man In the text
3. There is heavy use of symbolism in the scene e.g. the hooting of the owl
4. The song of selfishness at the start of the scene sets the stage for the atrocious acts that will be witnessed
5. The author warns against sweet tongued people like Oriomra who use words to armtwist clear thinking people.

Part one scene two

In this scene, the reader is introduced another very important character in the play. He is Sasia the man responsible for Zira's pregnancy that the diviner announced in scene one. Sasia is a Luhya word to mean scatter. In this case, the character is used by the author to symbolize his role as a scatterer i.e. one who scatters peace. He is hunting in the royal park, a symbol of the national cake accessible only to a few individuals. As we read the text or watch the play, we learn that this man has a characteristic of getting excited or getting annoyed with minor things. For example, after shooting the ill fated rabbit, he exclaims, 'Fantastic! Fast class shot! That was a good a job. And a fat one too!'

Only seconds later to regret that it is pregnant. He hides in the solace that he was ignorant of its pregnant status at the time of shooting.

Zira: You killed it
Sasia: Who? Me? No. It was a mistake.

The killing of the rabbit fills him with sorrow and leaves him in depression for it reminds him a past he wishes to forget. The pregnant rabbit is introduced in the plot of the text by the pregnancy that Zira had gone to confirm at the diviners in scene one. Its killing therefore foreshadows the fate of Zira's unborn child.

At this point, we have encountered three related cases of pregnancy. First we learn that Sasias's first wife died of child birth (a pregnancy that went awry). Secondly, Zira is full of Sasia's child and lastly Sasia has shot a pregnant rabbit. Three disasters related to pregnancy befall Sasia and this fills him with sorrow. Really he may have a reason to be worried bearing in mind that this is a society that believes in myths and superstition. However good leaders ought to maintain a sober mind in times of crisis. The way Sasia looses his capacity to think because his head is in a crisis as he says, is a sure sign that he is not fit to be a leader. Remember Sasia is a deputy emperor. The author seems to be telling us that such leaders cannot be trusted with national decisions especially when national disasters occur.

Zira on the other hand is portrayed as a nagging woman. Armed with the recommendation from the diviner that she should get married to the right man immediately, Zira forcefully confronts Sasia to an extent that he nearly looses his mind. She wants to protect her image so much that she attempts forcing Sasia into a marriage that he is seemingly not ready to hold. She is so excited with the prospects of being the wife to the number four man in Masero territory for today and after twelve years she will be the wife to number one man hence becoming what she calls, the 'empress'. She experiences sudden

mood swings that make her difficult to listen to her man and it is only when her moods return to normalcy that Sasia manages to convince her to wait until their child is born before they can marry.

On the other hand, she is portrayed as a wise woman who knows exactly what she wants and goes for it. Before she is pulled into the ignominious conspiracy by Sasia and Oriomra, we see her as a very respectable lady. And even after that, we see her battling to salvage her already tainted image by going for a confession at the palace and at the diviners. I would say luck was not on her side and probably that is why the author makes the owl welcome her to the shrine of god of peace, predicting a bad omen.

Again, in this scene we come to learn that Sasia is a date rapist who cannot be trusted with young school leavers. Zira has just left school the other day and here Sasia gives her alcohol and seeks cheap pleasure from her when she is drunk.

> Zira: When you gave me wine and I slept and you knew me in my sleep, was it not a crisis enough that you now call this a crisis? P.14

This character trait is used to cast a negative image on some African leaders who lure young girls to bed due to their positions. Such leaders, the author suggests, are bad leaders who have run down Africa by neglecting national issues to pursue their bodily passions.

Further ahead, Sasia believes highly of himself. His reflexive statement says as much, ‘Many people are planning their lives around ours or perhaps ours around theirs. Allowing us to affect them……’(p.16)

This statement ttells us that he is a man who sees himself as greater than others hence he is fit to be on top of all naturally. It serves as a backdrop for his ready acceptance of the ominous plan by Oriomra in the succeeding events.

Oriomra is again brought in this scene. Again note: He seems to come at the right time when Sasia's mind is clouded. As usual, he acts slyly to confuse him even further. At first one would mistake him for sympathizing with Sasia's plight for having shot a pregnant rabbit. But when he threatens to postpone their preplanned meeting because Sasia is not in the best frame of mind, we start sensing treachery. And it turns out to be because, Oriomra plays with Sasia's psychology and psyches in him feelings of tribalism and hatred for the refugees in their country that by the end of their meeting, Sasia is seething with hatred against Jandi who is seen as the beggar who wants to overthrow the hand that has fed him. We come to learn that Jandi is a child of an unknown father and Gibendi his mother took off from her native land because war had broken out when chiefs failed to agree on who would succeed their King who had passed on. So she sought refugee in Masero where Kaisia, Pamalika's brother, took her and made her his wife and also took care of Jandi (her son). Remember Kaisia is Pamalika's brother and Pamalika is Zira's father.

Things to remember in this scene

1. Oriomra uses a lot of lies to gain what he wants
2. Sasia is a gullible leader who cannot be trusted with national decisions
3. Zira represents the curious women who attach themselves to women because of their positions and not because of their worth.

Part One scene Three

The author introduces Segasega into the plot. The court clown, also known as old man sega is with the emperor at the diviners waiting lounge and he is engaged in a game of usurpation. The game works in such a way that if Segasega wins, he becomes the emperor while if the

emperor wins, he continues to rule. Remember that Segasega plays the game alone as the emperor continues to sleep on a safari chair. Suddenly, the emperor is assailed by dreams of his late fathers head tormenting him to which Segasega wonders,

> Your fathers head should be on your father's neck, your fathers neck would be on your fathers shoulder……p.31

Francis Imbuga once more exhibits his idiosyncratic use of dreams as a stylistic technique in conveying his message. The same stylistic aspect can be seen in his other texts like *Aminata* and *Burning of Rags.* In the dreams are hidden messages that the author wants the reader to get. For example in Emperor Chonda's dream, we get to understand that the problems of succession in Africa are primarily because rulers are simply afraid to hand over power to their successors. They must be forced using all means and that is why Imbuga makes the Emperors father torment Chonda in his dreams. This is a way of informing African leaders to willingly name their successors in order to appease the ancestors and most importantly to make and maintain peace in their territories.

In this scene, Segasega is presented as a humorous but intelligent clown who is well versed with the ways of tradition of Masero. For example he knows that Emperors are usually buried vertically when they die and not horizontally like ordinary citizens much as his position is marginalized as Ruganda (1989) postulates, he sometimes comes up with startlingly factual comments that we even doubt whether the author is right in calling him a clown. He also knows that the big man is not big without the small man for the small man calls the big man big. And for every big man, there is always a bigger one. His wisdom thus manifests itself for he naturally knows that the society is stratified (divided into classes) much as it may not be pronounced on the face value. Segasega then is the carrier of the strong message that the

author wants to pass to leaders. By making Segasega speak to the King with wisdom, the author is asking leaders to listen to even the lowest of the society. They may be the best advisors to them. Segasega then, becomes one of the voices of reason in the play.

Things to note in this scene

1. The characterization of Segasega as the elder and voice of reason is part of the strategies of transparent concealment that Imbuga uses to tell and show his message.
2. SegaSega's role as character includes also providing comic relief in otherwise tense actions as well as ascribing the play to the traditional African customs where Kings used to have food tasters
3. Another stylistic aspect that Imbuga uses is the dream.
4. The advice that the diviner gives to the emperor, 'Beware of darkness in light. Beware of your advisors.' This becomes very important later in the play as the plot unfolds.

Part two Scene one

This is the attempted murder scene where all attempts of assassination take place in the absence of the diviner who is OUT ON DUTY. The fact the diviner is out on duty is a paradox. We expect one who is out to be off duty yet the diviner is out of his work station but still on duty. You need to be very careful to unravel this mistery. This simply means that his being away is not accidental but preplanned. It is part of the unravelling of this strange disease that makes the emperor yell in his sleep.

Zira enters carrying a gourd which enhances the traditional Africanness of the play. It is also symbolic of the feminine nature of bearing of life. Gourds carry water and water is life. Zira's first

sentence I a kind of sing song, which enhances the stylistic aspect of orality in the text.

> Eye of the future
> I kneel before your presence
> And I beseech you to permit me
> To look you in the face.

This sing song approach attributed to this statement may allude to the fact that this is holy ground and that one has to sanctify not just him/herself but also his /her words.

Further into the scene, Zira swears by the Holy book which in this case may allude to the bible or the Qur'an. This could have been used to mean that modernity and western values have infiltrated Masero. When she reads the out on duty sign meaning that the diviner is not in the shrine, Zira remarks,

> I could swear on the Holy Book itself
> That I heard him cough as I approached.

It is only later own that we come to learn that the cough came from Jandi who all along had been hiding in the shrine. He is probably the owner of the mouth which ejected a dirty jet of water at the beginning of this scene.

This scene carries heavy euphemism. This is perhaps one of the visible concealments of the issues addressed in the text. This way, Imbuga tactfully cheats and escapes censorship of the text because he doesn't say things as they are. Remembers at the time of publishing this play, censorship was so rampant especially if the government authorities felt that a text uses words that incriminate the government of the day or bedroom words.

Beer is referred to as Omuhodo while sex is referred to as knowing one. Losing virginity is simply referred to as not being the same girl

(P.42). Elsewhere Chonda refers to incest as seeking low grade pleasure in the fathers house (P.50).

The stylistic aspect that is most glaring in this scene is the use of flashback and the fusion of the past and the present in one smooth flow. The scene starts with Zira taking to Sasia about the need to make a confession while Sasia is against the idea. Zira then flashes back to the events of the false testament she made against Jandi. This brings us to the trial against Jandi which is re enacted in a flashback but well fitted in the continuing plot. Zira recalls 'as clearly as rain from the skies,' how she stood in the witness space and shamelessly falsely accused her cousin of abominable sins. The trial in this flashback is actually a present trial but with Sasia in the trial box. Every bit of accusations leveled against Jandi were in deed committed by Sasia.

In the trial scene, note how Oriomra's wit is again used negatively to his advantage. Note how he leaves the exchange of bitter and nasty words fly between the Emperor, Jandi and Akiuso to go on for some time before he intervenes. And when he does intervene, it is just to let his victims bind themselves even further. Knowing very well that his prey is well entrapped, Oriomra goes forth to sympathise with Jandi and infact pretends to plead with the Emperor not to, 'torture him in this manner,' P.44. Oriomra seems happy that Jandi is well entrapped and he is simply jeering at him.

Another thing worth noting is the proverb that Kaisia uses in reference to the Emperors hasty judgement,

'If a king urinates in the bushes, even squirrels may see his manhood.'

The proverb is important at two levels. First, it serves to remind the Emperor that by making a hasty ruling, he is exposing his weaknesses not only to the weak ones, but to the sly and cunning ones as well. Remember in the African folklore, it is the hare, the fox and the squirrels that are bequeathed with traits of cunningness and wit. They

take advantage of other animals and trick them into doing outrageous and appalling things. Secondly, the fact that the Emperor doesn't understand it is a sure sign that he is unfit to be the ruler for what is a ruler who doesn't understand the wisdom of his people?

As the trial scene flashback fades out, Zira refers to Jandi as a big heart to mean he was a good man. It is here again that we learn of the implication of Zira accusing Jandi of incest. In this society, an incestuous child cannot be allowed to live and Zira's child cannot be an exception and this also helps the author employ African traditions in the play, 'Oh! My God! No no! Yes, I see it now. Jandi's child by you cannot live.' (P.50)

One wonders how comes Oriomra and Sasia are national leaders yet such small mistakes and oversights escape their plans. Imbuga is laughing at the short sightedness of the so called African leaders who make very grand plans but fail to put into consideration the basics of existence such as sanctity of life.

The author also employs cross purpose talking as a dramatic technique. After making Sasia understand that Jandi's child cannot be allowed to live, Zira slowly tries with little success tries to convince Sasia of the urgent need for a speedy action. But Sasia as stupid as he is, sees Zira's death as the speedy action that will put the matter to rest once and for all. This is where they go talking at cross purpose just before he stabs her. The author manages to bring this out by putting the characters in a dreamy intensity that is supposed to reveal the inner conflicts they are battling to control.

Sasia: There is only one way now.

Zira: Confession. It is inevitable

Check out how the word ‘inevitable’ is expertly added to Zira’s statement so that it acts as the cue to Sasia’s next word. Sasia concurs;

Inevitable

See also how Sasia is made to talk sarcastically while Zira is lost in happiness that her man has eventually seen her point of contention. Thus while she is in the dreamy intensity because of passion of happiness, he is in it because of deep thoughts of the implications of what he is about to do. No wonder he prays that the society understands his crime as having been an action of necessity rather than of villainy. Again the cue;

Zira: … the sooner I am relieved of this burden the better

Sasia; Yes the sooner the better.

Then hell breaks lose and Zira is maimed, just like the rabbit was maimed. Note this link of events of death

At that critical moment Oriomra emerges and tries to console Sasia although to his advantage. Sasia makes a request that Oriomra helps him give Zira a descent burial to which Oriomra turns down. Feeling betrayed by Oriomra and having lost Zira and their child, Sasia’s future seems bleak and the only way out is death. He suggest to Oriomra to kill him,

…….Here take it (gives *him a pistol*). Shoot me, I want to die (p.52)

Oriomra politely jeers at him,

‘No, Masero needs you.’

It is not that Masero needs Sasia as its ruler but as a victim who engineered the false plot against Jandi and later on killed the key witness. Thus, Oriomra turns the tables against Sasia and leaves him, accused while he walks out scot-free. With the realization that he can easily blame every thing on Sasia, he decides to eliminate him and accuse him of having committed suicide. These would exonerate him

from blame as well as permanently remove the only witness who can testify against him. Here the author tries to give a clue to the reader too understand why in Africa, witnesses simply disappear from the face of the world before they have testified.

And to crown his efforts in style, Oriomra sings his victory song then goes on to shoot Sasia. This song serves three purposes in the text. One it shows that the author is a master of using orality as a Dramatic technique. Two, it serves to break the monotony of the dialogue. Three, it tells us the callous nature of leaders like Oriomra who will sing and laugh at an unfortunate human being who they trample on in their quest for power.

In this scene, Oriomra is brought out as a representative of those dictators in Africa who rule by the sword, slaying all who are opposed to their redundant ideologies. They murder anybody who stands in their way regardless of the repercussions. The fact that he did not see Zira come round signifies the stupid oversight errors they commit while immersed in their acts of villainy (quote by Bukenya 1985, as reproduced in Ruganda 1989). Lastly this is a scene characterized by callous bloodletting activities. It is the climax of evil doing and presents a grim picture of the underground tricks that dictators in the contemporary Africa engage in.

Things to note in this scene

1. The euphemistic reference to otherwise disgusting or pornographic words, actions or suggestive dialogue.
2. The flashback as a dramatic technique, which helps the playwright to fuse the past and the present in one single smooth flow.
3. The cross purpose talking (between Zira and Sasia) as a dramatic device
4. Oriomra's characterization which is similar to those African dictators who slay their subjects

Part two Scene two

This is the last scene in which we have the denouement. The previous scenes have been loaded with gory incidents and this scene provides a relief. The shocking, almost unbelievable events of the previous scenes are laid to rest.

The scene opens with the Emperor once more showing incompetence as a leader. He is impatient with himself and instead of engaging his mind in matters of state importance; he simply creates odd jobs for the common man represented by Segasega. His dream seems to be his undoing because the visions of Jandi are again assailing him as he says

> It is no use, this game of patience,
> He comes, goes and comes again as before.
> Did I err in sending him to his death?
> Death? No, not death. I sentenced him
> To banishment, but he chose death….. (P.52)

As stated earlier, the author uses the dreams as a way of alerting African leaders that they are solely responsible for their actions and those of their cronies in their territory. A time will come when they will be called to answer for their actions.

Segasega's gimmicks that follow this tirade by the emperor act as comic relief to the grave events that have happened a while ago yet at the same time carrying important messages. In his comic manner, he talks of Chonda having inherited a palace that was built before the birth of democracy. This may mean that earlier on there existed aristocracy or autocracy where the leader could do as he wished without consulting and rulership was hereditary. Connected to this is the last page (66) where Segasega against says, 'If you ask me, that is what I call democracy. The freedom of mandibles.' He means that nowadays there is democracy or rather it is a democratic decision to let the people decide which kind of punishment to mete against Oriomra Segasega compares this state to previous stats of affairs where the King simply decided on which punishment to mete against an offender without consulting. If we pursue this point a bit further, we find that earlier on, the Emperor had meted a punishment against Jandi without doing thorough consultation. This proved to be a fatal mistake. Now when he allows people to speak without his interference, the people approve his decisions. Thus, the author is categorical here that a good leader should listen to his people especially when he/she wants to take a drastic decision.

The game of patience is invoked again, and just the way Segasega had alluded to the king losing it on the table, so does he lose it in real life. He loses because all along he was being misled by his Chiefs such that the only thing he can do is to except that he has been playing the clowns part. The author seems to suggest that some of these holders of national offices may not have sound minds especially when they are taking national decisions that impact negatively on the country.

Further in the scene, Emperor Chonda is again portrayed as a leader who doesn't know his people well. People appreciate what Segasega

says about the events in the country and in the palace more than they appreciate what the emperor says. Yet the emperor himself doesn't appreciate the wisdom that abound s in his foodtaster and that is why he dismisses his important words thus, '….a jester. A man without facts. Have his words now grown teeth that she should flinch when he speaks……' (p.54)

It is only later that he reveals that he was ready to name Jandi as his successor and the other chiefs knew it and that is probably why Oriomra decided to wrestle power before it had been passed to Jandi. In my opinion, it was Emperor Chonda's fault to let the other chiefs know that he had a soft liking for Jandi. Treating his senior ministers unequally must have brought this jealousy feelings and rivalry. This is actually seen in the wider society where advisors of president s who feel sidelined do outrageous things to receive recognition even if it is negative recognition.

The entry of Zira to the palace starts the journey towards revelation of truth that culminates into the exposure of Oriomra's activities. When the Emperor learns the truth that Jandi was unfairly accused and unfairly banished, he is so infuriated that he sends Zira away and swears to crown Jandi the chief of chiefs in Masero. One wonders, if Jandi is dead how can he be named a chief of chiefs? This is certainly one of the rashy decisions that make him unfit to rule.

Oriomra comes again and starts off with lies. Check on how he expertly tailors his truth to absolve himself from blame or any wrong doing. Earlier on he had lied and let off the hook but now he is lying to people who already understand the true state of affairs. His actions boomerang on him and he is exposed as the villain of the people.

The entry of Demokola and Ademola to the palace is sign that they are bringing good tidings. Remember that they went to the caves of hope and the paths of peace in the depths of the woods. It is from there that the vision of the seer on the wheeldealings of the chiefs was brought. This is a way of saying that Masero, despite all the pains it has suffered, has hope and a chance to regenerate itself. That is why all the people troupe to the shrine of god of peace to shake hands with the truth.

Things to remember in this last scene

1. The characteristics of Emperor Chonda that make him unfit to rule.
2. The author puts wisdom in a clown Segasega and foolishness in an Emperor. This is also part of the strategy of transparent concealment.
3. The unmasking of Oriomra's villainy required that Dr. See through beats him in terms of thinking before he could beat him in action.
4. The allusion to hope through Zira's confession and, Ademola and Demokola's entry and the fact that people are all going to shake hands with the truth

Activity

Summarise the play, *The Successor.* Pay particular attention to the important stages in the development of the plot

The Place of the Woman in the Society

The place of the woman simply means the role or part played by the female gender in the society. When studying a text of literature it is always good to ask oneself how the author has presented both male and female characters in the creative society he/she creates in the text. In the scene by scene analysis of *The Successor*, we have seen

that the author has presented the male characters in a balanced way. Let us now look at how the female gender has been created and presented.

There has been a tendency in African patriarchal societies to look at women as unassertive and any woman who tends to assert herself is considered negatively while a man who doesn't assert himself is considered womanly and inferior to the 'respectable men'. This state of affairs is well exemplified in *The Successor*. The societal arrangement manifested in the play is a patriarchal one. Such an arrangement ensures that women play second fiddle to men in terms of governance and decision making in the society and women in *The Successor* can be seen from this light. The women include Zira, Kaliyesa, Vunami, and Rita. The diviner's assistants, Ademola and Demokola, also have a role to play as women in the play.

The women are sidelined in the roles of decision making. Men pull levers of decision making unilaterally without seeking the opinion of women. The women only come in to implement the decisions whether good or bad. A case in point is when Sasia and Oriomra take a decision to eliminate Jandi from the race of succession. A woman (Zira) only comes in to implement the decision. It is Zira who accuses Jandi of incest that he is banished. This then tells us that women are used and their role is to facilitate and implement plans decided on my men be they dirty or clean.

Women are also seen as climbing ladders to success. They are used by men when men need to be uplifted. A case in point is the way a married man is seen as a senior in the society compared to an unmarried man. Chief Sasia is ranked lower to the other chiefs simply because he is unmarried. In *The Successor* a man is therefore measured by a woman and not by his abilities. In the society created

in the text, married men are considered mature and able of leadership because charity begins at home. If one cannot lead at home it would be difficult for him to lead a larger constituency.

Let us take this discussion further. In Masero, one has to be married to achieve a higher status. Zira confirms this when she laments to Chief Sasia,

> A man is not a man without a home of his own, and no man without a wife ever had a home in Masero. Why do you waste your time and energy working so hard, knowing well that the yardstick for a leader's capability is a stable home? For how long do you want to be called 'senior bachelor' of Masero. (P.18)

For this reason, chief Oriomra beats his colleague chief Sasia in rank because he is married. Therefore women are seen as facilitators of success for a man and not for themselves. In order to earn respect in the society and to be considered for a leadership role one has to marry a woman. One then wonders why married women are not given leadership roles yet they are married. This is open discrimination against women.

Zira's reaction to the revelation by Dr. See Through that she is pregnant says a lot about the place of women in Masero. First she is disturbed and ashamed and wonders what her mother will say. She admits, 'my mother will weep with shame and will not again look my father in the face.' (P.3)

Note that this is a gender insensitive statement because it means that a daughter is the shame of the mother when she is wrong. That is why her mother will no longer be free to look at the father because the father will regard her as having been the one who taught her daughter bad manners. Conversely, when a daughter does something good, she is the pride of the father and the mother is not counted. This can be explained by the reference as Pamalika's daughter when she dances

so well during the emperor's coronation. The role of then women then is to bring pride and honour to men and anything like shame belongs to them and them alone.

Question

Do you remember how dowry is paid in your community? Who goes for the negotiations? Who takes the lion's share of the dowry? Is it father or mother to the bride? And who struggles teaching the bride good wifely virtues? So in your opinion who should be receiving the brideprice?

Let us take this idea of dancing for men further. When Zira sings and dances with skill and grace at the emperors coronation so that she inspired many who were present, she was declared fit for a chief as Dr. See thro atones (p.2). I'm sure you would have expected that she would be rewarded by some long-lasting honour, recognition or gift for her valiant service to the state. But no, she is simply declared fit for a chief. Women thus get noticed for the benefit of men, especially when they are entertaining them; a woman is an entertainment tool, a tool for pleasure! How good a woman is at entertaining or providing pleasure to men determines which man she is prescribed for!

Women in *The Successor* are also denied leadership roles. In the protracted search for a successor, women are not given a thought. It is an affair about men; Jandi, Sasia Oriomra ….. and so on. Rita the only child of the emperor will not succeed her father simply because she is a woman. Emperor Chonda is even contemplating marrying another woman who will bear him a child (read son). In fact from the insinuations of what he says, one can deduce that the Emperor is eyeing Zira for a second wife to sire him a son who will inherit him. But he is annoyed that she has scandalized herself. The argument here is

that women are ignored in key positions in the society. In Kenya, you will recall that it was passed in parliament that women will be considered for a third of all government appointments. This dream is yet to be fully effected as we see most offices held by men.

Activity

In your opinion can women really be trusted with key leadership positions? Support your opinion with examples of women who have genuinely performed well when appointed to key leadership roles or those who have failed.

Further in the text, you will realize that women are despised by their male counterparts. They are dismissed as being excited by non serious issues. When Zira tries to impress on chief Sasia to marry her before it is known that she is full of his child, chief Sasia refuses and calls her insistence, school girl simplicity. (p.15) he brushes off Zira's efforts of proving to him the significance of his rank in the succession matrix as being excited by numbers because she had just come out of school recently. Thus her excitement is summarily dismissed as school girl nonsense. What women say is simply seen as nonsense that cannot be taken seriously. Now such an assumption is detrimental to the society because women are equal partners to men. A properly developing society takes into account issues and opinion of women because women are an integral part of any society. The idea of generalizing women as having mood swings or being naggy has permeated the society and it needs to be uprooted from the minds of many if we are to grow and develop from idea generated by women.

Question

Try to recall something a woman said in your society and then people dismissed it as women issues. Did the effects of whatever she said impact negatively on that society?

Look at the way Zira enters the stage when the play opens. She is carrying a water pot on her head and this depicts, among other things, the traditional roles assigned to women by the African cultures; those of being at the forefront in championing house related chores. You as a learned members of the society will reckon that the modern African woman has outgrown this idea of being bound to the kitchen because the social conditions require her input in various sectors just as it requires the mans input.

When Gibendi and Dr. See Thro came to Masero, they were refugees. Dr. See thro was given a shrine to operate from and to live there. Gibendi, we are told did not have any where to stay so she went from house to house begging for leftovers as she was on the verge of starvation. All that men did was to swallow saliva (admire her). It was Kaisia who took her and made her his wife and rears her starving son Jandi. You can see the preferential treatment accorded to the two refugees. Women are not enlisted for state support while men are. On the other hand Kaisia does not just take Gibendi so that he can help her because she is in need. Instead, he makes her his wife in exchange for protection. You can imagine what would happen if they disagreed? Gibendi will be thrown out of the house and out of the country. So she has to be very submissive.

Last but not least, let us look at the portrayal of Kaliyesa. This is the wife to the emperor who is just treated like any other woman in Masero. She is submissive to her husband and the Emperor and she

obeys his command. If told to come, she comes and if told to go, she goes. (Pp.30-31). Kaliyesa appears at the end of the play pleading for clemency from the Emperor to permit professionals to join the search for the supposedly drowned Jandi and if at all they find his body, she pleads that the Empreor allows them to bury it in Masero. Kaliyesa intercedes on behalf of Vunami the supposedly bereaved widow. This intercessional request on behalf of Vunami by Kaliyesa suggests that women are the gentle diplomats and motherly godsend helpers who come to the aid of the disadvantaged in times of crisis.

Activity

Go through the play *The Successor* again and identify areas where Ademola and Demokola, appear. How has the playwright portrayed them?

Essay Question on the Text, *The Successor*.

Imagine Oriomra was the Emperor of Masero, Write an essay on how you think Masero would be.

POLITICAL EVENTS IN UGANDA

As stated earlier, it is perhaps Uganda in the three East African countries that has suffered so much under political instability and military operations. After its independence in 1962, Milton Obote took over as the president. He ruled with relative stability until 1965 when ministers in his cabinet rebelled against the break-up of the monarchism such as Kabaka's and chiefdoms and the assumption of all state powers by the president. Obote responded by expelling them from the cabinet and when they organized a coup in the north he effectively sent a military officer Idd Amin to quell it. Amin did it satisfactorily and Obote promoted him to the rank of a full colonel. With time this new found relationship deteriorated because Amin was for the idea that the government heavily invests in the military while Obote diversified the armed forces from just the Military Army to paramilitary such as the General Service Unit and other special forces. This led to the 25th January 1971 coup d'état which was commanded by the then Major-General Idd Amin Dada.

Idd Amin's military rule in Uganda was ruthless and violent especially to those who were opposed to his rule. It is estimated that between 1971 and 1979, the period that the Amin's regime lasted, close to over 500,000 people are reported to have died with over 50,000 people exiled mostly in Kenya and Tanzania. The tribulations of such refugees are creatively captured in John Ruganda's *Shreds of Tenderness*. Idd Amin used the intelligence arm of the Military Force, the State Bureau of Research (SRB) to gather information and terrorize dissident voices within the country. John Ruganda also captures the activities of SRB in his creative works. *The Floods* and *Shreds of Tenderness*. The misuse of state machinery that includes the Radio, Newspapers (Gazette) and Police forces was also rampants during his rule.

Idd Amin's rules ended on 10th April 1979 when Uganda National Liberation Front (UNLF) a guerrilla outfit headed by Yusuf Lule, former head of Makerere University with the support of Tanzanian government forces ousted Idd Amin. Yusuf Lule was declared the president. But his rule was not to last as he was also dethroned by his ruling party and Godfrey Binaisa installed as the president. The removal of Yusuf Lule was basically because people thought of him and his team of leadership as people who ran away as soon as war broke and only came back to enjoy the hard-earned freedom when Amin was deposed. Those who had stayed to endure Amin's tyrannical rule saw the exiles as cowards who did not deserve to be in leadership position while the exiles saw those who had stayed as collaborators of Idd Amin. It is from this conflict that Ruganda creatively, imaginatively and superbly creates his text, *Shreds of Tenderness*

SHREDS OF TENDERNESS

Originally published under the title *Music Without Tears* in 1985, *Shreds of Tenderness* explores the historical period just after Idd Amin Dada's regime had been overthrown in a coup of a combined force of the UNLF and Tanzanian Military troops.

Amin's government had been characterized by murder, violence and bloodthirst against Ugandan citizens. Thus the disappearances or absence of certain important members of the family in *Shreds of Tenderness* is a literary manifestation of the histo-political circumstances of that time. The head of the family (father) represented by the portrait that hangs on one of the walls of the sitting room was killed by the government soldiers. One of the sons (Wak) of that family has just returned and naturally we would expect some celebration. But Odie is not happy about his brothers' return. The readers' curiosity is raised at this state of affairs.

As the play opens, Odie is busy engaged in an experiment with a termite in a jar, ice cubes and a bunsen burner. For Odie, the insect seems to represent a content head of state who is obviously too complacent to bother about the security of his own people. The author then brings in a second human character, Stella, sister to Odie and step sister to Wak. She is happy that Wak is back after ten years of absence. Odie is not happy with her because she fights for someone who abandoned them to suffer under the repressive regime that he reminds her that she has no otherwise but to side with him because "The Uterus rules the world". We later on learn of the atrocities meted against innocent individuals by the bloody regime. For example, Stella's school was raided and the army raped school girls and the nuns. Ironically we are also told that Stella has a romantic relationship with the man masterminded the death of their father and whose platoon raped the girls at the school.

In part two of the play, Wak is brought on the scene and the hatred between Odie a stayee and Wak the returnee is played. Revelations are made; Odie betrayed his step brother Wak when he was going to give a lecture titled: 'The Inevitable Road that will lead us back to Democracy' to University students in one of the lecturer halls. That is when he went to exile. As a refugee Wak suffered as much in the host nation which in the text alludes to Kenya. He is insulted and spat upon. This is brought out in the many plays within a play in the text. Secrets of the SRB files are revealed to Odie and his activities as a government agent exposed. The resolution comes when Odie agrees to pay the price of his actions by his death although we are not told if actually he faced the firing squad.

Implications of the Title: *Shreds of Tenderness*.

The word ‘Shred’ means a tiny bit or piece of something. ‘Tenderness’ refers to feelings of love, compassion, kindness, forgiveness and peace.

As shown in the play, these pieces of love and forgiveness need to be gathered for reconciliation and reconstruction for the purposes of a new beginning. The need for this reconstruction is seen at both the family and national level. At the family level, there has been strife, quarrels, and disagreement among the siblings, especially Wak and Odie. This is caused by issues such as the family inheritance, (pp. 20-22) betrayal (pp. 122-124) and the cold and hostile reception Wak gets from Odie (p. 77). All these issues are instigated by Odie and they cause disruption and bitterness in the family. Towards the end of the play, however, Odie gets to understand the reality of the intimidation and humiliation Wak went through as a refugee and he genuinely sympathizes with him and apologizes. This is brought out in the play within a play between Wak (a refugee) and Mr. No-Fear-No-Favour (Stella) (p. 117,119).

In addition when Wak comes back home after ten years of exile, he is not bitter with Odie and is ready to forgive him for betraying him to the SRB. He even tells him that he deserves the family inheritance since he remained behind and need the fort (p. 118).

Similarly, Stella makes numerous attempts to reconcile the brothers whenever they get into a conflict. She keeps reminding them that they are brothers and so they should stop fighting. “But you are brothers whether you like it or not. Hitting below the belt doesn’t work. You haven’t seen each other in ten years and the best you can do is jump at each other’s throat A brother is a brother man” (p. 58).

These attempts at bringing reconciliation at the family level are symbolic of the reconciliation and reconstruction of the entire country.

Due to the political strife in the country, there are cases of rape, executions and betrayal which show that citizens have little or no tenderness at all for one another. For example,

(i) Major General Ali's platoon raids a school and rapes nuns and school girls, Stella included (p. 31).

(ii) The SRB spies like Odie inform on their fellow citizen including friends for petty offences e.g. "Daudi's dog yapped at the presidential motorcade…" (p. 127).

Attempts towards bringing reconciliation in the entire country are seen through Wak who, among other returnees, has come back with the sole intention of reconciling, reconstruction and rehabilitating the entire country (p. 53).

The play ends on a note of hope for the future of the country. Wak forgives Odie. Odie admits his mistakes and is ready to face the consequences.

One can argue that the text tackles a national issue from a family standpoint. A family set-up is apt for representing a nation because a nation's basic unit is the family the success or failure of a nation largely depends how the families that form it are. From the family standpoint, we see the family members brave through great challenges.

However emotions of tenderness, of love, of compassion, of kindness and of forgiveness help them through to achieve a modicum of peace. Pieces of love ad forgiveness seem to be the most important aspects if one is to reconcile, rehabilitate and reconstruct a family and by extension the nation. It is good that we consider these shreds of tenderness both at Family and at National levels.

Family Level

The text presents a quarrelsome family. Odie has dislike for Wak. We really don't know why but we can gather that it is due to family inheritance (pg 20-22) a betrayal (pg 122-124). Odie seems to be interested in having all the property of their late father and that is why he betrays his brother to the SRB. Once he realizes that the brother has escaped the dragnet of SRB and left the country he declares him dead and hence manipulates his way to inheritance. Further tension is caused when Wak all of a sudden re-appears. Odie grabs him in a very callous manner and accords him a hostile reception.

Some Emerging Issues

Reconciliation

Some of the citizens who return from exile are ready to reconcile, reconstruct and rehabilitate the entire nation as shown in the following illustrations.

Pg 53Wak says that they have come back to reconcile, reconstruct and rehabilitate.

Pg 54Wak tells Odie to openly state what is bothering him so that they can all rest in peace and start building for the future.

Pg 73The ruling regime i.e. the Liberation Front is urging those in exile to come back home and has set aside forty thousand dollars for each family to help them reconstruct their lives from the ravages of exile.

Pg 117Wak reveals why he had to take to the bush "Not to save my little neck, but other people's lives."

It is suggested here that reconciliation is important before the work of rehabilitation and reconstruction can begin. Wak declares that he has not come back for the family inheritance but for reconciliation. Infact he tells Odie that he can have it all.

In the light of the foregoing, it is evident that after a system of governance that is oppressive, domineering and destructive, countries are still able to reconstruct their broken pieces and move towards reconciliation. This has happened in a number of African countries. For example, Sudan which has been war-torn for decades has at present made very remarkable progress towards bringing together the two warring factions i.e. Southern Sudan and Northern Sudan. Similarly Rwanda which was completely ravaged during the genocide in 1994 has almost brought to an end the animosity between the Hutus and Tutsis.

In the same way, when family members disagree over one issue or another, they should be willing to reconcile. In the absence of reconciliation, strife, be it the political or family level, can go on indefinitely.

Betrayal as a causative of family and national disintegration

Shreds of Tenderness borrows by inference from the violence witnessed in another of Ruganda's plays, *The Floods.* In *The Floods*, Ruganda compares the military regime to an ogre; and in the *Shreds of Tenderness*, he constantly revisits the violence that was witnessed time and again to confirm that it is in deed the cause for the dislocations/the fleeing of people that he creates in this play. For example Stella recalls that 'the ten years of genocide of the now fallen regime were characterised by, the music of death at dawn, death at noon, death at dark, shroud of darkness not needed, not nowadays.' p.10

From the play it is understood that Wak fled his motherland to escape death after his own brother betrayed him. The accusations brought against him are well captured in the telephone reverie Odie has on P.123

> Is that the SRB? Number triple one triple three calling… put me through to the major-general… I've got a curious case on my hands. One Wak Witu… he is becoming a bit of a nuisance. Threatening to give a talk on democracy and all that… yes, always seething with discontent… like all the rest of his intellectual colleagues… they must be hirelings of foreign forces. Marxist, I should say. Externally dangerous. Will arouse the public against the government… he says boss is a big ignoramus; that he is a village pumpkin… that he is dragging the economy to the doldrums, to utter chaos and ruins.

At that time Wak had not learnt of the wheel-dealings of his brother. Even when the three strange and mean looking figures come for him within the University premises, it is a combination of luck and his instincts and sense of escape that help him lie to them as he buys time to escape. Wak recalls, 'I met the trio. In the corridors of the social science building at the University. They had been sent to pick me up. I was going for my classes… excuse me, Sir,…. We are looking for a Mister Wak.' P.122

Upon discovering that it is him they are after, Wak senses danger. He lies to them by directing them to a room used as a store on the second floor of the building, as he prepares to leave. He reminiscences;

> Second floor, office number 213. he is out at the moment. Salaries section Main building. Or just in case he doesn't show up, checks him in the main hall at 5.00p.m. He is giving a public lecture on, 'THE INEVTABLE ROAD THAT WILL LEAD US BACK TODEMOCRACY,' so my gamble worked. I dashed home, put a few things in a plastic bag, got some money from the family kitty, left a note for Beth to lock up and go to the village, and I began the long torturous trek into exile. P.122

Elsewhere, we come to learn that the death of Odie's father was founded on betrayal. It is claimed that Odie actually informed the SRB that his father had committed treason. While going through SRB files, Wak finds this out;

> At the SRB, incredible. Absolutely nauseating. The reports, the false statements, Christ!.. 'Pepe spat on the president's portrait in a public bar. Judgement; 'let him face the music at once.' And report back it's been done.' No investigations carried out. No witness called. No! Just the auctioneer's final hammer on the bloke. p.119.

It is also discovered that Odie betrayed his friends as well. One of the SRB report files has it that a man called Daudi met his death in the most queer situations. His dog is alleged to have barked while the presidential convoy was cruising by and a case was opened against him and his dog;

> Daudi's dog yapped at the presidential motorcade… The dog, the first respondent is charged with treason and Daudi, the second respondent, with concealing his dog's intent. p.127.

In summary, the author shows that the present situation in the play *Shreds of Tenderness* is a result of the betrayal and violence manifested in the earlier years as captured in his other play *The Floods*. The actions and decisions of characters in *Shreds of Tenderness* are presently informed by what has forgone.

Plight of Refugees

The refugee problem is prevalent in many African countries. It results from unpopular and bad governance as has been witnessed in countries like Sudan, Somalia, Zimbabwe, Uganda, the Democratic Republic of Congo just to mention but a few. People have to flee from their countries due to political strife to seek refuge in other countries. In most of the host countries, refugees lead very unpleasant and difficult lives as seen in the following examples:

P. 86 They are accommodated in camps where living conditions are deplorable. Wak says "… there are ten tired, exhausted and hungry bodies slouched in there … This tattered shack is all the UNHCR can

afford for now". They lack basic necessities like water leading to unhygienic conditions. "Then the sweat, the stench, and water isn't for washing or bathing but for drinking only. If you are lucky to find it".

Pp 103, 106. They are abused, intimidated, humiliated and women are sexually harassed. They are referred to as uncircumcised dogs, cowards, mongrels etc.

P. 105 False accusations are levelled against them e.g. murders, forgery, impersonation, robbing banks, spreading venereal diseases etc. Ruganda explains the predicament of the exiles, presenting exile as diabolic. Through Wak, he laments of the treatment accorded to exiles thus;

> There is nothing as abominable as being a refugee... shouted at, your dignity lowered. Hell, man... from the sweeper to the highest official, they subtly remind you that you don't belong... a third rate non-citizen, always associated with hunger and deprivation and cheap labour... sometimes no one wants you to work. Your very presence is an irritant... if you do more than the nationals; they say you are buying your stay. You're living in perpetual fear of losing your job... you can never do anything right once you are a refugee p.80

It is also revealed that problems for exiles start with a first hurdle at the border where the immigration officers torment, rather than assist them. Such officers refer to refuges abusively as, 'tornadoes of stench'. A refugee is exposed to a humiliating body search for guns and illicit drugs and if the person happens to be a woman, she is sexually abused without regard to her education or social standing. An example is given of one Dr. Rugendarutakaliretigaruka, an academic of repute who is grabbed and taken for a 'quickie,' an euphemism word to refer to a cheap and hurried sexual affair by the officers. Wak laments;

> If you are a woman, every blinking idiot wants to paw you. The short term solution is to be permanently obsequious.

But why are refugees treated this way? Wak confirms that the reason behind this treatment is mostly malice, jealousy and sheer sadism. This is seen especially among the academic circle;

> The academics are the worst. Always engaged in endless prattle on lofty subjects which they half understand and… worst of all, they profess academic freedom but the moment you open your mouth or challenge their views, they feel threatened. p.81

If you tie this statement to the ones given above, then it becomes evident that the nationals habour malice, are jealousy against the exiles and seem to gain pleasure from tormenting these exiles because they consider them as outsiders who are a threat to their jobs. That is why they strive to make the lives of refugees difficult.

As seen in the play, it is important to note that anyone can be a refugee and so refugees should be treated with concern, sympathy and understanding. Mr. No-Fear-No-Favour who is a national of the host country humiliates Wak and swears that he can never be a refugee, yet when an explosion is heard, he is terribly frightened and has to turn to Wak who is a refugee for security.

Note

Therefore, there is need for good governance in order to avoid problems that may lead people fleeing their mother countries.

Gender Issues

The society depicted in the text is a patriarchal i.e. a society where woman are looked down upon by men. This is seen in the following examples from the play;

Pg 6 Odie tells Stella “Don’t shout, I hate it when people shout particularly women – sister or no sister. There is a tinge of disrespect for the women fraternity in the above statement. It is not that he doesn’t stomach being shouted at because as an agent of SRB, he was used to being shouted at by his bosses. It is just the way the society has conditioned him to look at women as members of the inferior gender.

Pg 129 – Odie’s father tells Odie that he is a perfect replica of his mother’s IQ. This means that he inherited his stupidity and miscreant behaviour from his mother. The underlying meaning is that women have bad manners that they pass down to their progenies which, of course, is not true. We cannot attribute the reckless behaviour of a child to the any one of the parents. This is a direct abuse to all mothers who in my opinion deserve better treatment than this.

Pg 81 – Women refugees are sexually harassed be it at the borders, at refugee camps or even at places of work if they are lucky to get employment. It is clear that when a woman is in trouble or when she seeks services, she is only allowed to access them in exchange for sex. This is belittling women and abusing their essence. It is regarding them as sex slaves and subjects. These are some of the practices that retard the social growth of third world states.

From the above illustrations it is clear that women in this society are not treated equally with men. The men despise them and abuse them as they please. It is interesting to note that despite the low opinion that men have towards the women, women are portrayed as more tolerant and more reasonable than them. Look at the way Stella has been portrayed against the backdrop of his brother Odie. They should therefore be treated just like men and be involved in nation building.

Note

There is need for the society to treat women with respect because they are human beings first of all. The author makes Stella a passionate, concerned, loving and reconciliatory character purposefully. This is meant to show that women are very important in the process of healing the wounds of feelings of betrayal and anger. Any society which ignores its women does so at its own peril.

Summary

From our discussion, do you think the text is relevant to the contemporary society? Yes it is because all these issues are prevalent in our society today. There are refugees in our society today. There are the gender issues, there are cases of bad governance and there are attempts at reconciliation in African countries as has been Sudan, Rwanda and Liberia.

Sample Revision Questions

1. With reference to *Shreds of Tenderness* discuss the plight of refugees.
2. Discuss how corruption has been brought out in John Ruganda's *Shreds of Tenderness*.
3. Odie is not justified in the way he treats his siblings and father. Discuss.
4. With specific illustrations from the play *Shreds of Tenderness*, discuss the character of Odie.

5. How important is Wak's return from exile in the play *Shreds of Tenderness*?
6. Discuss the effectiveness of the use of play within a play in highlighting the plight of refugees.
7. With illustrations from the play, discuss the relevance of the title *Shreds of Tenderness*.
8. Both the stayees and returnees are victims of poor governance. Discuss.
9. What is the role of Stella in the play, *Shreds of Tenderness*?

Further reading on this lesson

1. Imbuga, F. (1991). *Thematic Trends and Circumstances in John Ruganda's Drama.* Unpublished PhD Dissertation. University of IOWA.
2. Kyallo, J. (1992). *A Comparative Study of the Visions and Styles of Francis Imbuga and John Ruganda.* Unpublished M.A. thesis. Kenyatta University Nairobi.
3. Njogu, J. (2008). *A Literary Study of Dislocation in Selected plays by John Ruganda.* Unpublished M.A. project. Kenyatta University, Nairobi.
4. Ochieng, P & -------- (…….). *The Kenyatta Succession*
5. Ruganda, J. (1992). *Telling the Truth Laughingly; The Politics of Francis Imbuga's Drama.* Nairobi, East African Educational Publishers

Lesson Twelve: Conclusion

Having looked at the East African literary landscape in detail, it is worth our while to reiterate on some points.

All that we have discussed about the East African Poetry and Drama is by no means exhaustive. Even more important, is the fact that the selected texts cannot be seen to fully represent what already exists. Therefore it is upon you the student to read as many plays and poems from East Africa as possible. This will help you better your understanding of East African literary landscape.

Secondly, you may have realized that I have approached the texts from a contents point of view. I have specifically looked at how the content in the texts bear on form. This is not the only approach one can take while analyzing Drama and Poetry in East Africa. There are several other approaches and you as a student may want to explore some of this approaches. Other approaches may include looking at poems and plays from each of the three countries at a time. It may also include partitioning the plays and poems according to the dominant stylistic aspects. Additionally, you may also look at the significant authors from the different countries and their works. Therefore this is not the only way you can look at East African poetry and Drama.

Thirdly, I need to emphasize that in East Africa, there are so many playwrights and poets both known and upcoming whose potential lie undiscussed. There are versatile playwrights like, Okoiti Omtata, Jimmi Makotsi, Emmanuel Mbogo, Kuria Kanyingi, David Mulwa, Robert Serumaga and others. There are poets like Amateshe, Kabaji, Makotsi, Ndosi, Angira and others. The list is so big that we cannot enumerate them. Read about them and make your own judgments.

I acknowledge the fact that it would have been worth the while to look at Francis Imbuga's play *The Burning of Rags* under a lesson that could be called, Drama that praises African culture while his other play *Aminata* could be looked at under a title such as Drama on Gender in East Africa. Moreso Okoiti Omtata's play, *Lwanda Magere* and Nyambura Mpesha's play *Mugasha; The Epic of the Bahaya* could also be looked at under a lesson titled The Epic Drama in East Africa. Lastly a title like Emerging forms of Drama would have looked at plays like Taban lo Liyong's *Showhat and Sowhat* and Sibi Okumu's *Role play*. Under poetry, Emerging forms of poetry would have included poems whose authors use sheng language such as *What if I am a Literary Gansgta* by Tony Mochama and others. All these and many more would fit under the umbrella of East African poetry and drama. However I have purposefully decided to leave them out due to the course content limitations of one semester (in terms of time). Studying all the above would require more than one semester yet this course is supposed to be concluded within one semester.

But above all, do remember that there is the ever existent tradition of unwritten African Drama and Poetry in their various forms which have not seen the light of a pen and paper. What this means is that any mention of East African Poetry and Drama must recognize the fact that its length and the breadth is longer and wider than the estimated even within the writing (literate) tradition.

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