

An Analytical Study Of Thematic Concerns In Two African Plays: Shaka The Zulu By Fwanyanga Matale Mulikita And The Black Hermit By Ngugi Wa Thiongo

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ABSTRACT:

Drama does not exist in a vacuum. It hinges around life. Understanding a play text is basically centred on the commitment that the creative and interpretative artist scrutinizes the dramatic piece into parts that tells a story to its audience. The perception most people have about drama is quite uncanny as they trivialize the impact or perhaps the contribution it brings to the social, emotional and physical needs to the individual and the nation at large. The playwright or otherwise the stage or film director absorbs the culture of the society, observes the environment generally and discovers its peculiarities and makes the attempt to appeal to its audience some issues of concern in the society back to them in a medium that is appropriate-drama or play. The paper attempted to analyse the text of the two plays to ascertain some major themes that reflected the cultural milieu of the playwrights. With two plays *Shaka the Zulu* and *The Black Hermit*, the study employed textual analysis and interpretation and close text reading as the methodology in examining the themes of the two plays. The paper revealed some approaches that aids in understanding what a play text seeks to achieve in the area the playwright chooses his subject to communicate to its audience.

Key Words: Analysis, Interpretation, Playwright, Stage, Theme, Presentation, Audience,

Character, Author, Nationalism, Culture, Tribe.

Introduction

Analysing a play is a perception which simply means finding out what a play script is all about, it is also about getting the sense and feel of the play (Hodge, 1971). He further went on to explain the word *perception* as the stage director's total view of the play script after he has felt it in reading and examined the play text in detail. He concludes the process as a structural analysis which deals with tearing a play apart and in detail looking for the plays mechanics. In effect, play analysis heightens awareness of the internal structures of the script.

Play analysis can equally be defined as "the search for playable dramatic values that reveals a central unifying pattern that informs or shapes a play from the inside and coordinates all its parts (Thomas, 1992). In order to realise the meaning of the definition, Thomas, (1992) hinted of the need to breaking the play text into parts to understand the nature and its relationship to the society. He believed that the parts of a play are the parts which were originally created by Aristotle which are plot, character, dramatic action, idea, dialogue, tempo, rhythm and mood. Thomas further asserted that, conversely, understanding the internal nature of the play is crucial to understanding its external context.

In the opinion of Longman (2004) he intimated that people produced plays from scripts. They did so by analysing them. Whether or not they acknowledged it, every director, every actor, and every designer analyses scripts. In his view, every play analysed created instances and moments when a script was taken under examination.

Play analysis is usually done by very key and important theatre production staff and personnel including first and foremost stage or film directors, actors, light designers, sound designers, properties designers, stage hands, costume designers, stage managers, and among others. Understanding a play text or a script was the readers coming to terms with both the direction the playwright wants to lead into.

Theme (s)

A theme of a play text may be defined as the main idea or underlying meaning of a literary work. It is the message the writer of the text shares with the wider readers, audience and all interested in reading the particular text. We must also understand that a theme involves a clear statement or an opinion about a topic.

From experiencing a play and examining the various elements of a play we derive a sense of its significance and meaning. The word is used to designate the main idea or point of a play stated as a generalization. Because formulating the theme involves abstracting from it a generalizable idea, the notion of the theme inevitably moves away from the very details of character and action that give the play life. Theme is central, underlying, and controlling idea or insight of a work of literature, the idea the writer wishes to convey about the subject—the writer's view of the world or a revelation about human nature. Holman & Harmon (1986) orates that a theme is the central idea or ideas explored in the story. Literary, themes might be the subject matter or present itself or a message within the larger story. A writer presents themes in a literary work through several means. A writer may express a theme through the feelings of his main character about the subject he has chosen to write about. Similarly, themes are presented through thoughts and conversations of different characters. Moreover, the experiences of the main character in the course of a literary work give us an idea about its theme. Finally, the actions and events taking place in a narrative are consequential in determining its theme.

Theme is an element of a story that binds together various essential elements of a narrative. It is often a truth that exhibits universality, and stands true for people of all cultures. Theme gives readers better understanding of the main character's conflicts, experiences, discoveries, and emotions as they are derived from them. Through themes, a writer tries to give his readers an insight into how

the world works, or how he or she views human life.

The best way to think about themes is to ask how the playwright creates them. The following are different ways in which a playwright create themes as stated by Richard Gill (1985), the title of the play, how the playwrights presents his or her interests, how the playwright treats a common theme, the way the playwrights uses symbols, the way the playwright stresses important words, the playwright's use of moral words, the way the playwright's shapes the play, the use of important speeches, the use of important events, and the special treatment of ordinary, everyday occurrences. This list does not cover every single way in which a playwright creates his or her theme. The setting (s) of the play can also express its themes.

The theme tackles an aspect of the original intent of the play and carries across a message that relate to mankind (no matter where one finds himself or herself). Under its broad umbrella, themes can be grouped into four types namely; observation, moral lesson, criticism and statement. No matter the type the theme falls under, it should be universal; where people can associate with it everywhere on the face of the planet. It should outlive the world of the play. It should be a specific idea that gives unity and purpose to everything that happens in the play. The play *Shaka the Zulu* has a lot of themes some of which includes, absolute power corrupts absolutely, hard work and determination are the keys to success, vengeance leads to destruction, you reap what you sow, beware of whom you trust for not all who laugh with you wish you well, no condition is permanent among many others.

However, consideration will be given to the background of the playwright. It is crucial in the sense that the background which includes the experiences of the playwright to a very large extent informs the basis upon which some plays are written.

Background of Fwanyanga Matale Mulikita

Fwanyanga Matale Mulikita before independence in 1964 was first a teacher and later an education officer. His enthusiasm for writing led him to take a correspondence course in journalism but he graduated in short-story writing instead of newspapers. After independence he became a permanent secretary at the Ministry of Education and served with a like-minded Minister John Mwanakatwe, who was a well-known teacher. As an Educationist his main focus was to educate the young generation. As such he based his writings on historic events as Fwanyanga knew that he could get his educational messages to audience through creative writings.

Synopsis and Analysis of Some themes in the play *Shaka the Zulu*

The play *Shaka the Zulu* to an extent, projects the black man as one who can do things on his own without the intrusion of the Whiteman. The playwright portrays this through the character Shaka who single handedly built a powerful army as well as one of the most powerful kingdoms in Africa without the Whites. Mulikita through his play pricks the minds of black folks to stand out and start doing something with their lives and stop being dependent on the whites and external influences. The playwright introduces some white's characters in the play who are unable to make any significant changes in the life of the blacks in the world of the play. Instead, they rather steal from these black folks. In effect, the play makes us believe when we have trust in ourselves as black we can make it with determination just as the character Shaka made it.

Again, the play reveals how wicked people can be, once they gain your trust. In the play, Dingane and Mhlanga as well as Mbopa gained Shaka's trust but along the way, they assassinated him. The playwright to an extent is saying that, those in power must watch out for there are people hatching evil plans against them behind them. He warns that, such people may not even listen to advice just as in the case of Pampata trying to warn Shaka but no, he will not listen. This situation is very true about African leaders. In the sense that they are more often than not, betrayed and killed by their own trusted friends.

The play projects the struggles of African history. Mulikita had his tertiary education at Fort Hare

University College, South Africa, where he learnt a lot about the Zulu history and afterwards put it through the medium of a play text, so that everybody can read and understand the rich history of the Zulus culture. The play is telling its readers and audience that, aside the evil things that have been spoken about Africans, there some unique and good things about Africa that is not talked about, as the play historically portrays how a single man was able to rise against all odds and build and enviable kingdom in the whole of Africa.

The play in a way or the other encourages perseverance and determination taking a cue from how Shaka as a child had to suffer with his mother from one place to another but in all not giving up. The character in the play, Shaka did not. Instead, he saw his hardship as a reason to excel in life and he really excelled in life. Mulikita projected this in the play to make his audience change. The play is saying that, do not give up because of a misfortune but rather capitalize on that misfortune and rise up to the apex of your success.

Finally, Mulikita through his play '*Shaka the Zulu*' is saying that, 'do not set yourself up as god when you have power'. Shaka after becoming King thought he was untouchable and so he did things anyhow as there was no one to challenge him.

SHAKA: *I need no bodyguard. My name is my shield. Even the bravest men who approach me have their hearts turn to water. They know no will, but that of their King.*

Many people in our world today, put themselves so high when they have power. They will maltreat and manhandle others just to exercise their power. By so doing they put a vast gap between them and their subordinates. This leads to hatred and rebellion against the leaders.

Power corrupts but absolute power corrupts absolutely is a moral theme discussed in the play. King Shaka attains greatness and does no regard anybody, but does what pleases him. Shaka becomes obsessed with the power he had attained and so he set himself up as a god. After he ascended the throne, he tried to ensure that all his enemies were brought under his feet. In effect, Shaka's initial plan was to inherit the throne after his father but when it so happened that he was to as well inherit the Great Dingiswayo, he thought that was all and there was nothing that can move him.

Though King Shaka became one of the most powerful Kings in Africa historically, he subsequently became a tyrant. Thus, he was corrupted in his later days.

SHAKA: *Look, mother, all these are mine. They are yours too, for as foretold you have become the greatest queen Nguniland has seen.*

NANDI: *you are, my son the greatest of kings. [But she does not look very happy at what she says]*

SHAKA: *[who has not noticed his mother's expression] but this is only the beginning to their knees. And then that will be only another beginning.*

NANDI: *And yet I fear for you, my son. Not all our enemies carry a spear there are enemies in our hearts and bodies which defy all the power you may bring against them. Do not set yourself up as a god.*

Shaka had started to become complacent in his dealings and as such, his mother Nandi tries to admonish him to tread cautiously. But, Shaka does not understand and so he does not pay heed.

PAMPATA: *You must have a constant bodyguard around you, for people will suffer so much and no more.*

SHAKA: *I need no bodyguard. My name is my shield. Even the bravest men who approach me have their hearts turn to water. They know no will, but that of their king.*

King Shaka had gotten to the point that he thinks nothing can harm him. He sees himself as a god, thus, untouchable even if he was asleep. With this in mind, it is true that when a man gains absolute power he or she become corrupt.

A theme of observation in the play is that, hard work and determination are the keys to success. The playwright suggests in the play, that, once one determines and works hard, he will achieve positive results. Such that even though Shaka and his mother were initially abandoned by Senzangakona and Nandi's people of the Ifenilenja, they did not give up. Instead, Shaka was determined to succeed in life and so he worked so hard to achieve the success he hoped for.

KUZWAYO: *By our noble custom, those responsible for unnatural births are clubbed to death.*

SHAKA: *Perhaps it would have been better if both my parents had been killed before I came into this world, where life for has been a bitter burden.*

My father has been unkind to my mother, treating her like a slave.

This first six years of my life were overshadowed by the unhappiness of a mother I adore. When father dismissed us from Esi- Klebeni, we thought that life in Elangeni among her own people would be more tolerable. But here I am, constantly bullied and the facts of my birth thrown into my face. [So far Shaka has been speaking thoughtfully, almost to himself. Now he addresses the youths firmly]

I will not suffer for the deeds or misdeeds of my parents. My mother I love, and will protect with all the strength at my command. And I will not allow my birth to mar my present or future life. And I will not allow you to insult my mother. I have spoken.

MTEMBU: *Are you ready to fight, Shaka?*

SHAKA: *[Standing guard] I am ready.*

King Shaka finds himself in a situation of rejection and ridicule and instead of giving up; he fights out the problem to become greater in life. In his quest to become great, he goes an extra mile to make a change, thus defying tradition to become an outstanding figure in Zulu land.

DISGISWAYO: *Shaka I congratulate you on your outstanding performance in battle against the Butelezi. But I would like to hear from you why you have discarded your sandals which the rest of us value so much in battle.*

[Shaka steps forward and stands to attention]

SHAKA: *Your majesty, the great elephant, the son of Jobe, I have discovered that sandals are hindrance rather than an aid in war. They reduce speed of the warrior.*

DINGISWAYO: *But don't forget they protect his feet*

SHAKA: *It is true my lord, that they protect his feet. But the soldiers' feet should be hardened.*

This explained how Shaka worked hard to ensure victory on his side, thereby changing most of the strategies in their battles. This was the beginning of his greatness in the land of the Zulus and Africa as a whole.

Vengeance leads to destruction of oneself is a theme of observation the Playwright comments on. King Shaka in the play sought to have a revenge on his father Senzangakona and all those who maltreated his mother Nandi or opposed his chieftaincy. In so doing, he worked very hard to climb the ladder of success so that he can revenge on them. And truly he did as he had planned.

SHAKA: *You are condemned to death. And your going will not be easy. [He turns to the crowd]. You all know Mudli was unkind to my mother*

Nandi, a double sin for she was a royal blood. He poisoned my father's mind against my mother and thus caused the unhappiness that

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her at my father's kraal. EsiKlebeni. His hatred for me is well known. He influenced my father against me whenever he could. He even supported Sigujana as successor to my father, even though it was clear that I being the eldest son in the great house – Indlu- nkulu- should succeed my father Senzangakona. Even at Sigujana's death Mudli failed to extend a hand of welcome to me. You slayers there, make sure that Mudli does not escape while we consider other cases. [he turns to the guards] Guards, bring me all those who were cruel to Nandi or opposed my chieftaincy or both.

In this instance, Shaka had ascended the throne of his father and has started taking revenge on those who were against him or his mother. He subsequently became a tyrant so his brothers, Aunt and friends plotted and killed him.

You reap what you sow makes an observation of life. This theme stresses that, whatever a man does, he is either going to receive a reward or a punishment. In the play *Shaka the Zulu*, we encounter Mudli the paternal uncle of Shaka condemned to die as a result of his wickedness towards Shaka and Nandi. Similarly, we see Ntombazi also taken away to be in the company of hyenas. That was the punishment meted to Ntombazi for cruelly clubbing innocent people to death and hanging their heads in her hut.

NTOMBAZI: *I know I am ready judged. Proceed with the mockery of the trial.*

SHAKA: *True you are judged, judge by the deeds of all your eighty years. But I wish to hear your side. Perhaps you will persuade me to pass a sentence different from one I have in mind.*

This is where Ntombazi is finally captured and brought before Shaka for trial of all the evil things she and her son did to the innocent. Though Ntombazi had powers, she is unable to free herself with her powers. This means that once it is time to reap what you have sown, nothing can alter that. And so, when it even came to Shaka himself, nothing could change his life.

Another theme that can be deduced from the play is that, 'no condition is permanent', Mudli had his time with Senzangakona and at that time he had influence then. But when Shaka assumed power, he lost that position and the same could be said of Mkabayi, Shaka's paternal Aunt. Similarly, Nobela the diviner had done things on her own selfish motive without truly consulting the gods but subsequently, she was apprehended and executed. Finally, Shaka was nobody from the beginning yet he rose from nobody to the greatest king of Zulu land.

It may be evident from a careful reading and analysis of a play, many themes are discussed. One theme may be the dominant or the overriding theme that fully communicates, informs, educate and also entertains the reader or an audience. One of the main dominant themes which make an observation in life in the play *Shaka the Zulu* is beware of whom you trust, for not all who laugh with you wish you well.

More often than not, people in one way or the other put all their trust in friends, family or their loved ones. The unfortunate part is that, those who are trusted turns to stab in the back and betray their trusted friends. It becomes very painful because, these betrayals are mostly caused by people we least expected. In the play, Shaka strived to succeed in life against all odds, when he finally attained the success he had worked so hard for, he believed and put so much trust in his family members, Mkabayi, Mhangana and Dingani as well as in his friend Mbopa. Sadly enough, these were the very people who plotted against him and killed him. Shaka refused to adhere to the warnings of Pampata his lover. Trust, coupled with complacency made him think that nothing could harm him. As such, he saw himself as untouchable and yet the very people who were supposed to provide the much needed support and security as trusted comrades proved him wrong by betraying and ending his life.

MKABAYI: *Shaka is no longer, Shaka, but a devil whose lust for blood*

makes him destroy everybody. Fools will sit and cry over their past failures. Warriors mend their past faults by bolder action. Let us all swear that this month Shaka is assassinated. Dingane, begin.

DINGANE: (Fearfully but gathering his courage) *I swear by my sister that I will assassinate him.*

MHLANGANA: *Dadewetu, I promise the same.*

MBOPA: *To rid this country of a tyrant. I swear by all the terrible gods of war and all the chiefs who lie at Amakosini and all the dead who lie in Udonga- Lukatatiyana, that Shaka must die. I have spoken.*

MKABAYI: *No more words, but action. Let us go to prepare.*

These were the same people he trusted and protected from Nobela the Diviner. What is more, is the fact that, they swore to end the life of their benefactor.

Shaka believed and trusted his family and comrades in arms so much so that he closed his eyes from all dangers surrounding him. He was very optimistic that even if he will be eliminated it will not come from his close friends and relatives.

SHAKA: *Enemies? Who are my enemies, Pampata?*

PAMPATA: *They are like the grasses of the field. Who can tell them apart? But fear the one closer to you. Mhlangana, Dingane*

SHAKA: *My brothers! Pampata, your fears are foolish. Dingane's only ambitions are dressed in skirts! And Mhlangana- no! They have no grudge against me*

PAMPATA: *They would inherit your power, my Lord. And a strong leader could bend their minds. Blood is not always thicker than water. Dingiswayo plotted against his own father, Jobe and fought with his brothers. Nandi was spurned by her uncles, even by your father. Somebody may be whispering to your brothers that their lives are in danger.*

King Shaka believed and trusted his family and friends to the extent that even when Pampata tried to warn him against them, Shaka referred to her fears as foolish. Friends betray friends and there are people who will plan others downfall for no reason.

THE BLACK HERMIT

THE PLAYWRIGHT

Ngugi Wa Thiong'o was born on January 5 1938 into a large family near Limuru in Kiambu district, Kenya and of Kikuyu descent, he was baptized James Ngugi. His early educations were at Kamandura, Manguu and Kinyogori Primary schools then Alliance high school, all in Kenya.

Ngugi Wa Thiong'o obtained his first Bachelor of Arts degree in English from Makerere University College in Kampala, Uganda in 1963. During his education his first major play, *The Black Hermit* was produced in Kampala in 1962. He is a Kenyan author, his works include novels, plays, short stories, essays and scholarship criticism and children literature.

His other published works include like *Weep not child* (1946), *The river between* (1965), *A grain of wheat* (1967), *The trial of Dedan Kimathi* (1976), *Petals of blood* (1977), *I will marry when I want* (1977), *Devil on the cross* (1982) and many other written pieces of novels and plays. Ngugi Wa Thiong'o is currently a distinguished professor of English and comparative literature at the University of California, Irvine.

Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's acquaintances with certain social injustices and rebellions influenced his writings which reflected in the major themes of his early works. In growing up he lived through the Mau Mau war of independence (1952- 1962) and the central historical episode in the making of

modern Kenya. This encounter with colonialism is highly evident in his play, *the black hermit*. His acquaintance with a mission school in his childhood highlighted the themes on Christianity and African culture or tribal customs as portrayed in the play *The Black Hermit*.

Synopsis

The black hermit is a play that tells the story of a young man, Remi who was the first to go to the University from his village. He becomes a hermit in the city, visiting night clubs with his white girlfriend, Jane. Remi neglects his mother, Nyobi in the village and his brother's widow, Thoni whom he has had to marry under tribal custom.

The elders back in Remi's ancestral village anticipate his arrival to liberate them from colonial oppression as they termed the new ruling government and its leadership. Remi is also involved in a bit of politics though working as a clerk for an oil company in the city.

Remi vows never to go back to the village but the tribe does every possible best to bring him to the village. On reaching the village he blames the leaders for preaching tribalism and the Christians for condemning traditional beliefs and polarizing the tribe. He still ignores Thoni who later committed suicide and leaves behind a suicidal note proving her love for Remi. Remi now regrets his actions.

Thematic Concerns in *The Black Hermit*

The Black Hermit talks about a number of subject matters such as love, racism, tribalism, religion, nationalism, politics and education.

The theme of observation as deduced from the play criticises politicians not making good their promises after winning elections, thus, unfulfilled promises. Politicians deceive the populace and delude them by making promises that are never accomplished.

JANE:*Oh, promises, promises. I should have known what promises mean to you. You're like one of your precious politicians- they stand in front of the crowd and they shout. Give me your vote, and I'll give you shoes! But when the time comes, when you've got all you want, no shoes, no shoes!*

The dialogue in the play was said by Jane, Remi's white girlfriend in the city. Though heart-broken, she made this speech and attributed Remi's behaviour to the many politicians who solicited for votes from the electorates at the expense of huge promises. The playwright in this speech cautioned his audiences to be careful of the politicians who approached them like '*wolves in sheep skin*'. Politicians will lie to unsuspecting electorates to vote for them to come to power. After winning elections and coming to power these same politicians deliberately refuse to fulfil their promises to the electorates.

A statement of theme discussed in the play is never trust a politician. This statement is strongly evident in the play, *the black hermit*. The elders and people of Marua tribe believed in the humble charisma and the influence of their tribesman Remi, and voted into power the Africanist party. They supported and proved their loyalty to the party and the government in power over years but they gained nothing, only heavier and heavier taxation and no member of the tribe even was in the government.

A moral or lesson drawn in the play suggests that wisdom is not gained through western or the Whiteman's education only. Many people are of the firm belief that wisdom is only useful when one is educated in a classroom or when one acquires the *white man's education*. There is no gainsaying the fact that western education has not achieved its primary purpose of improving the social, cultural and economic conditions of any country. Culture of a people which is their total way of life is seen in their views about what they hold to be most desirable for their life's and those include their values in their perceptions of the universe and the postulation of some ultimate being or beings considered worthy of worshipful reverence and obedience, in the ways they regulate their social and personal relations, manage the affairs of their state. It may be their political systems, how they educate their children, the style of architecture, their style of dressing, the type of clothing,

what they regard as polite behaviour in society, their farming techniques, the habits and customs and system of rewards and among other things. The playwright is of the opinion no matter what type of education one has that one must also embrace the local culture as an avenue of acquiring knowledge and learning values that cannot be found in western education. We must always go back to our roots to pick out values and knowledge systems that will enhance our wellbeing in society and not become a hermit to trample on our culture.

NYOBI: *Education and big learning has taught him nothing, I am an old woman without learning or much wisdom. Yet I know what Remi has done is wrong.*

Most people who have earned any university education have a conception of acquiring more wisdom than the masses or illiterates. These 'so-called' elites mostly decline to critically scrutiny situations before handling those situations. Though they are capable of solving these problems, they hastily put up ridiculous and outrageous acts.

The theme makes a moral observation in life which reflects in Remi's attitude to inadmissibly refuse to reason with the people of his village, hence hurting their feelings and their desire to make him a leader in the village.

Other theme to consider maybe, a government in the independence era after colonial rule evokes tribalism. This theme suggested how the founding fathers or first leaders of independent states solicited for the development of their tribe at the expense of other tribes in a multi-ethnic country.

They tended to practice nepotism, tribalism, and favouritism. Thus, these people granted lucrative positions or contracts to members of their tribe or family solely. The way to nation building is for states men and citizens to be united, self-reliant and self-dependent. Thus, there is the need to accord a rebirth of the African culture in the world of technology, education and political reforms.

Ngugi is much concerned about the wisdom and power of traditional beliefs and Christianity. He uses this theme as a moral lesson which seeks to reveal the effect of two religious beliefs in an individual's life: Remi's behaviour, philosophies, way of thinking and dressing among others.

REMI: *(Then he sees the Bible, takes it, and also the small bundle left by the elders. He weighs them in both hands. He is clearly moved) these-these pieces of superstition meant to lure me home. Shall I find my peace and freedom there? These are part of me, part of my life, my whole life.*

Other themes stated are that, irrespective of your economic, political and social status, never forget your roots and your guardians'. This particular theme is an observation on life which showcased how most people are helped through obstacles to attain success with the hope of returning to lift those who helped them to higher plains in life. It is quite evident in the play that due to their selfish ambition and conceit, tend to neglect their helpers. Remi has become a *black hermit* in the city after the tribe helped him acquire university education with the home tribes' expectation that, he will return to the village to lead the tribe politically and socially, but Remi chose to become a clerk in an oil company in the city.

There is also an observation on religion, the religion of pre-colonial and post-colonial epoch. Before the arrival of the white man, each tribe or ethnic group in Africa had its own oral and practicing traditions and religions. This aspect of the culture made a tribe unique and the people bounded together in unity and purpose.

The advent of European colonisation re-instituted a new age of religion which was alien to local natives was introduced. Now a number of the local dwellers perceived the introduction of Christianity into local cultures to be the cause of tribal division and polarization.

As evident in the play, Remi's family with the pastor as Christian converts on one faction and the

elders as traditionalists on another hand. Another instance which attests to the relevance of this theme is where the elders and the pastor took separate spontaneous trips to the city to lure Remi back to the tribe. Both parties convinced Remi to return and upon departure, each visitor deliberately left a bundle of charm and a Bible on his table in order to lure Remi back to the village.

REMI... *These, these pieces of superstition meant to lure me home. Shall I find my peace and freedom there?*

A second instance to advance the theme is the character Nyobi, a Christian convert and mother to Remi, overwhelmed by the love for her son to return has blessed the Marua tribal medicine that will heed the elders on the journey to the city, now sought the help of the pastor for her abominable deed and to use the power of the Bible to make Remi return from the city.

NYOBI: *What have I done? I know Christ hates our medicine, suppose God punished me so that Remi does not come back?*

THONI: *But the elders are going?*

NYOBI: *I know, it needs the power of Christ together with the power of the tribe to bring back Remi.*

The play, *the black hermit* demonstrates in addition a theme of observation which cautions about our loyalty to our tribes and culture. The theme elaborated the essence of extended family system and the African's belief of bond by a common social network. Each ethnic group knows that the singular success of a member is to the paramount benefit of all the people of the tribe.

An indication in the play is the joyous anticipation of the return of Remi to the tribe. Remi the sole outstanding and educated youth of Marua tribe has acquired a university degree. While in school, he crusaded to win the franchise of his people to vote and join the Africanists party that is now in power. But he quit politics after school, lived in the city away from his family and tribe.

The tribe retrogresses after Remi's sudden resignation from politics and his absence in the village. His family, his elders and the people of the village realizing their bondage under the new government hence pursued Remi's to lead them politically to found a new political party or acquire a reputable and lucrative position in the government to enable the tribe enjoy social amenities like the other tribes.

1ST ELDER:*You asked us, your tribe, to support the Africanist party.*

LEADER: *We want a tribal political party.*

1ST ELDER: *A prime minister from the tribe.*

2ND ELDER: *A husband to all the land*

PASTOR: *The children of God want you. And Christ calls you to lead them to the cross.*

REMI: *I must now rise and go to the country for I must serve our people, save them from traditions and bad customs....*

The play, *the black hermit* was to unearth the resurgence of the African culture in the post-independence and post-colonial era of Kenya and Africa as a whole. This themes are universal and cuts-across the entire continent of Africa. In the days of colonialism, the advent of European culture peculiarly Christianity and education into Africa was an attempt to widely wipe-off the African culture entirely, for the fact that the African culture had no documentation except through oral and practice. Most of the traditional practices were condemned to be barbaric including the religion of the indigenous people. The perception created a more in-depth conflict throughout colonial days to the period of post-independence.

ELDER: *Do you still believe in what the white- man said? He said our medicine was bad, bad! Some people were easily deceived, even now, four full years after independence, they have not discovered the lie.*

Post-colonial writers usually attempted to form a post-colonial version of their own countries, rejecting the modern and the contemporary, which is tainted with the colonial status of their nations. This is the awareness of the representations of the non-European as exotic or immoral other. Post-colonialism therefore examined the representation of cultural diversity and its treatment in literary texts. Post-colonial literary theory is applicable to the understanding of Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's *the black hermit*, especially the phase of protest and cultural self-assertion. It is the phase of western criticism and agitation of cultural, economic and socio-political independence.

As an African play, *the black hermit* dwelt on the problems of the post-colonial Kenyan society. The themes of the play centred mostly on the conflict between African culture and the western culture as well as the conflict between the Christian ideology and the traditional religious doctrine. In the play, Remi, the archetypal educated elite, embraced alien culture and became alienated. He allowed himself to be assimilated and he "assimilated". He was forced to look down on his own people. Being the first university graduate in his village, he now considered the tradition of husbanding his late brother's wife as barbaric. What he preferred was to marry a white lady, Jane, in the city. In order to call Remi back home for political leadership, the village elders devised the means of traditional magic power, while his mother, Nyobi, consulted to use the power of the Bible. The pastor represented the Christian ideology. The missionaries championed western education by teaching religion alongside education.

Ngugi Wa Thiongo also reacted against the established authorities and value of the colonists in the play. The problems of taxation, oppression, forced labour and abuse of power became the bane of national development in post-colonial African society. It is emphasized in the play that tribalism always prevents people from advocating for societal development.

In the play, Ngugi hammered the question of what (*Uhuru*) independence has brought to the people. Although politically free, the people are still in social bondage- of tribalism, culture, economy, and religion as patterned by the colonialists.

Like other post-colonial writers, Ngugi used the play *the black hermit* to reclaim the African past and erode colonial ideology by which the past has been devalued. In the play, Remi goes into self-

imposed exile in the city. He later claimed to be tired of the city. This suggests a sense of nostalgia or homesickness.

Such other post-colonial issues as disillusionment, tribalism and racism versus nationalism are portrayed in the play. The two sides involved in this conflict are family, tribe and race on the one hand and the whole nation on the other. The playwright condemned factionalism at

LEADER: *Look at our country since independence. Where is the land? Where is the food? Where are the schools for our children? Who of our tribe is in the government? Who of our own flesh and blood can be seen in long cars and houses built of stones? Our tribe waits under government composed of other tribes. What has Uhuru brought us?*

Religion, tribalism, racism, corruption and many others are not cures to the ills of the society or nation, rather nationalism, self-reliance and dependence, unity in a multi-ethnic state and equal sharing of the national cake.

Conclusion

Understanding a play text either for the reading pleasure or for an interpretation of a script for a stage performance or a film production is an exciting adventure with immense benefits. Apart from enhancing the readers or a director's capacity to initiate a successful and enjoyable acceptance of the play, it also arms the reader thoroughly with confidence and an unshakable deep knowledge base in meeting any demand in the areas of dramatic criticism and dramatic literature.

Understanding a play text hammers on analysis and interpretation no matter the challenges

associated with penetrating a text. The discussion centred on looking at themes in two major plays. The various expositions on themes in this paper has the tendency of helping in equipping all and sundry especially students in the area of understanding what a theme is, how the playwrights are able to weave intricate conflicts and dialogues successfully to tell their stories.

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