THE DEATH MOTIF IN JOHN RUGANDA'S SELECTED PLAYS

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Declaration

This project is my original work and has not been presented for a degree in any other University.

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This project has been submitted for examination with our approval as university supervisors.

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Dedication

This work is dedicated:

(i) To the late Mr. Bernard Kakinda, my benefactor, guardian, teacher, mentor, founder, proprietor and Headmaster, St. Bernard’s College – Kiswera, Masaka Uganda.

and

(ii) To the Kasigwa lineage.
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Abstract

This study explores the treatment of the theme of death, its creation, portrayal, use and significance in John Ruganda’s drama. It contributes a new and deeper insight into John Ruganda’s works. He, John Ruganda, uses death as a running motif around which he builds his drama and articulates societal thematic concerns. The relationship between content and form within the literary theory of structuralism informs the conceptual framework of this study. The methodology is basically analytical and library-based. John Ruganda’s six selected published plays are primary sources. Secondary data is collected from critical material on John Ruganda’s works. Unstructured informal face to face interviews and discussions from scholars who have interacted with John Ruganda and his works provide field data. This research also explores the various concepts of death and examines the causes and use of various manifestations of death as a leitmotif in his drama. John Ruganda utilizes unique dramatic techniques: a minimal cast and storytelling, African folklore and mythology, role playing and fantasy projection within a one confined symbolic setting and use of language and symbolism. These were analyzed and the results established that they provide a reflection of the reality of a life of a people bedevilled by death in a society he deals with in his drama.
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1.0 CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the study

This study investigates the motif of death in John Ruganda’s drama. It interrogates how he perceives death, defines and presents it in some of his plays.

This work also investigates what Ruganda gives as the causes of death as defined from various perspectives whether they are motivated by natural causes or whether they are self-inflicted through human folly in his drama.

It is significant to note that this research examines whether John Ruganda uses the death motif to enhance the role of literature in society. According to Ngugi (Writers in Politics 6) literature is a reflection of social and historical reality and part of man’s self-realization—what William Shakespeare calls mirror unto nature. This study therefore examines whether John Ruganda uses the theme of death as a running motif, to reflect the historical reality, the socio-political and cultural struggles and survival in a hostile totalitarian historical and political dispensation:

A work of art is basically persuasive and is a vehicle for attitude change to take action or see life in a new light, it’s not purely cognitive, it’s emotive, it’s affective. (Ngara 11)

This study explores various definitions of death. For instance:

According to the Oxford Learners Dictionary, Physical death means “the end of life or the state of being dead” (p. 376)

The theological Christian perspective attributes sin to spiritual death including death of conscience:

(Griffith 5) posits that the entrance of sin into the world is a transgression of the law or more literary, sin is lawlessness. Sin also affects man’s
nature. It results in the darkening of the intellect, the deadening of conscience, the defilement of the heart, and distortion of the will. Sin also hurts man’s relation to his fellows, causing animosity, hatred, malice and other sins against love. Lastly, sin issues in spiritual death, the separation of soul and body from God for ever more. Physical death is defined as the separation of the soul from the body while everlasting death is the separation of body and soul from God forever.

From the African point of view, (Mbiti, *African Religions and philosophy* 157), “Death is conceived of as a departure and not a complete annihilation of a person. He moves onto join the company of the departed, and the only major change is the decay of the physical body, but the spirit moves on to another state of existence.” The African traditional concept of death is that physical death is not the end of life. Man’s life here on earth is temporary and ontological. Man’s real home is the spirit world (Mutuh 138 - 139). These spirits are endowed with supernatural powers interceding and supplicating on behalf of the Living (Ayasi 78).

The burial rites usher the person home to the spirit-land where he joins the ancestors. The spirit of the dead becomes restless and confused in the spirit world and may haunt the living if it did not get a proper burial (Mutuh 80, 143).

Human beings keep the relationship going between them and the living-dead chiefly through libation, offering of food and other items, prayers and observation of proper rites towards the departed or instructions from them. (Mbiti, *African Religions and philosophy* 162 – 163).

Indeed death is a monster before whom man is utterly helpless. Death is inescapable. It is an individual affair in which nobody else can interfere or intervene. This is the height of death’s agonies and pain, for which there is no remedy nor escape as far as African concepts and religions are concerned (p 158).

This study interrogates the extent to which John Ruganda consciously or unconsciously uses these definitions and any other emerging definitions of death from his writings.
Whether Ruganda defines death either overtly or covertly, the study explores how Ruganda represents it.

Therefore, this research examines whether John Ruganda’s use of the death motif fulfills this role in his drama as a persuasive piece of art for sensitization and positive change of attitude for a better society. It also seeks to conclude whether the death motif in John Ruganda’s drama is a running thread around which he communicates his message and commentary on the socio-economic, cultural and political concerns in a society he deals with.

Here reference is made to Kwitonda J. Claude’s undergraduate project: The Treatment of the Theme of Death In Seven Selected Works of Francis Imbuga 2005. Kwitonda explores the treatment of the theme of death. Its causes and effects and how death is used by political leaders to tyrannize and subdue the citizens. But he also looks at death as a necessary evil to achieve poetic justice by eliminating evil from society as exemplified by Mulili in Betrayal in the City. This study relates to Kwitonda’s work in that it examines how death is used as a tool to intimidate or eliminate real or perceived enemies by politicians. Death is therefore caused by human folly. However, this research differs from Kwitonda’s in that it examines death as a leitmotif in John Ruganda’s drama.

Sambai C. Carlyn’s M.A. research: Violence and Memory in John Ruganda’s, The Burdens and The Floods, explores death through violence for self preservation and as a tool for political leaders to perpetuate themselves into power. This reflects the genesis of the problem in John Ruganda’s drama which is one of the causes of death in a society he depicts.

1.2 Statement of the problem

Although John Ruganda is one of the renowned playwrights in East and Central Africa, and being aware that much critical work has been written about his works, this study is a collective analysis in a single critical study to examine the theme of death as a running
motif in his drama. This is a generic study that focuses on the creation, development, treatment, interpretation and use of the theme of death. It examines the concept of death from the African traditional and Christian perspective. This study is a departure from others because it examines to what extent John Ruganda is pre-occupied with the theme of death and why death seems to be a gravitating focal point around which he builds his dramatic action. It also examines how the theme of death controls the story, influences dramatic conflict and development of related societal thematic concerns in his drama that is built on the theme of death as a leitmotif.

1.3 Aim and Objectives

The aim of this research is to analyze the portrayal and use of the death motif in John Ruganda’s drama. The main objective of this study is to explore the development, treatment, interpretation and purpose of death as seen from various definitions, concepts and perspective in John Ruganda’s drama. In order to analyze the portrayal and use of the theme of death in John Ruganda’s drama, the study focuses on the following objectives:

(i) To identify the various concepts of death and their causes.

(ii) To examine the effect of death on characterisation, plot and language in John Ruganda’s drama.

(iii) To analyze the relationship between death and emerging themes in John Ruganda’s drama.

1.4 Research Questions

The study responds to the following questions:

(i) What are the various concepts of death and their causes in John Ruganda’s drama?

(ii) To what extent does content (theme of death) affect form (plot, characterization, language) in John Ruganda’s drama?

(iii) How does death advance other related themes in John Ruganda’s drama?
1.5 Research Assumptions

The following assumptions guide this study that focuses on the portrayal and use of the death motif in John Ruganda’s drama:

(i) That there are various manifestations of death with different causes.

(ii) That the theoretical framework of structuralism and literary criticism is effective in analyzing the treatment of the theme of death as a leitmotif in Ruganda’s drama.

(iii) That death as a recurring motif is core towards exploring other related themes that reflect societal concerns in John Ruganda’s drama.
1.6 Literature Review

Since this study explores the development, portrayal and use of the theme of death as a leitmotif in John Ruganda’s drama, this literature review is a survey of the theme of death, its definition, causes and its treatment as looked at in the critical works on John Ruganda’s drama. The general observation is that some of these works are mainly student guides centred or individual works such as *The Floods, The Burdens* and *Shreds of Tenderness*.

However, some of the researched material on John Ruganda’s drama examines the definitions and causes of death, physical and symbolic and dramatic techniques such as the dramatic structure including use of symbolism to depict societal concerns in his drama. But there is no generic comparative study that examines various manifestations of the theme of death as a running motif in John Ruganda’s plays as this study does.

1.6.1 Manifestations of Death: Definition, Causes and Treatment

In his guide to John Ruganda’s *The Floods* (1980), Bukunya Austin has written some in depth criticism of the play. The totalitarian regime of Idi Amin Dada in Uganda marked “an advent of murderous political dictatorship which turned on their own citizens, killing and brutalizing them with the viciousness of preposterous monsters” (Bukunya 8).

Although Bukunya points out the mass killings of citizens that were brutalized and many dumped in the lake, he neither dwells on the theme of death as a running motif around which Ruganda builds his drama nor does he make a comparative study with other plays by John Ruganda in respect of the death motif as this study does.

Both Mweseli Monica’s and Wanjala John’s *A Comprehensive Study of John Ruganda’s Shreds of Tenderness* (2005), have in passing mentioned the theme of death and futility in *Shreds of Tenderness* without looking at death as a leitmotif and without comparing this to other plays by John Ruganda.
Gikunda Njogu Jackson’s MA Thesis: A Literary Study of Dislocation in Selected Plays by John Ruganda (2008), Kenyatta University, focuses basically on factors and effects of dislocation centred on influx of refugees due, for instance, to volatile political polity. Although brutal death is one of the reasons for dislocation, the study does not treat the various concepts of death and as a motif in John Ruganda’s drama.

Sambai C. Carolyn’s MA research report entitled Violence and Memory in John Ruganda’s the Burdens and the Floods (2008) University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, explores the theme of violence and use of memory. Her study examines the perpetration of violence against the defenseless citizens during Idi Amin’s dictatorial rule as a tool to perpetuate military dictatorship into power. Memory is used as a tool of narration to reconstruct and re-live the past life as a means of escapism. The study investigates violence and memory in two plays; The Burdens and The Floods and does not explore the various concepts of death from the African traditional and Christian perspective but this comparative study investigates the theme of death as a motif across the six selected plays by John Ruganda.

Erapu Laban Notes on John Ruganda’s The Burdens (1977) treats such themes as domestic strife and family disintegration, the struggle to survive, politics and politicians. These themes are based on The Burdens without a comparative study with other plays by John Ruganda.

Olo O’s, A Comprehensive Guide to John Ruganda’s Play The Burdens (1999), is a general guide to assist students interpret The Burdens. Although he treats such themes as suffering, poverty, human relationships, immorality, revenge, change and exploitation, he does not examine death as a running motif in the The Burdens. Olo, like Erapu, does not make a comparative study of The Burdens with other John Ruganda’s plays.

Nazareth Peter’s analysis entitled “Waiting for Amin: Two Decades of Uganda Literature”. (Ed) by Killam G. D., The Writing of East and Central Africa (1984), analyses Black Mamba as a play dealing with high level corruption and sexual immorality in academic
institutions involving a white Professor Coax. In *Covenant with Death*, Nazareth identifies alienation that has set in traditional society. In *The Burdens*, he identifies corruption, poverty and a sense of hopelessness that destroy the family. In *The Floods*, Nazareth sees the State Research Bureau (SRB) as a bloody thirsty machine that brutalizes the people during Idi Amin’s regime. Nazareth does not examine the theme of death as a running motif that propels John Ruganda’s drama in the four plays he analyzes.

Francis Imbuga in his PhD thesis entitled: *Thematic Trends and Circumstance in John Ruganda’s Drama* (1991), describes Ruganda as a socially sensitive writer whose style is influenced by Athol Fugard. Imbuga’s dissertation deals “with the identification, establishment, and interpretation of the main themes: political commitment or lack of it, domestic strife and tension and the immorality of poverty, treated successively” (Imbuga 15). Neither does Imbuga treat the theme of death as a running motif in John Ruganda’s drama nor does he identify the various concepts of death as seen from the African traditional and Christian perspectives as this study does.


Ciarunji Chesaina’s PhD thesis entitled *Women in African Drama, Presentation and Role* (1987) analyses the role of female characters. They are presented as inferior in a patriarchal African society. “Women in African Drama” is too wide a topic. Chesaina examines Ruganda’s portrayal of two women only in one of the chapters in her dissertation. She is pre-occupied with gender and does not focus on death.

Obyerodhyambo’s MA Thesis; *Symbolism in The Drama of John Ruganda* (1990), University of Nairobi, examines various aspects of symbolism that bring out themes in John Ruganda’s drama. He concludes that John Ruganda’s symbols are obtained, for example, from elements of African folklore such as mythology and story telling. Examples
cited are the myths of Kaikara, the goddess of fruition, Nalubale, the goddess of the lake and the legend of Ngoma, the paramount chief with his daughter Nyenje. Although he points out barrenness and violation of nature, he does not focus on the theme of death as a running motif in Ruganda’s drama.

Peter Omondi Akwiri’s research project on **Portrayal of Death in Margaret Ogola’s novel: The River and the Source (2007)** - Maseno University, posits:

Death is a subject of everyday social discourse...death is both an individual and communal phenomenon that affects not only the bereaved family but also the community as a whole...death is the only thing that happens to every human being at one time or another and that is not a positive aspect of human life. Death is a pet theme not only of social discourse but also of constant preoccupation of literary artists who are constantly reflecting on human life.

This study therefore examines the theme of death which is a constant preoccupation and tool of John Ruganda in depicting societal concerns tailored along the theme of death as a leitmotif through his drama.

1.7 Justification of the Study

There are unique issues raised in this study that focuses on the exploration of the portrayal, analysis and purpose of the theme of death as a running motif in John Ruganda’s drama. This research adds new knowledge to the existing literary critical works on Ruganda, particularly so because it provides more insight into Ruganda’s drama that consciously or unconsciously is built on the Death Motif that holds his drama together. It also serves as a motivating factor to inspire other scholars to examine the Death Motif in other literary works by other African writers that may have the theme of death as a leitmotif through their writing. An exemplification of this kind of inspiration is Kwitonda John Claude’s **The Treatment of the Theme of Death in Seven Selected Works of Francis Imbuga** (2005), Undergraduate Project, Kigali Institute of Education (Rwanda).
1.8 Theoretical Framework

This study employs the literary theory of New Criticism which advocates the notion of literature as an aspect of biography, psychology or literary history related to concrete "real life" of author and audience. (Hawkes 128).

A close look at John Ruganda's drama depicts Ruganda as a playwright that portrays real life situations from the inside. His biographical background and the political events of his country Uganda during Idi Amin's autocratic regime influence his drama which articulates the truth of the socio-economic, cultural and political issues of society he depicts in his plays. The psychological trauma and the historical events reflect the real life experience of the author that he shares with his audience.

This New Criticism theory that advances "real life" experience will fill the gap that makes it necessary to integrate it with structuralism (Douglas 1989) as a literary theory that examines how language and literature convey meaning through the recognition that communities which share textual history reach consensus about meaning because they share codes and conventions of expression. Structuralists examine internal structures within which meaning is expressed and how they are organized. Ferdinand de Saussure influenced formalism that reduced narratives to basic functional units which are antecedent of literary structuralism. For example (Egleton 104) Vladimir Propp in his Morphology of the Folktale (1928), identified the role of characters and the structure of folktale.

Theory is the process of understanding what the nature of literature is, what functions it has, what the relation of a text is to author, to reader, to language, to society, to history. It is not judgment but understanding of the frames of judgment (Lye John, "The Differences between Literary Criticism" April 22, 2008).

One of the structuralist scholars Saussure Ferdinand (Egleton 96-97) observed that perception of all reality seems to be structured by language. Structuralism (p 94) is concerned with structures and with examining the general laws by which they work. The
individual units of any system have meaning only by virtue of their relations to one another. Literature was in some significant sense cognitive, yielding a sort of knowledge of the world.

Northrop Frye (p 92) insists that literature is an “autonomous verbal structure” which contains life and reality in a system of verbal relationship. Literature is an expression of those fundamental human desires but which are not fully satisfied. Structuralism is basically analytical. It is a calculated affront to common sense. It refuses the ‘obvious’ meaning of the story and seeks instead to isolate certain ‘deep’ structures.

Structuralism does not take the text at face value, but “displaces it into a quite different kind of object. The content of the narrative is its “structure”. Its “subject” is its own internal relations, its own mode of sense-making. The implicit assumption of the structuralist (Ray 110) is that events, phenomena and objects are culturally functional only to the extent that they have meaning. Objects that have meaning are by definition social phenomena best understood in terms of the shared structures through which that meaning constitutes itself. Structuralism (p 115) must take place within phenomenology; its task is to explicate what is phenomenally given in the subject’s relation to his cultural objects. Meaning must be a conceptual category resulting from cognitive consideration of the text. The meaning (p 115) of a poem within the Institution of Literature is not ... the immediate and spontaneous reaction of individual readers but the meanings which they are willing to accept as both plausible and justifiable when they are explained. The author’s meaning is what the interpretive community agrees it to be. Although interpretation according to (Mugubi 2005) may be subjective, it should be justifiable from the textual facts.

Culler Jonathan (Ray 115-116) maintains that an awareness of the assumptions on which one proceeds, an ability to make explicit what one is attempting to do, makes it easier to see where and how the text... leads to ‘that questioning of the self and of ordinary social modes of understanding which has always been the result of he greatest literature.'
This study, therefore, employs the theory of literary criticism grounded in the literary theory of structuralism. According to (Ngara 14), The Theory of Literary Criticism gives an account of the nature of works of art and provides a framework of analysis and method of evaluation. Fiction (p 15) can be analyzed into four main constituents: Content, narrative structure, character and linguistic format. Unity of content and form is emphasized. Content is not only what is presented but also how it is presented. The concept of the relationship between form and content in literature is expounded.

Theme, topic or subject matter constitutes content. This is an artistic creation embodying aesthetic effect including the dynamic and complex interaction of events, people, ideas, attitudes and words on one hand and narrative structure, character and linguistic format on the other.

The content depicts the playwright’s response to his socio-economic, cultural and political environment. The plot pieces the events of the play together and shows cause and effect. However, the plot may not necessarily be chronological sequence of events. It may employ the sophisticated cinematic technique of flashback as is analyzed in John Ruganda’s selected plays. It doesn’t matter whether the playwright uses a chronological sequence of events or a flashback as long as the drama falls in the wider concept of conflict in drama.

The beginning of plot is an exposition of characters and conflict, the middle is an attempt to solve the conflict leading to heightening of tension, suspense, twists and surprises leading to a crisis or climax and then the ending leading to a resolution of the conflict. The flashback could be narrated or enacted as a play-within-a play. The flashback, apart from unfolding plot and conflict, it is used for purposes of character and thematic development as well as enabling characters to get absorbed into role-playing and fantasy projection.

Mulwa David (Kasigwa 13) posits that good drama lies in “the plays dramatic power, in-depth characterization, character development, character interrelationships and the overall skill with which a playwright constructs / structures the plays (especially with clear-cut flashbacks that make it possible to present a lot of action (and information) without having to thread it out in the (often tedious) casual-connection plot.”
The above observation falls in place with the theoretical framework of structuralism and literary criticism that is used to interrogate John Ruganda’s drama based on the theme of death as a running motif.

In summary, literary theory looks into the essentials and basics such as the elements and components of the art of literature and how it (literature) relates to society. Structuralism examines individual works and looks at the world as both real and intelligible to man in society. While structuralism incorporates relationships between literature, culture and history of a people it depicts, literary criticism informs the process of analysis and evaluation based on detailed methodology and skill in arriving at an informed well reasoned judgement.

1.9 Scope of Study

Although besides being a playwright, John Ruganda is a poet, a novelist and critic, the scope of the study is based on the following selected published plays of his drama. The theme of death as a motif whether physical or symbolic runs through and across these selected plays:

(i) **The Burdens** (1972)
(ii) **Covenant with Death** (1973)
(iii) **Black Mamba** (1973)
(iv) **The Floods** (1980)
(v) **Echoes of Silence** (1998)
(vi) **Shreds of Tenderness** (2001)

This study focuses on the analysis of the portrayal and use of the theme of death as a leitmotif in these six selected plays. In this regard, the study investigates the structure of dramatic action, character and characterization, language and style, thematic development and other societal concerns advanced by the theme of death in John Ruganda’s drama.
1.10 Methodology

1.11 Sampling

The selected texts, The Burdens (1972), Black Mamba (1973), Covenant with Death (1973), The Floods (1980), Echoes of Silence (1998) and Shreds of Tenderness (2001) were arrived at by purposive sampling. These selected texts of John Ruganda’s plays as primary sources, portray the theme of death as a running motif in his drama. The secondary data is obtained from the literary critical material on John Ruganda’s drama from the library and the internet. Primary data too is collected from unstructured face-to-face, informal interviews and discussions with respondents who have interacted with John Ruganda and his works. John Ruganda’s background and the historical events of his country, Uganda, form an informed view and insight of this study based on the death motif in his drama.

1.12 Data Collection

Data is collected from primary and secondary sources. John Ruganda’s selected plays: Black Mamba, Covenant with Death, The Burdens, The Floods, Shreds of Tenderness and Echoes of Silence serve as primary sources.

Primary data is obtained from unstructured informal interviews with respondents that have actually interacted with John Ruganda and his works. Some of these respondents include Bukenya Austin with whom Ruganda worked closely at Makerere University - Kampala, Uganda and in Kenya, Mr. Njuguna Wakanyote (who acted as Wak in Shreds of Tenderness). Prof. Okoch Obura (as Bwogo in The Floods), Mulwa David, Dr. Amateshe K. and Prof. Imbuga Francis who has actually written his Ph.D thesis on John Ruganda’s drama: Thematic Trends and Circumstance in John Ruganda’s Drama (1991). These interviews provide useful biographical information on John Ruganda and his works. Could, for example, his background have influenced his writing particularly his pre-occupation with death as a leitmotif in his drama.
Since this study is basically analytical, collection of secondary data is largely library based. Secondary sources are literally critical material obtained from guidebooks, periodicals, literally journals, dissertations and internet on John Ruganda and his works. Libraries are sources of materials for the study.

1.13 \textbf{Data Analysis and Interpretation}

Data is analyzed and interpreted in relation to the objectives of this study based on the portrayal and use of the death motif in John Ruganda’s drama.

To arrive at the conclusions of this study, collected secondary and primary data were coded and categorized using the causes of various concepts of death as a major criteria for categorization. Library research data analyzed include what other critics and scholars say about death and other emerging themes related to it. Primary data collected from the field research based on John Ruganda’s biographical background was analyzed to establish whether it influences John Ruganda’s writing particularly his pre-occupation with the theme of death as a leitmotif in his drama.

Information collected from the selected plays is analyzed within the theory of literary criticism grounded in the literary theory of structuralism. This theory provides a conceptual framework for analysis, interpretation and method of evaluation. The theory is used to analyze the relationship between content (the theme of death) and form (plot, characterization and language).

The analysis is guided by the dramatic structure that should have a beginning, middle and end regardless of whether the plot is chronological or not. The beginning constitutes character and conflict exposition. The middle incites action, heightens tension, creates twists and surprises leading to a climax or crisis and revelation of the truth. Then the ending marks the resolution of conflict, rounding up characters and story.
The analysis is centred on the theme of death to establish whether it is a running motif around which John Ruganda uses dramatic techniques to build dramatic action, develop characters and articulate other related emerging themes of societal concerns in his drama.
2.0 CHAPTER TWO: THE CONCEPT OF DEATH IN JOHN RUGANDA'S DRAMA

2.1 African and Christian perspectives:

This chapter explores the various manifestations of death and their causes in the John Rugands's drama. It defines both physical and symbolic death and the Christian as well as the African concept of death and perspective.

According to Mbiti (p 155) although man has accepted death as natural phenomenon, ironically every human death in African societies is thought to have some external causes making death both natural and unnatural. People have to find some reason for the cause of death.

Mbiti (p 155) identifies the causes of death as magic, sorcery, witchcraft, curses and God through natural death due to old age or through God's wrath executed through lightning or natural calamities such as pestilence, floods or earthquakes. Death could also be caused when man contravenes an important custom prohibition or breaks God's covenant or edict. This is what happens in Covenant with Death when Kaikara unleashes her wrath on Bamya for breaking the covenant.

According to the African traditional perspective (Mutuli 138, 139) death is the beginning of another phase of life in the spirit world. The "burial rites" usher him "home" among the ancestors. It is a general feeling (Mbiti, Concepts of God in Africa p 257) that if the dead are not properly buried they may take revenge upon the living or remain unpeaceful in the land of the departed.

This perspective is brought out in Ruganda's The Floods when Kyeyune is disturbed by the lack of a proper burial accorded to the Army Brigadier whose body was dumped in the lake with "three long nails in his head, his genitals sticking out of his mouth. A big stone around his neck." (The Floods p 10).
Kyeyune “believes that individual deaths and disappearances are due to some irresistible becon drawing people to their doom ... The most pathetic of Kyeyune’s mental aberrations is his conviction that all deaths and murders around him are the work of he “Fisher of men” or “Patron of the Lake” who draws men to their deaths so that he would not be lonely at the bottom of the lake.” (Bukenya 29). Apart from the benevolent or malevolent interaction of the living dead with the living according to (Mbiti, *Concept of God in Africa*, p, 163) man is ontological destined to lose humanness but gain his full spiritness, and there is no general evolution or devolution beyond that point. God is beyond and in African concepts there is neither hope nor possibility that the same would obtain a share in the divinity of God.

Bearing this in mind, the point Ruganda is trying to make in his drama is that the living should be each other’s brother keeper for harmony and co-existence so as to avoid the repercussions of being permanently haunted by the dead as exemplified by the vengeful spirit of the Army Brigadier dumped in the lake without a proper burial.

The African departure from the Christian concept of death is that Christianity believes in the resurrection and inheritance of God’s kingdom – a hope upon which Christianity builds its church. (Griffiths 30) describes spiritual life as the union of the soul with God, physical life is the union of the soul with the body while everlasting life is the union of the soul and body with God forever. From moral standing, the fact is that John Ruganda’s agents of death such as Bwogo, Odie and Boss himself are spiritually dead because of the atrocities committed against mankind they are condemned to eternal damnation.

2.2 The Conscience, Moral and Spiritual Death

The death of this hope of inheriting the God’s kingdom is occasioned by the entrance of sin into the world. This discussion, here is centred on the characters that are “spiritually dead though alive.” According to the Christian concept of death:

“Sin is lawlessness... Sin affects our relation to God... Sin also affects all the powers of man’s nature. It results in the darkening of the intellect, deadening of conscience, the defilement of the heart, and the distortion of the will. Sin also hurts man’s relation to his fellow men, causing animosity,
hatred, malice, and other sins against love. Lastly, sin issues in death, the separation of soul and body from God for ever more." (Griffith 5)

Most of John Ruganda’s characters seem to have lost their conscience (deadening of the conscience, causing animosity, hatred, malice, and other sins against love). These characters with dark hearts are found in John Ruganda’s plays. Such characters are, for instance, Boss, Bwogo, Odie, Kanagonago in The Floods, Shreds of Tenderness, and The Burdens. Bwogo is the head of the SRB while Odie is a spy also under the SRB. The death of conscience is clearly demonstrated by the callous nature and the insensitivity of Bwogo in The Floods by the monstrous brutal killing and despicable disposal of the dead dumped in the lake. The reader or audience gets horrified by Bwogo’s lack of feeling for the dead:

Bwogo: I saw those dotards and the women and the women ...their faces wrought with fright. They know what havoc the floods have caused on this Island. And the lake too... This lake harbours its own unfathomable secrets... This lake ...has been the tomb of many men...lorryfuls of wailing civilians, driven to their deaths, over the cliff, at the point of bayonets. The crocodiles have never been more thankful. (The Floods p.19). This can only be said by a man whose conscience is dead.

If Bwogo, an agent of destruction and death, his conscience is dead how much more is the death of conscience in Boss in The Floods and Shreds of Tenderness on whose behalf Bwogo commits these atrocities. The SRB is a military terror machine that unleashes death on the citizenry. One must have lost one’s conscience to get involved in the kind of atrocities perpetrated by the SRB at the orders of Bwogo, the agent destruction. The constant association of Bwogo, or Odie with the SRB becomes a repeated motif that depicts physical death and the death of conscience.

A lot of things have gone wrong in the country ...unrest in the army, hardship (probably economic hardship) among common people, corruption in the system, people being cheated of their land, hired soldiers (mercenaries) terrorizing the people, unemployment even among the best educated members of parliament getting salary increases while the government workers do not
and, as Nankya puts it above all, "Uncertainty and death. Death stalking the streets (Bukenya 38).

With this kind of scenario, it is unimaginable how Boss through his henchmen, Bwogo, can unleash terror on the powerless and innocent people. Nankya complains: "God I'm tired of meeting blood everywhere I go ...the mainland is choking with it, the lake bubbling with it like a cauldron and the island is barricaded with blood." (The Floods p. 36) This kind of terror can only be unleashed by people whose conscience is dead.

In the same vein, it is immoral to amass so much wealth amidst a sea of starvation. Austin Bukenya, personal interview 2nd October 2010, also mentions that Ruganda's biographical background particularly the mistreatment Ruganda's own mother suffered as a house-help in some affluent homes must have had an adverse effect against exploitation of the underdog by the rich class. This is reflected in The Floods where Nankya's mother worked for Bwogo's powerful and rich father on whose compound Nankya, with her mother and grandmother lived in a squalid room, separated by a perimeter fence. This can only be done by a man who has lost his conscience — a man who is insensitive to the plight of fellow man. Nankya accuses such greedy insensitive people as suffering from AGORAMANIA.

Nankya: Agoramania: Craze about open space, masses of room to move about and breathe in fresh air. Free to dance, laugh and cry at will. Some place to bury your dead as well. Place to call your own. The Bwogo estate everywhere in the country. The Michell mansions. The Aphrodite Service Apartment. The Day of Bachelors. The Camasutra Hostels and the Rainbow Tourists Hotels: You name it. You are not the chairman of the Building Board for nothing.

Nankya: What about Boss? What do I know about him? ...His concubines, his brain tumour that causes him bouts of insanity, the various methods of liquidating his supposed enemies. His businesses north of the equator? What don't I know about him? (The Floods p. 76)

This is moral decadency. The characters that behave this way are spiritually and morally dead. Indeed there are several links between Shreds of Tenderness and The Floods.
The State Research Bureau, for which Odie worked, is the same State Research Bureau of which Bwogo is director in *The Floods*: The jealousy and greed which cause Odie to betray his brother may be compared to the insatiable acquisitiveness of which Nankya accuses Bwogo in *The Floods* (P. 76) Also the opening of *Shreds of Tenderness* with Odie senselessly torturing a “king” termite, reminds one of the sadistic perversion of the SRB men, so vividly reflected in Nankya’s vision of Bwogo attacking an anthill, with the spike of his umbrella in *The Floods* (p. 59) (Bukenya 7). Bwogo and Odie are spiritually dead because of their viciousness, greed, as agents of evil and destruction. In terms of insatiable greed Bwogo could be compared to Mr. Tumbo in Francis Imbuga’s play *Betrayal in the City*.

Tumbo: ... If I had depended on empty talk when I came from abroad two years ago, I would not be owning this block and that one. You were born alone and when you die, you die alone...We are here for a season. (p. 45)

He too is suffering from the spirit of acquisitiveness and materialism – these characters are morally dead and insensitive to the plight of the masses. In *The Burdens*, there is the stinking rich, Kanagonago. While Wamala complains of “poverty symbolized by the sewage stench that meets the nose” back at home, and the neighbours’ children defecting all over the place” (p. 54), Kanagonago lives in luxury and grandeur. Wamala observes: “What view you command from here, Mr. Kanagonago. The city sits well on its concrete haunches between trees and electric poles. Must be exalting at night: neo lights and stars and the breeze carrying the rose scent... The town tramps and city thugs carefully hemmed out by the hedge and the barbed-wire fence.” (p. 52) He continues: You change cars like pants, Mr. Kanagonago, last month it was the Prince, now you are driving a 350 Mercedes... This settee must have cost you a hell of a fortune. (p. 53) Kanagonago smokes 555 not cheap crown bird cigarettes. He is callous and pompous and drinks whisky. A man, who lives this kind of luxurious life amidst people suffering from abject poverty without compassion for these wretched of the earth, must be a spiritually dead man who has severed his relationship with God and he is liable to internal damnation. God will tell them on the last day of judgement:
"Go away from me, with your curse upon you, to eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you never gave me anything to drink..." (Mathews Chapter 25)

From the Christian perspective as earlier mentioned, sin is "lawlessness" and violation of God’s law. Sin issues in death, the separation of soul and body from God for evermore.” (Griffith 5). For example men commit sin by, breaking God’s commandments such as:

- you shall not kill.
- you shall not commit adultery.
- you shall not steal.
- you shall not give evidence against your neighbour
- you shall not set your heart on your neighbour’s house, ... or spouse,
- or servant, man or woman ... or any of your neighbour’s possessions

(Exodus Chap. 20).

Most of the main characters in John Ruganda’s drama break all the laws in the book. They are therefore spiritually dead before the eyes of God and man.

David Muliwa personal interview 17th October 2010, describes what Ruganda sees in debased man who is hollow and devoid of moral values. Man has become so debased that all places of worship do not mean a thing – but sensual – that even God must become obedient to his sensual pleasures and yet purports to be the source of life. This is preposterous and ironic, because there is death of godliness. Christianity a citadel of godliness is dead. Tinka and Wamala are spiritually dead. When a woman becomes a nun, she has repressed emotions. Perverted Christianity in this case is brought to kill the emotions and the role of woman designed for procreation. Pervasion becomes a vehicle through which society is destroyed.

Prof. Imbuga, Personal interview 17th October 2010, argues that Christianity advocates harmonious co-existence with one another here on earth. If that harmony is struck then we have happiness. Anything that disrupts that harmony, leads to death that subverts the search for happiness. There is a number of versions that John Ruganda deals with that subvert that happiness such as unfulfilled dreams depicted in The Burdens by Wamala, Tinka and the masses, for example, and even the psychological trauma of insecurity and
unfulfilled dreams and rejection suffered by John Ruganda himself arising out of his life in exile.

Although David Mulwa, Personal interview 17th October 2010, agrees that Ruganda was full of life, he (David) at the same time looks at the other aspect of John Ruganda’s social concern. Once when they were coming down one evening from the National Theatre in Nairobi, one of them remarked about the beauty of the stars and moon in the sky but Ruganda retorted, “I don’t remember when I last looked up at the sky.” According to David Mulwa, Ruganda who walks with his head down at planet earth where man oppresses man, in his mind, Ruganda sees a shroud cast over the world. He had seen this even before Amin came to power as reflected in The Burdens. According to Mulwa the statement meant that John Ruganda was in such sadness. The world had failed to honour him at the Literature Department. He was accused of corrupting his students when he was teaching them at Theatre Bar. When he came back from Canada he could not get a job even among colleagues at Kenyatta University or even at the University of Nairobi where he had made great academic contribution. But Mulwa is quick to add that with friends or presumed friends he was flamboyant. Although he had a grim view of the world, he treated it as a light thing. May be that is why he entitled his work “Telling the Truth laughingly:” The Politics in the Drama of Francis Imbuga (1983).

This notwithstanding, according to David Mulwa, Ruganda sees the death ridden world arising out of that particular statement: I don’t remember when I last looked up at the sky. According to Mulwa, it is telling why John Ruganda is pre-occupied with the various manifestations of death in his works:

The death of family institutions leading to the fragmentation of society and hence the death of society. The death of the political ethic that holds what is held dear with the advent of the new unethical political dispensation is well depicted in The Burdens, The Floods and Shreds of Tenderness. Practically there is even death of ideas, and death of spirit occasioned by individual greed for power and property.
Another good manifestation of various moral and spiritual death is exemplified in *The Burdens*. Busolo Wegesa (*A Study Guide to The Burdens* p. 27) summarizes the scenario:

The breakdown in morality and casual nature of feelings, the kondos (violent thieves) who snatch a suitcase from a well-dressed girl only to find the corpse of an infant. Both the girl and the kondos are criminals though of a different kind. Wamala and Tinka have their first sexual escapades in the cemetery – one could say they have no respect for the dead. Earlier they had done it at the entrance of the church. The church is itself a den of individuals with perverted sexual desires, the priests who preach a strict moral code conduct sexual affairs with young altar boys. There is also widespread pretence – at Wamala’s wedding the intellectuals, famous for criticizing the powers that be or the establishment, drink themselves silly and leave without sandals. They are indulging in the same extravagance that they always criticize.

They are like Wamala who because he is now at the receiving end, criticizes the same government of which he had been minister, of exploitation of the masses. Other examples depicting moral decadence are Boss and Bwogo in *The Floods*, Odie in *Shreds of Tenderness*. They kill using the SRB boys as has been discussed above.

There is also moral and spiritual death through sexual immorality. Bwogo literally rapes Nankya on the carpet in his office, in *The Floods*. Wamala is accused of coming home in the dead of the night, “wet as a sponge with illicit smell of intimacy.” Nammadu who is Barewa’s wife commits adultery boarding to prostitution with Professor Coarx who is also married in *Black Mamba*. Matama cohabits with the married white man in the city, in *Covenant with Death*. Njoroge Njuguna is accused of committing adultery with other women by his wife Wairimu in *Echoes of Silence* (p. 70).

Adultery degenerates into what one would call prostitution. It is telling that Muthoni commits adultery with Sid the “Film Star. Top class. The cream of Hollywood.” (p. 69) in exchange for a few dollars. She is picked in a Mercedes Benz from the slums (Majengo) and taken to Hilton Hotel suite.
The same spiritual death through adultery runs through Black Mamba following the same streak, Professor Coarx, a white expatriate, though married exploits the black prostitutes whose immoral indulgence the professor ironically preaches against.

Bukenya posits that Ruganda’s experience influenced his writing. For example while The Floods among other things reflects his reaction against the frustrations he faced at the Literature Department at the University of Nairobi, Black Mamba is a reflection of his experiences at Makerere University campus when he was a student. The tirade against hypocrisy and sexual exploits and exploitation practiced by the expatriate Prof. Coarx is an attempt to depict the moral decadence at Makerere University at the time.

Namuddu though Barewa’s wife accepts to commit adultery and becomes temporarily Professor’s clandestine mistress he hides from his students and friends though in complete ignorance of her relationship with his house boy, Barewa.

In Covenant with Death, Matama cohabits with a Whiteman Duncun, who abandons her when she is inflicted with a mysterious disease. She had literary been “married” to Kaikara, the goddess of fruition, and was supposed to remain pure “untouched” by a man. And for this she is punished. So from the Christian point of view sexual immorality in this case adultery leads to spiritual death for it contravenes one of the commandments of God “Thou shall not commit adultery.” And from the African traditional perspective Matama and her parents are struck dead for contravening Kikara’s covenant which decreed that Matama was to remain celibate.

Njuguna has a love affair with a young lady who derides Wairi for her barrenness over the phone:

Wairi: ...Mr. Njuguna is not in at the moment ... young lady this is not a brothel... it doesn’t matter whether you knew him before me. He is mine young lady...now. Period ...How dare you say that to me? ...Go on laughing at me Go on ... my womb is what? Bloody insolent strum-pet?

(Hangs up. She is incensed) (p. 31)
Because of Njuguna’s infidelity, Wairi feels emptiness, loneliness and hollow. She gets hallucinations of Njuguna’s woman: Big as a mountain ...like the hand of death touching you. (p. 32)

Wairi is lonely. She is barren. The husband is detached, silent and disinterested. He is never at home. The situation is made worse by Wairi’s barrenness. This is the kind of loneliness Tinka suffers when Wamala is never at home at the public bar with fellow drunks and tarts – with only one difference, Tinka has Kaija and Nyakake her children to talk to. So infidelity turns Wairi and Tinka into empty shells though living but emotionally dead.

It is evident that if man is to regain his true position before God and also recover the true equilibrium of nature, sin must be dealt with and put away. God’s relation to this world is one of righteousness and as this relation has been set at naught by human sin, God’s broken law must be honoured, His righteous character vindicated and man’s position and nature restored. (Griffith 5)

2.3 Physical Death: Panoramic View

Besides moral or spiritual death physical death, too, runs through John Ruganda’s drama. In The Burdens, Tinka stabs her husband Wamala to death following a fierce fight. When Wamala one evening comes home as usual, “wet as a sponge and carrying the odour of illicit intimacy” (p. 72), Tinka in a moment of jealousy, anger and frustration murders Wamala in cold blood while asleep. This is an example of death caused by human folly. Kaija in The Burdens describes it as “a massacre ... the slaughtering down of the giant. There is too much blood. The flood breaks through ... Everybody is terrified. They take to their heels and the flood helps swallowing them up ... until there is one sea of blood. (pp. 73 –74)

The reference to The Floods of blood becomes an extended metaphor of brutality and murder of the hapless citizens Ruganda portrays in his play The Floods (of despondency and blood of innocent citizens at the hands of military dictatorship in Uganda during Idi Amin Dada’s rule).
Wanton destructive of life is caused by human weakness such as greed for property and power. Ironically, there are floods of blood and destruction of life everywhere even in government maximum (in)security prisons. Even Bwogo, the head of the State Research Bureau that visits terror on the citizens acknowledges it.

Bwogo: Maximum security? Hell of a place ...pailfuls of shit and floods of piss and vomit. Blotches of clotted blood on the floor, graffitoes written out in blood on the walls and the Koran (The Floods p. 43)

The preponderance of blood and floods in The Floods is a continuation of The Floods of blood introduced earlier on in The Burdens. The Floods builds the theme of death as a leitmotif. In The Floods there are numerous instances of murder, the brutal and senseless killing either motivated by greed and self-preservation perpetuated by the State Research Bureau. A good example is the brutal murder of Rutaro, the veterinary doctor with great promise who Bwogo suspected to have had a love affair with Nankya, his mistress. This death is motivated by human folly. This was senseless murder — "hard and remorseless and unfeeling". (The Floods p. 31). An innocent man killed for no reason. At The International. His cries for help unheeded by one and all ... just for a single dance (with Tankya).

Another example of physical and callous murder is that of the headmaster at the hands of the State Research Bureau hired by the toilet paper manufacturing illiterate tycoon who suffers from inferiority complex. The tycoon clicked his fingers once and in a second, the SRB boys were on the spot. They bundled him out of the Imperial and that was the end of him. His corpse was found in the lake a week later. (The Floods p. 58)

Ruganda here points out the flimsy cause of death — the jealousy and inferiority complex out of illiteracy that was prevalent in Uganda among Idi Amin's military soldiers and illiterate tycoons. Nankya draws the picture: My first date with Bwogo...

An illiterate T. P. tycoon ... was feeling left out of the blue... the tycoon blew up... you laughtering me? ... and drunkening and talking like Queen Zabeth?
Do you thought because of your dengris you can embrought your England here? You goes toilet now if you don’t quiet ... Stop biting your England here ... I can emboughted you twice and complete and also. And no mosquito can zwing about your dengris. (p. 58)

This brings to mind the murderous, opportunistic illiterate, Mulili, in Francis Imbuga’s Betrayal in the City. Murder most foul is depicted through the portrayal of the callous sinking of the full load of the boat purportedly evacuating the islanders to safety in the impending predicted floods that allegedly posed danger to them. But the idea was Bwogo’s as a way of eliminating Nankya (who knew too much about the excesses of Boss and his regime and had threatened to expose them to international community). Bwogo thought Nankya and her mother would be on the boat. Kyeyune paints a gloomy picture: Yes I saw them, men, women and children singing onward Christian soldiers and boat whirling around in terror (p. 159) as they drowned in the lake.

Besides man’s need for self-preservation, Ruganda seems to suggest that one of the causes of death is man’s inherent tendencies for destruction out of the callous nature of man. This is exemplified by thoughtless wanton destruction of life typified by Bwogo who stabs his umbrella in the cranium of the anthill. “No mercy, no remorse but stab like a sadist. Three times with fierce delight”, (p. 59). The stabbing here is reminiscent of Tinka’s destructive nature, when she stabs Wamala repeatedly in cold blood. The drowning of the loadful of the innocent; defenseless Islanders; like termites, men, women, and children is as senseless and callous as it is callous for Bwogo to stab the helpless termites. The destruction of the termites is a symbol of violent and destructive tendencies of man and craving for shedding blood by committing senseless murder. The use of the stabbing of termites is a death-symbol that is extended into Shreds of Tenderness when Odie tortures the termites at the beginning of the play. These are symbols that portray the theme of death as running motif, in for example, The Floods and Shreds of Tenderness.

Another example of brutal physical death is that of the army brigadier with three nails in his head... his genitals sticking out of his mouth. A big stone around his neck. His belly
ripped open and the intestines oozing out. Kyeyune says: I looked at the body...and froze with fright. Here was a man, a military man, who probably had a wife and children. (p.10)

In that Kyeyune calls him the “Patron” of the lake who feels lonely at the bottom of the lake. Kyeyune is convinced that this dumped body of the army brigadier who did not receive a proper burial according to the African traditional burial rites and concept of death is the cause of death of numerous bodies dumped into the lake including the massacre of the boat loadful of islanders. “The man with irresistible beckon. Three nails stuck in his skull. He has called them home.” (p. 37)

Another cause of physical death at a great scale perpetrated by man is as a result of mass-uprising against oppression and exploitation. This is depicted in Echoes of Silence (p. 13) in reference to the people’s Mau Mau uprising against British colonialism and the subsequent extermination of the masses at the hands of the British colonial rulers at the time.

Down the line after independence on December 12th, the aborted coup d’etat in December 1982 against the then President Hon. Daniel T. Arap Moi of the Republic of Kenya, left “scars” Wairi would like to forget. The failed coup for the new dawn is compared to Wairi’s still born child. It is like the spirit of death taking away a mother of a newly born baby (pp. 20 – 21). Although a revolution may bring hope to the disillusioned masses, the fact that it is bloody, it costs man’s life. A coup d’etat is bloody whether by Guerillas in the name of revolutionary struggle or ambitious military generals in an attempt to grab power. For example, the continuous ricocheting of guns even after the guerillas have overthrown the military dictatorship in the Shreds of Tenderness and the mopping exercise of the SRB spies and their eminent facing the public firing squad in evidence of a vicious cycle of the perpetration of the meaningless extermination of life through power struggle.

This is what happens in The Burdens. Wamala narrowly escaped the firing squad and escaped with the prison sentence. In The Floods Bwogo is rounded up at the end of the
play and may face the firing squad or summary execution. It is likely the same fate that awaits Odie at the end of *Shreds of Tenderness*.

In *Covenant with Death*, there is traumatic encounter with physical death. Matama, Bamanya’s daughter is sterile. She is inflicted with a mysterious disease and dies on her way back home from the city where she had been cohabiting with a Whiteman, Duncan. This was a contravention of the covenant, Matama’s parents had made with Kaikara, the goddess of frutation. In return for their sterility, they were given a daughter, Matama on condition that she was to remain celibate, “untouched” by man. In the event that ensues, Ruganda builds a horrific picture of death visited on Matama and her parents for disobedience, (*Covenant with Death* pp. 102 – 103).

Although the three meet physical death, it is wrought on them by the wrath of Kaikara, the goddess of frutation. This implies that God or the supernatural can inflict death on mankind for his disobedience. (Mbiti, *African Religion and Philosophy* 155) identifies one of the causes of death according to African traditional concept of death as through God’s wrath executed through lightning when man contravenes or breaks God’s covenant.

Physical death, too, is caused by disease but aggravated by poverty and deprivation. One evening Nankya’s grandmother died. She had been unwell for quite sometime suffering from Tuberculosis. The doctors had given her up and discharged her from hospital to create room for more promising patients ... may be to give her a chance to die among her people in the tiny squalid room behind his (Bwogo’s father’s) mansion (*The Floods* p. 73). She died in anguish in excruciating pain “coughing and vomiting blood”.

Reference to Tuberculosis as a killer disease associated with squalor and poverty is also mentioned in *The Burdens* in reference to Nyakake. Kaija mentions that teacher said her constant cough might be T.B. Implying that Nyakake might die unless she receives proper medical care which seems a pipe-dream because of the abject poverty life Wamala’s family lives in the slums.
Ironically death whether inflicted by man or natural disease or God’s wrath is equally cruel and traumatizing as depicted by the painful death of Nankya’s grandmother, through coughing and vomiting blood due to Tuberculosis. Death caused by man is much more blood-curdling and horrific especially when one realizes the flimsy nature, greed and selfishness of man for power and property as a motive to eliminate fellow men. The cited death of Rutaro and the Headmaster in The Floods is a good example.

The streak of murder caused by jealousy and spirit of acquisitiveness in the name of making wealth runs thorough Shreds of Tenderness as exemplified by Odie. Shreds of Tenderness like The Floods smells of murder most foul, callousness and greed. Nankya asks; Good God! Shall we ever rid ourselves of this incessant blood? Even Bwogo admits that maximum security prison is “a slow torturous process”. Every deed meant to break one down. Endless chores. Mornings: digging mass graves and burials; afternoon: carnage – the thudding of hammers against skulls; evening: enforced cannibal feasts on fellow inmates and at night: hallucinations (The Floods p. 44).

2.4 Manifestation of Symbolic Death:

Apart from physical and spiritual death discussed above it is significant to explore other concepts of death particularly at the symbolic level. In The Burdens, Echoes of Silence, Black Mamba, Covenant of Death, Shreds of Tenderness and to some degree The Floods, there is the symbolic death of the family and marriage institutions. Prof. Oluoch Obura in one of the interviews (Nairobi, 6th November 2010) mentioned that John Ruganda was rather skeptical about the role of women in marriage institutions. In The Burdens, Tinka is a cantankerous woman, always critical and nagging. Wamala accuses her of being a big burden around his neck always pulling him down. She is a subversive woman. The only good thing she is good at is undermining his efforts. Yet “When a man comes from this hell, this crowd full of power-hungry bastards with twitching hands – hands eager to grab and get rich, get rich quickly – a man wants sympathy and sweetness, tender care and kindness. Not silent curses” (The Burdens, pp. 35 – 37).
The marriage is marked by constant fights, blame game for their present plight of abject poverty in the slums. There is no meaningful communication, mutual respect and harmony in the home. Although one may be tempted to say that the cause of this domestic strife is due to poverty and failure by Wamala as a family head to sustain and provide for the family, in *Echoes of Silence*, the Njuguna family is affluent yet it is not happy. Njuguna keeps away from home and his wife Wairimu suffers from loneliness to a degree of hallucination. The fact that Double O is able to slap Wairi for her tirade, (*Echoes of Silence* p. 60) bearing in mind that Double O was a stranger who had just come into the house to meet Njuguna and yet Double O is able to slap her on this occasion, implies that she is a nasty woman whose stock insults he cannot stand just like Tinka in *The Burdens*. No wonder, therefore, Njuguna stays away from home in company of other women.

Double O, himself is not a happy married man at home. He complains of nagging, noise and lack of peace at home: I am tired and depressed and feeling very lonely at home: I want to go home and play with Tina. So I arrive home wanting tea and the sound of merry laughter. I open the door and almost immediately the music starts: the bang of cutlery, the slamming of doors and pans dropping in the kitchen. Tina is taut with silent tears in a corner and Muthoni’s high pitched grating, screaming above it all. So I realize that his home is not sweet home for me. At least tonight. I walk out of the room ... (*Echoes of Silence* p. 44) Double O like Wamala (in *The Burdens*) suffers the same frustration of a strained marriage relationship from a nagging and quarrelsome wife.

Regarding his married life, Wakanyote, personal interview 7th November 2010, recalls that Ruganda’s home was sacred. Unlike David Rubadiri who freely invited artists to his home, Ruganda’s was a private place giving the suspicion that there was no warmth in the home. After rehearsal John Ruganda stayed out late till the wee hours of the morning with the artists. May be this is one reason why John Ruganda overtly or covertly is skeptical about marriage and presents nasty vicious and vindictive female characters in his plays. Tinka in *The Burdens* is a good example.
In fact Prof. Obura Personal interview 6th November 2010, believes that John Ruganda looked at life especially the marriage institution with a lot of skepticism. This is reflected in his depiction of the role and portrayal of female characters as callous and vicious. The skepticism, against women, influences John Ruganda’s writing and even the choice of some plays for his production, for example his choice of the Greek tragedy Media which he directed. In this play Ruganda sees women as selfish and terrible characters obsessed, with revenge and vindictiveness Medea callously murders her own children by dismembering them and in a macabre way hitting back at her husband for jilting her. Ruganda sees women especially in marriage as capricious and heartless by nature and as agents of death as is also illustrated by Tinka who murders her husband in cold blood in The Burdens.

Ruganda was falsely accused of drinking and going with his female students simply out of jealousy because Ruganda was too close to his artists. He rehearsed late into the night. He extended the work off stage for rehearsal post-mortem discussion for purposes of character analysis and interpretation of their roles. He was a “slave driver” who could rehearse late into the night. According to Wakanyote, Personal interview 7th November 2010, Ruganda did not seem to have a happy married life although his children: Ruhuana, Ruhundwa and Kembubi were deeply involved in theatre. Wakanyote believes that Ruganda was never understood even by those close to him possibly including his wife. He was accused of being a drunk but how come he wrote and produced admirable pieces of art literary every year if he were a drunk? His colleagues must have been driven by jealousy, he concludes.

Though there is the problem of barrenness in Echoes of Silence, the fact that Wairimu was not able to conceive though she had given birth to a still-born, she would probably have conceived again if Njuguna were available. Ironically the ability to get children is not a recipe to a happy and a successful home. Tinka and Muthoni, though poor have children to talk to but they are not happy either, in marriage because they too, like Wairimu suffer from loneliness. “Blows, battles, hunger, hatred, poverty and a cold bed. I can’t stand it any long,” Tinka complains. (The Burdens p. 35)
In *Black Mamba*, Professor Coarx is married, but confesses to Namuddu his newly found mistress: “although I am married, I have never found joy in marriage. Would you believe it? Never found joy at all. These few days I have spent with you have been the happiest of all my life, happiest as a man and woman can be said to be happy” (p. 29). “I have spent seven years with my wife, no seven years have spent me, growling in a dark pit of bitter animosities” (p. 30). This again is an illustration of failed family relationship.

The marriage institutions are on their death bed. In the same way the marriage relationship between Barewa and Namaddu is a strained one. Namaddu complains of poverty, negligence and loneliness: She asks Barewa, “How long had I stood the loneliness of a married woman?” How long, Barewa? And you call me your wife. (*Black Mamba* p. 48)

Although she thought, “living in a hovel was natural (before meeting Prof. Coarx) wearing rags a necessity, toiling away in my garden a duty. Nor did I care about my hard bed, my poor meals and careless of our men” (p. 54), her eyes are now open and she is not prepared to be thrown “back into the rubbish heap?” (p. 55). It means their marriage will never be happy unless Barewa is able to sustain her and give her an opulent life. This is most unlikely because Barewa is a mere houseboy who is likely to lose his job following the Professor’s arrest by the police.

Barrenness drives a death knell into the marriage institution. In *Echoes of Silence*, Wairimu as has been pointed out, leads a frustrated marriage life for as it is, after the first still-born, she cannot conceive. Matama in *Covenant with Death* is shunned and despised because she is barren until she feels alienated and decides to leave the village for the city. Though she confesses that she was happy with her cohabitation with Bwana Duncan, the white man because he did not despise her for her barrenness since he did not like children (p. 94), one feels her sense of frustration. “What use is beauty when you’re carrying emptiness? Beauty should procreate” (p. 88).

Motomoto, too, is looked down upon because his manhood is dead. He is impotent and cannot beget children let alone getting married. These two, Matama and Motomoto are “closely bound by a common bond which Motomoto describes as ‘Our frustrations’, our
small pleasures, our fears and our hopes, other people’s expectations and our failure to meet them”. (pp. 94 – 95). This is the death of hope; failure to marry, beget children and presumably lead a happy life.

The prospective marriage between Nankya and Bwogo in The Floods does not seem to promise a successful marriage relationship. Bwogo and Nankya are always at daggers drawn, fighting, maneuvering and suspicious of each other. Although Bwogo has made Nankya pregnant, he denies the pregnancy and Nankya threatens to carry out an abortion. The fact that Bwogo schemes to eliminate Nankya and her mother who ironically had served faithfully as his father’s house help, in boat tragedy, shows that Bwogo has very little regard if any for her. Theirs therefore cannot be deemed to be a successful marriage. It is as good as dead. In any case, there is death of failure to make meaningful friendship. Bwogo was brought up in an isolated exclusive club of affluence and opulence away from the common people. So, he has never learnt the art of making genuine friendship. So he cannot have lasting friendship let alone marriage.

The death of hope in an individual, too, is a running motif in John Ruganda’s drama. For example the new political dispensation in post-independent states has killed the peoples’ hopes and aspirations for a better prosperous future particularly with the advent of military dictatorship typified by Amin in The Floods and in Shreds of Tenderness.

However, according to Prof. Oluoch Obura Personal Interview 6th November 2010, Ruganda articulates the ambivalence of life and death and explores the idea of empty existence. Wamala in The Burdens for instance dies because he felt inadequate particularly when he loses his cabinet ministerial post. John Ruganda interprets life in terms of life sustenance. Without this society looks at an individual as inadequate and failure in life – the inadequate individual goes on a slow journey to death.

The simmering of atrocities are brewed in The Burdens when the “palace was blown down. First a strong wind ... then the storm that wrecked the foundation of the palace and battered down the reed fence” (p. 14). The guns began to play the drums “(p. 15) then
came a leper. A common leper stinking with leprosy and commonness. Dragging misery behind him won the chief’s daughter and the thrown” (pp. 16 – 17)

The above, is in reference to the violent overthrow of the kingdoms in Uganda by Milton Obote the then Prime Minister, who used Amin to destroy the monarchy. The emergency of political upstarts is represented by the leper in reference to Wamala in The Burdens. Ruganda seems to condemn the destruction of the old order through violence. The perpetration of atrocities and misrule including exploitation is depicted in The Burdens, The Floods and Shreds of Tenderness. There is death of political sanity, harmony and order as witnessed by the massive and wanton destruction of property and life.

There is an array of the manifestation of symbolic death in John Ruganda’s drama. There is death of self-esteem running through his plays. For example, Okoth-Okach feels inadequate because of his weathered hand and comes from a despised ethnic community that does not practice circumcision. He too feels that he cannot provide for the family because of lack of money.

Tinka in The Burdens denies the glaring fact that she has lost her self-esteem for having been reduced from a cabinet minister’s wife to a woman in the slums. That is why she refuses Kaija to sell groundnuts at school so as to escape “the derisive laughter of the slum women”. Wamala, too, has lost self-esteem and his ego is wounded having been reduced to a pauper from the lofty position of a cabinet minister.

Wairimu though leading an affluent married life, she has lost her self-esteem because she is barren and despised for it. Matama, too, has lost her self-esteem for the same reason that she is barren and an outcast in society. Self-esteem for Motomoto, too, is dead because he is impotent – his manhood is dead and cannot marry and beget children. Barewa like Wamala feels inadequate because he cannot fend for himself and his family. No wonder he trades his wife to the Professor for money. Kaija too, sensitive at his age, feels loss of self-esteem because he is the only boy at fourteen without a bed of his own. And he feels let down by his parents when they fight in public. Kaija laments: And passers-by cheering and
encouraging you to go on fighting ... and my schoolmates were there too. Looking at me with pitiful eyes, The Burdens (p. 68).

In Shreds of Tenderness, Odie feels loss of self-esteem when his father despises him for poor performance in class and even gives his inheritance to Wak – his step-brother instead of him since he is the eldest brother according to African custom. No wonder Odie schemes his revenge against his own father and Wak.

In summary, this chapter explores the various concepts of death and their causes in John Ruganda’s drama. It would be interesting to see the factors that seem to influence his pre-occupation with death. John Ruganda whether consciously or unconsciously uses the theme of death to articulate societal concerns affecting the people during his contemporary time in post-independent African States. On close look at his works, John Ruganda’s biographical background influences his writing and informs John Ruganda as an artist. The political backdrop of his country Uganda especially during the despotic military rule of Idi Amin Dada, seems to be rich resource material for his writing especially his great concern for and empathy with the plight of the deprived and oppressed masses at the hands of the powerful political and economic elite.

The interrogation of what influences John Ruganda’s writing especially his pre-occupation with death seems to arise out of the unstable socio-economic political situation in Uganda at the time and his own biographical background both of which have a bearing on his writing. This view seems to have credence arising out of the face-to-face interviews and discussions with scholars who have interacted with John Ruganda and his works.
CHAPTER THREE: THE TREATMENT AND PORTRAYAL OF DEATH IN JOHN RUGANDA'S DRAMA

3.1.0 Dialectics of Structural Dramatic Conflict: Effect Of Death On Structure

This chapter analyses the development, treatment and portrayal of the theme of death in John Ruganda's drama selected plays. The analysis of the portrayal of dramatic conflict and action is guided by Freytag Pyramid model generated by German structuralist and critic Gustav Freytag in his influential publication, Technique of Drama (1863):

Freytag Pyramid Model articulates a set of structural rules which could be applied to every dramatic text...His method was deductive: based on a conflict-oriented theory of drama...that a plot develops in the dialectical conflict between action and counter-action and thus moves from the exposition of the conflict through the antagonistic climax to the catastrophe (p. 239).

Although this model implies a linear or chronological structured sequence of events, John Ruganda uses the sophisticated cinematic technique of flashback in most of his plays. However, this does not compromise the creation of dramatic action and conflict because the beginning of his plays have the exposition of characters and conflict, the middle builds tension as the characters grapple with how to overcome the problem. This leads to a crisis or climax and then descends to the resolution of conflict, rounding up of characters and story thus marking the end of the play, referred to as a denouement.
In John Ruganda's plays dramatic action and conflict is built around the theme of death or the fear of it.

The Burdens opens with Tinka with "an I have been through kind of face" weaving a mat late at night waiting for her husband Wamala who is out there drinking and possibly with his tarts like one Tinka refers to as having squinted eyes that seduces Wamala with "kwete". Tinka and her children, Kaija who is frustrated because he cannot afford a bed of his own and walks with tawny legs in badly patched shorts hungry and dejected with a sickly sister Nyakake probably infected with T.B and cannot afford a proper medical doctor, are haunted with fear of death and insecurity in the slums from the "kondos" in the absence of Wamala.

When Wamala finally comes with a second hand banco bed for Kaija, his ego as a man is wounded by the disparaging remarks made by Tinka who is described as "a subversive woman...a big burden"(P.31) always nagging and pulling Wamala down. Tinka realizes that Wamala is a mere dreamer who cannot be practical and face the reality of his current abject poverty as a result of falling from grace to grass, from the ministerial cabinet post to a pauper in the slums. This truth downs on Tinka when Wamala in his reverse nearly shoots Kaija with a postal mistaking him for the soldiers who had come to arrest him for his blind ambitions and subversive activities when he wanted to overthrow the government with the help of the government with the help of the "Yankees" with their dollars.

The constant blows, the curses and an empty bed coupled with abject poverty, explode into a fierce fight between Wamala and Tinka in which they tear each other's clothes off in public and finally culminates in Tinka's pre-meditated murder of Wamala in cold blood. This is the crisis or the climax of the play. After this point, the play descends into a reversal leading to a resolution and rounding up of the conflict, the story and characters.

Wamala is dead, gone into oblivion possibly to join the ancestral spirits and probably like the army brigadier with three nails in his skull in The Floods, hound Tinka for his murder. The children miss their parents particularly their father with whom they seem to have
struck a code of admiration and love. There is "death" or disintegration of the family. The children in the orphanage will start a new life while Tinka will languish in prison and most probably face gallows. Although she regrets the cause of her actions and faces more frustration than she had bargained for, she cannot reverse the wind of time. So, John Ruganda in this play manipulates death as a basis around which he builds his dramatic action and conflict as reflected by the various manifestations of death: the physical death of Wamala. The psychological death of both Wamala and Tinka as fallen heroes and heroines from opulence and highest pinnacle of success: Wamala as a cabinet minister, Tinka, the chief's daughter and ministerial wife to the slums.

The theme of death is a central focus around which John Ruganda builds his dramatic action and conflict.

The dramatic structure begins with the unstable situation that becomes an exposition of conflict and character. John Ruganda begins his plays with foreboding that creates a strong feeling that a catastrophe, a tragedy or something unpleasant or dangerous is going to happen. This premonition prepares the reader or viewer for tragedy ahead.

In The Burdens, for example, what incites action at the beginning of the play is the fear of death. The symbolic setting of the play in the crime-infested slums suggests insecurity, poverty and death. The "little semi-permanent house made of mud and wattle... smeared with cow dung where everything has grown dark with smoke with soot strands dangling precariously" (P1), suggest desperation and abject poverty. This is emphasized by Kaija's badly patched shorts, a hurricane lamp and yawning. His legs are tawny and as thin as a toothpick, the sounds of foot-steps outside are signal of insecurity from the "kondos" who are violent robbers. The fact the Tinka brews and sells illicit brew "enguli" in the house is target enough to attract "kondos" to break in and relieve her of her hard earned cash. The possibility that they might steal her bunch of bananas suggests starvation and a slow journey to death. John Ruganda's creation of this premonition of death or fear of it pervades the whole work. For instance Tinka's narratives to Kaija in the initial stages of the play are full of foreboding indirectly predicting the emanate death or murder of
Wamala at the hands of Tinka and the destruction of the old order witnessed by the end of the play.

The story of the palace which was brought down by the violent storm is an allusion to the destruction and death witnessed in Uganda when the then Prime Minister, Milton Obote used Amin Dada to storm Kabaka’s palace. The monarchy was overthrown and violence set in. There was no longer peace and harmony but violence in an epoch where “guns play the drums” (p. 15).

“The stories of old drunken men stabbed to death by their jealous wives in the dead of the might” (p. 11) serve as a premonition of Wamala’s death at the end of the play. This gives an impression in the long run, that Tinka premeditated Wamala’s murder. She, in fact, ironically told Wamala after the violent fight in which she sustained a bruised elbow, “you’ll pay for this dearly” (p. 34).

In the story Ngoma the paramount chief with his daughter Nyenje, Tinka paints a grim picture of a leper, implying Wamala, “Stinking with leprosy and commonness” (p. 17) won Tinka, the Saza chief’s daughter and took over the thrown. The implication here is that the normal order of doing things is turned upside-down and by extension life becomes topsy-turvy without peace and harmonious existence but violence and death.

The opening of The Floods, too portends evil, destruction and death. The setting of the play is ominous. The islanders are hemmed in by the surrounding waters of the lake, with an eminent storm and destructive floods:

In an hour’s time the floods will ravage this Island ... Hurry up everybody... (The boat is heard honking insistently by the shore). It is now or never... Dogs are prohibited, goats not permitted! No cocks and no cows... Pigs will be prosecuted and cats will be quartered”. (p. 1)
The times seem to be worse than during Noah's Ark where animals were allowed on board. Nature symbolized by animals faces extermination just like the islanders who face emanate drowning in the lake because of the floods. Ruganda uses forereshadowing here as a premonition of the death of the islanders who are eventually sprayed with bullets by the SRB and drown in the lake. The atrocities of death and destruction that are littered all over The Floods is well predicted right from the beginning of the play.

This feeling of imminent danger is not only emphasized by the seemingly marooned Islanders but it is also depicted by "the intermittent glows of thunder and flashes of lightening and the sky with dark clouds of rain" (p.1) which portend nothing but death.

The Floods also opens with an impending catastrophe posed by the predicted floods that may drown the islanders if they are not evacuated within three hours. The conflict rises with the pre-occupation of the Headman herding the islanders to the boat. The appearance of Bwogo, the head of the SRB on the scene inquiring whether Nankya and her mother have boarded the boat and his final encounter with Nankya, produces the most devastating dramatic irony leading to a climax.

Bwogo is confronted with the naked truth that Nankya was aware that Bwogo was using state machinery, the SRB boys and the mass media to hoodwink the islanders into believing that the floods were eminent. But the real reason was Bwogo's miscalculated scheme to eliminate Nankya because she knows too much about the excesses of Boss and Bwogo and their violation of human rights:

Nankya: (to Bwogo)
"you gave the orders ...the radio announced the impending floods. The boat arrived and the Headman whipped everyone on the boat...Then the pre-planned accident. The massacre in the boat. The authorities would then conveniently blame it on the guerrillas (p 67)."
The spraying of bullets and complete extermination of the innocent islanders is a peak of the ruthless and senseless murder visited on the helpless citizens by the dictatorial military regime.

Nankya's revelation of the truth behind this extermination exposes Bwogo as unfeeling, diabolical and devilish who executes murder in cold-blood. The betrayal of friendship is a big manifestation of death in John Ruganda's drama.

After this climax, there is a reversal where Bwogo tries to make amends though it is too little too late because Bwogo is rounded up as the Head of the SRB by the new revolutionary liberating forces may be for the sake of poetic justice.

1st Soldier: Mr. Bwogo, may be you think we don't have your particulars. You are the boss of the SRB, are you not? Are you not? Answer me!

Bwogo: I am

1st Soldier: Very well follow us

Kyeyune: (To himself) The call of the beacon no one can resist it.

1st Soldier: Out everybody. (They lead them out).

(The Floods p 106)

Most likely Bwogo may face death by public firing squad. Dramatic structure and conflict is built on the theme of death in the play as illustrated above.

The opening of Shreds of Tenderness is blood-curdling. It, too, portends evil, destruction and death because of the “shooting and shelling and killing outside” (p. 2) while His Highness is in a chloroformic slumber while there is war around. The ricocheting of guns and the big bang of motor (pp. 2 – 3) suggest that everything rattles with fright ... cows, cowards and commanders (p. 3) and are all fodder for bullet fire. This is confirmed by Stella who describes gun fire as music implying “Death at dawn. Death at noon. Death at dusk” (p. 7)

The presentiment at the beginning of Shreds of Tenderness prepares the reader or audience for the brutal murder and senseless death that is perpetrated throughout this play.
Shreds of Tenderness is a sequel of The Floods. It takes over from where The Floods stopped after the overthrow of the dictatorial regime of Idi Amin in Uganda though the play is a symbol of what happens in military dictatorships in Africa.

The ricocheting of guns, the mopping and rounding up of SRB boys and resistant military personnel against the liberation revolutionary forces and the impending public firing squad all signify death.

The climax reaches when the truth is revealed that Odie was actually an informer in the SRB. He had betrayed his own step-brother Wak who was forced into exile. Odie too had betrayed his own father leading to his elimination by the military regime when General Ali signed his death warrant. Stella in particular is devastated because she can hardly believe that Odie would commit this high degree of betrayal. The reversal is reached when Odie admits his guilt and he is ready to face the consequences of his crime by the end of the play:

Odie: Let me do my penance if need be. If the forces that be are rounding up all SRB spies, so be it. Let them. I am not scared of the law. I will serve my term and keep my dignity (p 134).

One wonders whether Odie's life will be spared. Most likely he will face death. So, the dramatic conflict is built around the theme of death in the play that uses Odie as one of the agents of evil.

John Ruganda creates premonition at the opening of Covenant with Death. The ominous hooting of the owl and sense of insecurity that pervades Motomoto, Matama's escort back to the village on a lonely deserted country side road, creates a gloomy picture. Motomoto complains, "Everything around us, the trees, the birds, the very air looks tense with a dangerous quiet ...It's frightening. I don't like this road my lady " (pp. 74 – 73).

Matama herself is coughing like a volcano, vomiting blood and in fact, she admits that she cannot survive "unless by a miracle (p. 74). Her face is lined with grief ...with death (p.
When Motonoto threatens to abandon her on the road so that he returns to the city, Matama pleads, “When you talk of living me, you are only hastening my end. Death is cheating me; don’t help it” (p. 75). When one realizes what actually happens by the end of the play, Ruganda has prepared the audience sufficiently enough for the catastrophe as witnessed by the extermination of Bamya’s family (Bamya himself, Kabooga his wife, and Matama their daughter) for having contravened Kaikara, the goddess of fruition’s covenant.

**Covenant With Death** opens ominously with the emaciated Matama inflicted with a mysterious disease coughing and vomiting blood literally waiting for death. She is on her way back from the city to the village which had alienated and rejected her because of her barrenness. The climax comes when her father Bamya is struck with lightning at the height of the communal celebration of the rain after a prolonged drought.

When his wife Kabooga learnt of her husband’s death, she was devastated, “No daughter, no husband, and NO LIFE”. She rushed to her room and gored herself dead with a spear blade (p 102). Matama, too, on learning of the death of her parents, she is overwhelmed by God’s wrath. (She cries louder and louder and louder with intensifying agony, until she collapses, dead) (p 102). The higher expectation to tie the knot between her and Motomoto comes to nothing. Motomoto reprimands the Old Man who reveals the tragic end of Matama’s parents. “You have killed her, you, lout! And in her death you have killed my joy and killed me” (p 103).

Out of this exchange, the revelation of the breach of the covenant between Kaikara, the goddess of fruition and Bamya is brought to the fore. Matama was supposed to be a priestess to serve Kaikara at her shrine. She was to remain pure “untouched” by men. It was on that agreement that the old otherwise barren couple were given Matama. So, Matama was fated to die even before she was born. The cultural estrangement and alienation only aggravates her slow journey to death. The building of conflict therefore is tied around the theme of death in this play.
Although Black Mamba sounds like a comedy; the undercurrent rhythm is actually a satirical tragic-comedy. The opening of the play has a shroud of foreboding hanging over it. The haggling between Barewa and his wife Namuddu as to who should earn the first earnings of a hundred shillings from the Professor Coarx for sleeping with Namuddu, does not auger well for the future and the family.

Namatta’s husband has allowed her to practice prostitution out of which earnings they seem to lead an affluent life. It is a perverted society that would allow a husband to lend his wife to another man to go to bed for money; as happens at the opening of Black Mamba. Though Berewa rationalizes the deed by asserting that since “poverty hooked us, we must hook riches (p. 11), Namuddu dismisses it as “immoral that should not be made to “sound simple and virtuous.” (p. 12).

Ruganda here creates a situation that portends evil. If Professor Coarx learns that Namuddu is Barewa’s wife whom he has been tricked into sleeping with for money, Barewa will lose not only the confidence the Professor has in him but he is also likely to lose his job. Either way Barewa’s aspirations for a prosperous future will be shattered. The reader or viewer is prepared for the catastrophe by John Ruganda through the presentiment created at the beginning of this satirical tragic-comedy.

The conflict in Black Mamba is built around betrayal and death of trust. Poverty and deprivation lead to the erosion of morality and death of moral values. Professor Coarx’s over-indulgence and lust for sex even with prostitutes, is exploited by Barewa, his houseboy. Without the knowledge of the professor, Barewa lends him his wife, Namuddu for money. Barewa hopes to alleviate his poverty through this devious plan.

The climax comes when Namuddu in her nightdress from the bedroom bursts into the sitting room thereby embarrassing and exposing Professor Coarx’s clandestine sexual indulgence before his visitors, Catherine Smith a new lecturer in the department and Odhiambo his student -cum- government spy. This leads to a reversal of incident in the play.
The professor's hypocrisy gets exposed and his job is on line. Barewa is also exposed as unreliable since the truth is revealed that Namuddu is not a prostitute but Barewa's wife. Most likely Barewa will lose his job and sustenance - hence his down trend on a slow journey to death with shattered dreams for prosperity and a happy future. Although this play is ostensibly a comedy, the underlying issues simmer with death depicting a society whose morals and values are dead. This play too, builds its conflict around moral decadence which is one of the manifestations of death in John Ruganda's drama.

**Echoes of Silence** opens with fore-boding, too. In the background there is “the clatter of crockery” possibly suggesting an agitated wife. The continuous ringing of the door bell makes her impatient. The evening outside is wet and cold. The word “wife” gives Okoth-Okach “pin-pricks in the heart and cold shiver” wrapped with sore memories with the slamming of doors, the shattering of windows and tongue spewing out cascades of venom like a cobra...(p. 3) a house of horrors ... with a whiff of boiling beans and the jungle of dirt and disorder... who would have the courage to scale the mountains of muck and stuffiness or listen to the unorchestrated clang of crockery and gadgetry (p 3).

This description paints the woes of Double O who is married to a howling wife cursing and calling him “a worn out, a cringe, a little flea with no drive and ambition” (p 6) yet in contrast, Wairimu is all alone though wet and cold outside. “Almost dark. Bank robbers and political careerists and petty pick pockets prowling the streets beyond that door” (pp. 7 – 8) as if Wairimu all alone is waiting for death just like Tinka in *The Burdens* waiting for agents of death – the “Kondos”. Ironically both Double O and Wairimu suffer from loneliness in their marriage. The gloomy picture Ruganda paints at the beginning of **Echoes of Silence** is a premonition of the death of marriage institution and family relationships Ruganda deals with in this play. As it turns out by the end of the play, Wairimu and Double O have no joy and happiness in marriage. It is as though they were waiting for death.
3.1.1 Theatre of the absurd: Depiction of absurdity of life

Some of the dramatic techniques Ruganda uses involve what is referred to as “controlled experiment” where a few characters are “abandoned” in the restricted area such as a sitting room as is the case with Double O and Wairi in Echoes of Silence or Tinka and Wamala in their shack in The Burdens.

In this confined room, they then act out the drama in their minds, their dreams and hopes, their fears and frustrations, and the occasional happy moments which they retrieve from their past, from time to time, to make their present lives a little tolerable, however futile the exercise. (Imbuga, Thematic Trends and Circumstance p. 177).

In terms of acting and theatre presentation Ruganda uses the “alienation effect”, a term coined by playwright Bertolt Brecht for a type of acting and theatre presentation which avoids creating the illusion of reality on stage in order to make the audience more critical of the action in the play... all the technical devices by which illusion is created are in full view of the audience (Etherton 9). Wamala for instance changes into the teacher’s suit in full view of the audience when he prepares to meet Kanagonago in The Burdens.

Ruganda uses role-playing where the actors subsume the characters’ role such as Tinka playing Kanagonago, in The Burdens or Wairi playing Muthoni in Echoes of Silence or Stella playing the refugee in Shreds of Tenderness and then they fall back into their real character roles in the respective plays.

This falls in the realm of the theatre of the absurd which Ruganda uses effectively to depict the theme of death in his drama. The theatre of the absurd focuses:

on man’s anguish, fantasies and alienation. In a world of slums, dustbins and brothels (such as depicted in The Burdens and Black Mamba) ...man’s victimization is the product of the human condition rather than social justice ... The world of absurd drama... is based on the view that there is no such harmony, no clear and well defined system of beliefs that can effectively govern man’s action ... man’s concern with the meaning of life, then becomes the central concern of the absurd play (Imbuga, Thematic Trends and Circumstances pp. 200 – 201)
In his plays, therefore, Ruganda tries to explore the meaning of life and true love relationships which in the present circumstances seem to elude the principal characters in his drama. For instance, Wairi and Double O who seem to be on the quest for the meaning of life, are disillusioned by loneliness and alienation and so are the couples, Tinka and Wamala, Barewa and Namuddu, Bwogo and Nankya. Even the siblings, Stella, Wak and Odie are disillusioned, too about the meaning of life assailed by nothing else but death. It should be noted that the action of absurd drama “is intended to demonstrate symbolically the idea of the playwright and to create the dramatic temperature necessary to maintain the interest of the audience” (Oliver 6–7).

3.1.2 Presentation: minimalism as a dramatic strategy

Because of the constraints of the Travelling Theatre and the influence from Athol Fugard’s dramatic techniques that heavily rely on minimalism, John Ruganda too, is a minimalist who apparently uses a single set and minimal cast to build his drama.

John Ruganda uses a single symbolic setting that suggests confinement, lack of freedom and escape from frustration, loneliness and death. Although the characters are able to paint the picture of the goings-on in the outside world, the action takes place in a single symbolic stage setting.

In The Burdens, Tinka and her children are confined in a shack set in the slums surrounded by insecurity and death from the “kondos”, deprivation and hunger. Indeed the cold-blooded murder of Wamala at the hands of the capricious wife, Tinka takes place in his hovel.

In The Floods all atrocious actions are enacted on the island. The confinement of the main action on this island gives an impression of a people trapped by death either from the wrath of the lake or the murderous regime. It is as though the inhabitants are waiting for death.
In fact whoever leaves the island faces eminent death. Ssalongo a father of twins, was escorted away by two military figures and was never seen again. The islanders who supposedly wanted to escape floods, are gunned down and all perish in the lake.

The army brigadier who was dumped in the lake is now the “Patron” of the lake beckoning everyone to their doom. Even Bwogo, Nankya and Kyeyune are rounded up at the end of the play by the armed soldiers. It is unlikely that Bwogo will escape the guillotine.

In Shreds of Tenderness, all action takes place within the confines of the living-room in a double-storeyed house that accommodates Odie, Stella and Wak. They are surrounded by insecurity and death as symbolized by the constant ricocheting of guns, uprising and civil war outside.

In Echoes of Silence, the action is confined to Njuguna's sitting room. Wairi and Double O seem to have been hemmed in. There is cold and rain outside with likely criminals plowing in the dark. The feeling of loneliness, rejection and alienation felt both by Double O and Wairi, gives an impression of depressed souls waiting for death since their aspirations for joy, happiness and unfulfilled dreams cannot be realized.

Bukenya personal interview 2nd October 2010, adds that the years after independence were troubled times. Society had gone haywire. Because of the social, political turmoil John Ruganda like Bukenya himself were forced into exile during the Amin dictatorial military misrule. Like in Echoes of Silence, society witnesses the death of a dream facing total collapse of meaningful existence full of life and hope. It is as it were a society is waiting for Njuguna who never comes to fulfill Okoth-Okatch’s dream an epitome of everybody’s dream to lead a fulfilled life. Echoes of Silence looks like an extended metaphor of Waiting for Godot. It is like waiting for death because God never appears. In any case one cannot see God without encountering death.
In *Black Mamba*, the setting is confined to Professor Coarx’s house mainly in the sitting room. It is a kind of prison where Barewa and Namuddu do not feel free to move around. Namuddu is literally confined to the bedroom while Barewa operates from the kitchen. The house is like a cell where even the Professor himself does not feel at ease. He is always worried that his perversion for over-indulgence with prostitutes would be found out. The setting gives a dreadful psychological torture worse than death.

In the *Covenant With Death*, although the scene shifts from “a country road” in the first movement to Kaikara's shrine near the Old Man’s compound, it is still on the road, in the middle of nowhere, on a journey in quest for life or death. Its setting turns out to be a journey to death as exemplified by the extermination of Matama and her parents. In short the theme of death affects the setting in John Ruganda's drama.

As a result of this the dramatic conflict relies heavily on the ingenuity, talent and versatility of the performing artists. John Ruganda’s drama therefore relies heavily on the manipulation of voice, body and acting space by the artists. It does not depend on gadgetry and modern manipulation of technology such as lighting to create mood and atmosphere. The treatment of the theme of the death in his plays requires intensity of feeling to bring out the anguish felt by the characters involved in order to achieve empathy or otherwise from the reader or audience.

Professor Oluoch Obura, personal interview, November 6th 2010, also describes John Ruganda as a minimalist who exploited the artistic talent of the performer to realize the societal concerns he articulates in his drama. He exploited on the mood motif by his careful auditioning and casting talented artists that could bring out his interpretation of the play. During rehearsals John Ruganda was a “slave driver” who always insisted on doing it right.

John Ruganda was lucky to have got the best artists: Stella Muka who had been best actress in Kenya Schools National Drama Festival. She combined well with the talented brilliant performing artists, Oluoch Obura, Njuguna Wakanyote and Odigo in his productions.
He was a minimalist partly because of the demands and constraints of the Travelling Théâtre that requires a small cast easy to travel with minimal stage properties. His plays, as has been said, depended on the performer’s manipulation of voice, body movement and use of acting space without relying on heavy stage properties and gadgetry and use of modern stage lights to create mood and atmosphere. The plays could be staged in a social hall, church, in an open market or on a street in an attempt to take drama to the people.

The long dialogue which characterizes Ruganda’s drama tested the versatility and viability of the talented performer to recreate mood, atmosphere by bouncing the audience both in time and space. The performer has to interpret and internalize the long dialogue, soliloquy or monologue to be able to deliver.

The performance on an open outside stage emphasized characterization, dramatic style and high level of acting. Prof. Oluoch Obura personal interview November 6th 2010, contends that Ruganda created discipline in his actors and gave them faith and encouragement to learn how to get the best out of themselves. Njuguna Wakanyote, Personal interview November 7th, 2010, confirms the above view that Ruganda as a director brought out the best in “you”, the performer. The success of Ruganda’s performances largely depended on acting the script not so much on the physical trapping of the gadgetry on stage. Ruganda was a demanding director, who destroyed the “you” first and created the artist in “you”. At the moment, Wakanyote who as Wak in Shreds of Tenderness, had a feeling that Ruganda was researching on them: Odigo, Stella and Wakanyote.

The success of John Ruganda’s plays is depicted in the authorial intrusions in his plays though obtrusive since John Ruganda uses some of his characters as a persona to point out Ruganda’s obsession with perfection in a production.

Since the theme of death requires high degree of emotional intensity and communication Ruganda insists on doing it right repeatedly during rehearsals even if it takes three hours to rehearse just one line as Wakanyote said. This comes out clearly in his plays. For example...
in *The Burdens* during the meet – Kanagonago-rehearsal scene, Tinka insists that Wamala does it right:

**Wamala:** (stands and tries it out) I walk in and then from the doorway... (Familiarity:) Hallo, Vincent. Long time no see.

**Tinka:** Not so familiarly. (He was back a few steps, then tries again, cautiously-almost timidly)

**Wamala:** Hello Vincent. How do...

**Tinka:** Mister. Mister. It’s business, remember ... you’re intruding.

He walks back and stops a few steps opposite her... (p. 51)

In *The Floods*, Bwogo insists that Nankya does it right – their first meeting at the zebra-crossing.

**Bwogo:** (impatiently moves over to her to demonstrate: first the way she has done it then the way she should do it) ...Remember? The gyrations. And don’t carry that big bag of yours as if you were going to the ladies’ or something. Every step must be calculated. Every gesture must carry a message. (He sits down) (She does the bit again, this time properly – like a coquette” (p 93)

Ruganda’s obsession with perfect movement and acting is also evident in *Echoes of Silence*. When Double O innumerates his success in a theatre production, he emphasizes a perfect movement: “He came in with the easy gait of an old man...” (Elatedly Easy gait is the expression...not ‘awkward movements ... but easy gait.’(p.42)

When Wairi imitates Grace Muthoni, Double O’s wife, Double O objects: “That’s not Muthoni, wrong voice ... the temper is not appropriate ... it should be thunder and lightning. When you open your mouth the audience should plug fingers in their ears. The sound mixer should explode, should explode and everybody scurry to the nearest exit. The police call in the fire brigade. That would be Muthoni (p. 62). The thunder clap woman. Muthoni’s character can only come out with constant rehearsals in order to produce the right voice.
Wakanyote, Personal interview November 7th, 2010, recalls Ruganda passionately hugging his actors, with tears in his eyes, after a successful drama production. This is echoed in *Echoes of Silence* when Njuguna a drama director rushed backstage excitedly and kissed Wairi passionately between tears of success (p. 29) for acting perfectly the role of Ophelia in *Hamlet*.

Indeed, as Wakanyote and Prof. Obura had earlier mentioned, Ruganda extended the discussion of the drama rehearsals late into the night. This is reflected in *Echoes of Silence*. Wairi, ostensibly and obstrusively disguised as Ruganda’s spouse, complains about her husband. “For him its theatre, theatre and nothing else but theatre …taking too much of his time at her expense (p. 28), Double O replies: But you know how it is madam. After a grueling rehearsal, although Wairi doesn’t want to hear it, “it is okay, boys. Freeze. Let’s discuss the rehearsal at the club.” Ten, eleven, midnight …a production is created not in a rehearsal room but outside …in an atmosphere where an actor’s ego and sensitivities are least likely to be hurt …and lose him forever. So let’s all go to the club and bare our hearts.” (pp. 28 – 29). This sounds an authorial voice articulating John Ruganda’s philosophy and method of production. Unfortunately he was misunderstood by those too close to him. So, the strength of John Ruganda’s drama lies partly in his insistence on perfection through gluing rehearsals to bring out the best in an artist in order for the performer to articulate the emotionally charged plays that deal with the theme, death as a running motif. A less endowed performing artist with an under-rehearsed play with long dialogue that characterizes John Ruganda’s plays, would not measure up to the task.

Moreover, John Ruganda’s plays do not follow a linear or chronological sequence of events, in terms of dramatic structure. Literary all his plays, *The Burdens*, *The Floods*, *Shreds of Tenderness*, *Echoes of Silence* use the sophisticated cinematic technique of flashback narrated or acted. This involves the actor to immerse himself into role playing or fantasy projection in order to recreate the dramatic conflict, mood and atmosphere and bounce the audience both in time and space. This requires a versatile and talented artistic performer. Short of this, Ruganda’s plays could be boring, too long, wordy with too much dialogue and with little action. So the success of John Ruganda’s drama largely depends...
on the talented performers to bring out the theme of death and other related thematic concerns.

John Ruganda himself acknowledges the fact that:

Anyone who will be looking for a conventional play will find Echoes of Silence disappointing in that it does not follow a lineal progression either in terms of plot or character development. But it has its chemistry.... It observes internal logic... Auditory images and symbols change rhythm and tempo as much as the visual ones do. They bring to the ear and eye certain reminiscences, certain echoes that force the characters to make emotional leaps into the past and the future with anguish and hope ... that is why the flashback has been so handy as a dramatic device. (“Afterword” Echoes of Silence p. 103).

The above observation from John Ruganda as a playwright and director indicates that the success of his plays largely depends on the versatility of the performer that must recreate the play to life and bring out those strong emotions of anguish that may be demanded by the various concepts of death in his drama. John concludes: “Readers familiar with my other works particularly The Burden, The Floods and Music Without Tears, (now entitled Shreds of Tenderness) will not find this (flashback) technique in anyway intriguing or challenging, especially when it comes to a character assuming so many other roles in the play (“Afterword,” Echoes of Silence p. 103).

Njuguna Wakanyote, personal interview November 7th 2010, observes that the actors had to have strong emotions and be able to sustain them throughout the long dialogue. He in fact adds that when abroad in Germany performing Shreds of Tenderness (then Music without Tears) the production took 3 hours. When he noticed the audience was getting bored and some were walking out, he decided to edit the play and cut out the verbosity. He in fact thinks that Shreds of Tenderness is too philosophical and deeply involving and a torture to Form IV K.C.S.E. candidates. He contends that the long dialogue and verbosity in John Ruganda’s plays, renders them static. The plays are too much demanding on the actors and lead to mental exhaustion on stage. He suggests that
Ruganda’s plays should be turned into movies because the stage performance is too demanding for an ordinary performer.

Be that as it may, the intriguing nature of the theme of death creates sufficient interest in the reader or viewer of John Ruganda’s plays. Although the long speeches may create lack of sustainability of emotions on the part of the less endowed performing artists, John Ruganda has carefully crafted his dialogue that builds dramatic action and character interrelationships using the theme of death as a central focus in his drama.

3.1.3 Fantasy Projection: Effects of Death

Ruganda uses fantasy projection in flashbacks which are either enacted or narrated. In a play-within-a-play scene, John Ruganda re-creates the past lives of his characters. The reliving of their glorious lives is “to make the present bearable and the future worth waiting for” Wamala says.

The reverie into their past is a kind of escapism from the harsh realities of the present. The characters normally revisit their glorious past after strong emotional and psychological turmoil that ends up in a physical fight or a scuffle. In order to make amends, the enactment of their past life is preceded with offering each other a hard drink: “enguli”, Scotch Whiskey or Brandy as a sign of making amends. For instance, after the fight over the bottle of “enguli” when Tinka sustains a grazed elbow, Wamala offers her a drink and asks her to have “a sip or two. It helps. Drugs one and keeps one hoping” (The Burdens p 37).

Tinka and Wamala are dejected souls who are as good as dead. This results into an attempt to relive their past glorious life in order “to make the present bearable and the future worth waiting for” Wamala says. Although Wamala’s “blows and tarts have wiped out (p 37) Tinka’s memory, the drink helps the two to immerse themselves in “the happier times” of their past:
Their courting. In the park behind the chapel ... Tinka's breaking of the vowels as a nun by the door steps of the chapel ... on the cold cement ... then in the cemetery too ... (with little respect for the dead leading to the discretions if holy grounds) with holy ghosts weeping and turning away ashamed (p 38). Then the politically expedient marriage and the re-enactment of the extravagant state wedding, a symbol of “national extravagance between bouts of “whiskey and the champagne” (p 41). Then the advent of independence and the swimming into luxury, “shopping at the supermarkets over the phone, business deals done at the Intercontinental and the hairdressers coming home. We were big pots then” (p 41) Wamala concludes.

But now in contrast Tinka and Wamala languish in abject poverty holed up in a squalid hovel in the slums with their desperate children. The family is demoralized and it is as good as dead.

Through the enactment of Wamala's marriage, the reader or viewer is able to see Wamala's insensitivity, hypocrisy and scheming depicted through the marriage of expediency to achieve political ends. Wamala is vindictive and he is hitting out at the Catholic Church for:

Rallying nuns, fellow priests and faithfuls against me. Branding our party communist- who would rape the nuns and turn churches into casinos... I gave them what they deserved. Their most trusted nun, the only daughter of an eminent catholic chief. It was a political masterpiece. And in your spiritual dusk, was my political dawn and their defeat (p 41).

The implication here is that Wamala does not love Tinka. She was married for selfish political reasons. When Wamala makes Tinka go through abominable and ungodly love escapades in the cemetery, on the floor in front of the chapel and makes her break her vowel as trusted nun, Wamala, is deliberately killing her image and integrity. These love escapades too show a perverted, immoral and spiritually dead person - Wamala. Although he won the political election, he was not to serve the people but to exploit them so that he swims in luxury-the ranch, the mansion and limousine. He like Vincent Kanagonago is an agent of exploitation that visits suffering and death on the helpless poor citizens.
In the meet-Kanagonago-play- within-a play scene, Wamala continuously (serves himself some more drink p 54-55) in order to gather Dutch courage and spin out his anger and frustration. He remembers the squalid life back at home. "Diarrhea, floods, composit, the little anthills and the flies while Kanagonago lives in luxury and self-grandeur. Because of the drink and frustration, in an outburst, Wamala calls Vincent "a blood sucker, an exploiter, and an arch swindler." Wamala (carries himself to the edge of hysteria and violence) and swears revenge:

One day this little man, this pauper... being led by black vipers like you will one day... unite... one day shriveled fingers will throttle fat throats like this. (He grabs Tinka's throat). (p 61)

When it is Tinka's apparent need to revenge on Wamala for her loneliness, poverty and frustration, she drives Wamala to an edge when reminded of the haunting boots of the soldiers who had come to arrest him for treason. Wamala goes into a reverie, some form of fantasy projection and imagined that the soldiers had come for real. In a moment of desperation and self-defense he nearly shoots his son, Kaija with a pistol:

(Tinka realizes the impending catastrophe. She stops Wamala) asks Tinka whether she was on "the side of the private".
Tinka: It's Kaija
Wamala: Kaija?
Tinka: Yes, your son.
Wamala: He is at school.
Kaija: It's me father.
(Wamala jerks to a stop. Recognizing Kaija. He is ashamed of himself that he simply sits down, head between his knees, dumbfounded p65).

This is the last time Wamala is seen as a shell of a man. This could have informed Tinka's resolve to murder a dreamer because as matters stood Wamala could neither redeem himself nor the family. To some extent Tinka has contributed to Wamala's tragedy because she had not been supportive. She contributed to the death of Wamala's self-esteem and male ego. Her capricious nature viciousness and revenge killed "the man" in Wamala. Tinka becomes an agent of destruction and death - a focal theme around which Ruganda builds his drama.
In *The Floods*, Ruganda uses the theme of death to construct the flashback. After a scuffle and struggle Bwogo “growls and barks at her like a dog, tearing unto her viciously with his teeth and fingers” (p 69). This illustrates how demonic and dehumanized Bwogo and Nankya have become. “Both are on fours like cats and dogs” (p 69). This follows a revelation of Bwogo’s scheme to eliminate Nankya and her mother. Bwogo hits back by calling her an academic fraud while Nankya reiterates by threatening to expose him and Boss to the Amnesty International for their excesses and abuse of human rights marked by the numerous senseless murders of the innocent dumped in the lake. Bwogo and Nankya drawn themselves in hard drink as a sign of mending fences.

Bwogo: Look, let’s be friends...genuine friends. Like we used to.
Nankya: Blood stinking drunk. You don’t know what you are doing.
Bwogo: There is no need to fight each other.

Both then immerse themselves in the lives of their happier times from their first “encounter at the zebra crossing” (p 91). This leads to their dining and partying till one day Nankya becomes pregnant when she is literary raped by Bwogo on the carpet in his office. A pregnancy which now Bwogo disclaims and which Nankya threatens to abort since Bwogo does not want to take responsibility.

The enactment of their past happy days brings them together as evidenced by Nankya’s confession that Bwogo is “not really that bad” though she calls him a “bloody murderer”.

It is late in the day because Bwogo is rounded up by the soldiers as the head of the SRB to go and answer charges of atrocities and fraud.

However out of the enactment and the subsequent dialogue the reader or viewer learns that Nankya is a product of rape. This is evidence of the atrocities committed by the soldiers who raped Nankya's mother. Bwogo’s upbringing did not give him an opportunity to mix freely with the poor and make friends. His life is that of exclusivity. He has no feelings for the ordinary souls. His compassionate feelings are dead.
The fact that Bwogo is an opportunist who has risen in life because he is Boss's cousin; this has made him hollow and unfeeling for the plight of the common man. He takes advantage of Nankya's social status in life - she is a university lecturer with PhD and she is tipped to head the literature department and professorship. In contrast Bwogo was an academic failure or struggler:

Boarding school all way to form six. A brief spurt in the military academy at Sandhurst. Quit because the exercises were too vigorous. Several trials in schools of technology in Britain and ends up in India. Commerce degree in Delhi. Five years of flopping and sixth to fluke the B.Com. Under-Secretary in the ministry of commerce and accelerated promotions because he is Boss's cousin (p 56-57).

Nankya's success would therefore boost his image in the public eye with a university don as his wife although Bwogo does not want to admit it.

In the play-within-a play, Bwogo seduces Nankya more out of infatuation than love: Bwogo says, "I must catch that bird for sure. My! my! What a chick!...those hips, the gyrations of the hips that tantalize men and send their hands diving into the deeps of their trousers" (p 93).

So Ruganda uses this scene to show the artificiality of human relationships especially the betrayal of love. The fact that in the play Bwogo had planned to eliminate Nankya shows death of genuine trust in fellow man.

The play-within-a play scenes enacted in Shreds of Tenderness, too, depict human frailty, violence and death. The enactment of the war of liberation (p 39-43) against the guerrilla forces and internal malcontents by government soldiers typifies atrocities against man: "Children are being captured ...the women are being raped... houses are set on fire" (p 42). the subject-leader roles played by Stella and Odie respectively show the viciousness of military dictatorship. When the Queen Mother wants her son, Odie replies: Tell her, her son is dead. Dead. Suicide case...and then kill her (p 42).
The hypocrisy is brought out when the soldier advises His Excellency to eliminate the Queen Mother in a fake road accident: And then when Your Excellency learns of her untimely death, declare the day of her burial a day of national mourning. Give her a state funeral with full military honours and name one of the back lanes after her”! (As a by-the-way) You will have to attend the funeral, Your Excellency (p 47).

The same political game is re-played in The Floods. The press the meteorological department, the radio and the mass media are used as political propaganda machinery to hoodwink the citizens and as a means of covering up atrocities committed by the state:

The death of queen mother. This is a national catastrophe. The orphans and widowers grieve with the common man... Condolences to the bereaved family...Death has untimely ripped the Beloved one from our midst. The Founder Mother of our nation...There will be state mourning for four weeks, a military burial for the occasion and a statue erected in the City Square (The Floods p 60).

Still on Bwogo's diabolical plan to get rid of her, Nankya rubs it in: you gave orders hoping that I would be one of the victims...A thousand pounds tip for the director of the meteorological, radio and television would warn the inhabitants about the imaginary floods... Your hands and conscience would appear clean. No remorse. No self-recrimination because bodies of mother and her daughter are untraceable. Then your expensive wreaths at government expense and symbolic burial in the city cemetery for a would-have-been fiancée and her mother. An ingenious plan. This neddles Bwogo's conscience and he howls like maniac (pg 67).

These are various manifestations of death at the individual and societal level.

It is true Bwogo pleads for reconciliation with Nankya when he discovers that she has read through him and has unravelled his hypocrisy and betrayal.

Although Nankya scales the wall of poverty and jumps over into Bwogo’s arms (p 104) to lead a life of luxury and opulence led by the Bwogos, it is for selfish and opportunist reasons. Though their expected “baby boy Rwenkuba, the thunderbolt that will blast the wall and redeem” the poor, the hope is remote since Bwogo and Nankya are rounded up by
the liberation soldiers soon after Bwogo and Nankya had agreed to have a glamorous wedding with a “Big reception at State House” (p 105).

Knowing all the atrocities Bwogo has committed including his calculated scheming to eliminate Nankya and her mother, one wonders why Nankya heaps so much praise on Bwogo: “you’re not all that bad ... You're just wonderful” (pp 104-105), of poverty led by the lowest members below the economic social scale.

These praises can only be expressed by one who is desperate or overenthusiastic for personal selfish reasons to identify one’s self with the new high social class for prestige and show-off. Though Nankya is self-made, intelligent and a hard worker, she is curious to see and possibly experience the life “beyond dinginess and darkness (p 104).

Nankya becomes materialistic and attracted to worldly treasures... the beauty, the brightness ...cars sliding by in somnambular silence...doves dipping themselves in swimming pool. This is paradise (p 104) that overwhelsms Nankya .Life to her becomes sensuous and she forgets the moral responsibility for the poor.

This looks a different stance from Nankya's earlier admirable literary criticism with her concern for the plight of fellow workers who are “underfed, undernourished, unclothed, uneducated ,abused, whipped, rapped and incarcerated for failing to provide enough raw materials to the capitalistic world” (p 23).

No wonder Bwogo describes her as a pseudo Marxist who only pays lip-service to the plight of the poor and disadvantaged members of society. Her feelings for the poor are dead. Now like the Bwogo’s, she too suffers from the rich man's disease “Agromania” a craze about empty space, masses of room to move about (p 75).

Odie accuses Stella to have thrown “shame and decency to the jackals” (p 31). However, the fear of death also most probably holds both Stella and Nankya hostage because as evidenced by the murder of Rutaro, these agents of death can commit murder if to prove to
everyone that (they) would do anything and get away with impunity” (p 31) Impunity is a cancerous disease that pervades post independence states in Africa.

Stella, too, in Shreds of Tenderness loves sensuous life, wealth, drinks and parties...night after night’ with Major-General Ali, the man who signed a death warrant of their father (pp 29 – 30) The same Ali who sent soldiers that raped Nankya and nuns in school (p 31).

Stella and Nankya cohabit with well known bloody murderers – Ali and Bwogo. Could it be that Stella and Nankya’s sensibilities are dead. Or could it be that the two have become slaves and cannot extricate themselves from a vindictive regime, whose love advances, by these agents of death cannot be jilted or rejected without dire consequences of death and retribution.

The death of trust and hope in the new political dispensation is also evident in Shreds of Tenderness where there is political struggle for leadership with little regard for the masses. The arrogating to himself the power of the chairman of the primer, through force and violence by Odie typifies the military coups and struggle for power either through the rejection of electoral results or through violent means by use of the gun. This is a symbol of the death of peaceful transition of power in Africa:

Odie grabs Wak’s throat. There is a fierce struggle, trying to resolve old and new grievances at once ...Odie gets the upper hand. He lifts Wak up, locks both hands at the back places knee on his victim’s spine and forces him to repeat the words ...A for AUTOCRACY (p 63).

If there is power struggle among siblings, how much more devastating would it be among people without blood relation.

In the reenactment of the improvisation on the plight of refugees, Wak transforms himself into a local policeman, Odie a constable while Stella becomes a refugee. Odie’s brutal animal instinct and dehumanization are well played out. Odie relishes his part as a police
dog sniffing around Stella’s legs and emitting uncontrollable bursts of barking noises (p 88).

Moral death, corruption through bribery is played out through the tendency for migration of officers for extortion for money and sexual favours. Stella narrowly escapes rape by declaring that she was all HIV/AIDS victim- “Dishing out a free dose of death” (P 94).

The fear of death saves Stella from being raped by the immigration officers who in this case are portrayed as corrupt, morally and spiritually dead.

The reenactment of the Mr. “No - Fear - No - Favour man”, story depicts the decadence of society especially the insensitivity and lack of sympathy for the unfortunate plight of other men such as the refugees. It also depicts a society that has gone to seed and deeply involved in sexual immorality and spiritual death:

At the New Garden the place is crawling full of prostitutes and professors, students and widowed sugar-mummies. Beer is flowing like the River Nile in flood ...The entire spectrum of busy beehive is...busy drowning sorrows of their dreary lives...(while) No- Fear - No - Favour man on the prowl...Full throttle ...mouth as wide as cow’s And as loud. Like a hound on heat....making howling noises (p 101).

The refugees are at the receiving end taunted:

Stella: (Explodes) cooikaikwanyu, mathaamira kweny maya. (Return to your country, you refugees)...You grabbing our jobs and using our women... Fouling the air... refugees should be seen not heard. They are referred to as bastards who plunder the economy and cause shortages “... They are aliens who sabotage the economy, spread venereal diseases and rob banks in broad daylight. Refugee are described as uncircumcised dogs with wasted muscles and exhausted manhood, bloody cowards who do nothing while their mothers at home are raped and toddlers dissembled” (pp.104-105).
It is only when Mr. No-Fear No-Favour messes himself up with “pee and poo-poo” in a moment of fear of a presumed bloody coup d'etat, that the plight of dehumanized refugees can be appreciated. Their plight is explained through the fear of death which John Ruganda creates through dramatic irony in this scene. Mr. No-Fear-No-Favour who had sworn that he is never afraid of a coup and had never imagined it could happen in his country, ends up getting humiliated. Ironically he seeks help from a refugee he had just humiliated.

In play -within- a play, technique, requires very competent and well rehearsed performers to execute their roles creatively. This is particularly so in those emotionally charged scenes that bring out anguish and pain. The theme of death in whatever manifestations requires highly charged emotions.

In Echoes of Silence, for example, the actors must bring out the traumatic experience of “broken dreams, unfulfilled ambitions ...the repressed emotions and shattered wishes of unfulfilled dreams” (p 23) of both Double O and Wairi.

Wairi loathes, “the smells of silence and solitude...in a house full of nettles and red ants...where the house, the furniture and kitchenware (p 26) share” secrets and intimacy more than Njuguna her husband does...”but they too have gotten tired of my cold touch and abated whines and whimpering”. They too, are giving me the cold shoulders of rejection (p 26). While Wairi is “suffocating with affluence and solitude”, Double O is “sick and tired of depravity and the thunderclaps (the nagging and spiteful wife) at home” (p 29).

When Wairi enacts Grace Muthoni’s promiscuity and encounter with Sid, the American film star, she does it so convincingly. She goes through the erotic paces in a suit at the Hilton Hotel. The anguish and pain Double O goes through bring out the theme of death in whatever manifestation:

Double O is incensed and agonized. He is holding on to Wairi writhing with agony. His mouth ajar when it is not moaning, his eyes fixed on some spot taking in the images of what is supposed to be taking place between Sid and Muthoni...Double O breaks down ...sprawling on the
Double O is a “pathetic figure” as good as dead because of the emotional turmoil he goes through: “grotesque motions of jealousy, envy, vulnerability, anxiety, doubt and even total love for Muthoni” (p 74).

It takes a talented actor or actress to bring out these charged emotions propelling the characters towards the edge of death. No wonder eventually Double O contemplates committing suicide when deserted by Muthoni and his beloved daughter, Tina. “the absence of mother and child is in reality the absence of Double O. The emptiness and loneliness would kill him. That is why Wairi reads his mind. “You want to take a little drink to still yourself against their absence... and then put “a noose around your neck” (p 81).

Although Double O and Wairi are united in their loneliness and rejection just like Matama and Motomoto in Covenant With Death, they find common ground drowned with the balm of a drink. They will only wake up the following morning to the bitter truth and reality of unfulfilled dreams. Njuguna will probably come back to his wife Wairi while Double O has to return to a house of emptiness and loneliness. Though living, Wairi and Double O are in essence “dead”.

3.2.0 Effect Of Death On Characterisation

This sub section basically explores how the theme of death affects characterization in John Ruganda’s plays. He presents the principal characters as villains, and agents of evil, destruction and death. Although the architects of evil behind the scenes such as “Boss” in The Floods and Shreds of Tenderness are given type names, are principal players in visiting mayhem and death on the innocent citizens whether they are civilians or military rulers in past -independence states in Africa.

In The Burdens the “Old Veteran” is the boss who is ruthless with dissidents. He rules with a heavy hand. Wamala is lucky that he was only locked up for two years and finally got released by the presidential reprieve otherwise in other states he would have faced a public firing squad.
Equally in *The Floods* and *Shreds of Tenderness*, the reader or viewer only hears about “Boss” in each of those plays. This gives an impression of the mysterious nature of these “Bosses” who are presented as demi-gods beyond the reach of man, particularly the common man. They rule through proxy and the sycophants so as to gain and execute their diabolical schemes so as to gain and perpetuate themselves in power for selfish reasons: lust, self-preservation, greed for power and materialism.

This is a Machiavellian view where the fathers of a nation try to give a benevolent impression like Kongi in Wole Shoyinka's *Kongi's Harvest* while behind the scenes they plan malevolently for murder and summary executions through hypocritical, opportunistic and greedy sycophants as agents of death. Bwogo in *The Floods* and Odie in *Shreds of Tenderness* are typical examples who use the SRB boys to eliminate real or imaginary enemies of state.

Ruganda uses the same technique of description through hearsay of those stinking get-rich-quick tycoons who have amassed wealth at the expense of the masses thereby causing slow death to the populace that wallows in abject poverty. For example Odie's father is a looming figure. His portrait typifies a demi-god- a supernatural: “a silent listener to every conversation in the home”. He as a member of the University Senate is widely travelled and has acquired and amassed wealth: 1500 acre farm, an executive house and “the Nile Apartments” (*Shreds of Tenderness* p 118).

Then there is Katalikawe who never went beyond form four always at the tail end of the class (p 56), but now “the man is stinking rich. He is a millionaire(with a) Big mansion, a fleet of cars, a dairy farm, a poultry farm...export and import complex, Director of the National Wines and Spirits Corporation...also operating a Computer College, you name it” (pp 55-56).

In *The Burdens* Kanagonago though enacted by Tinka, he is never met in person. His impact as an agent of exploitation and a cause of impoverishment to the masses who face slow death because of deprivation and poverty is felt. Mr Kanagonago lives in opulence, in an executive apartment up market, changes cars like pants, while the town tramps and city
thugs are carefully hemmed out by the hedge and the barbed wire fence (p 52). Wamala says its luxury and exploitation through and through. They're bent on sucking the blood out of us until we drop dead (p 23) “Bleeding a leech to fatten a heifer” (p 23) Tinka concludes.

In *Echoes of Silence*, Njoroge -Njuguna is a powerful man who leads a life of affluence though the reader or viewer never meets him in person but his presence hovers over the whole play.

John Ruganda himself posts: *Echoes of Silence*

“Suggests a very minimal verbal contact between Wairi and Njoroge. She lives in a much more agonizing solitude than Double O does: at least he has got “thunderclaps” and Tina to go back to. The gadgets of affluence that would ordinarily be a source of pride are here personified to remind her of her plight and their worthiness when happiness is absent. Perhaps in a wider context one is talking about hollowness (death), when material success is not complemented by human love and understanding (Ruganda, “Afterward” *Echoes of Silence* p 102).

So Njuguna’s absence from home aggravates Wairi’s loneliness and disillusionment in the marriage institution. The play seems to ask what does one do or how does one pre-occupy oneself while waiting for death or waiting for Njuguna, a symbol of hope for happiness yet he never turns up.

Grace Muthoni in *Echoes of Silence* with her “thunderclaps” distresses Double O because of her nagging and promiscuity when she runs away with the American film star, Sid, and taking Double O’s favorite daughter, Tina. This frustration and sense of loneliness edges Double O closer to death when he contemplates committing suicide. Although the reader or viewer never meets Muthoni physically on stage, her presence as an agent of frustration to kill a man’s soul pervades the whole play.

Muthoni, Double O’s wife, continually nags him about the deplorable conditions at home. She does not only question his manhood but she above all acts as a formidable wedge between him and their daughter Tina. His wife’s decision to desert him, taking with her his lovable daughter, would
be strong enough motive to make him contemplate suicide. (Ruganda
"Afterword" Echoes of Silence p 95-96).

In Covenant With Death, the reader or viewer never comes face to face with Kaikara, the
goddess of fruition except through her voice. This is for invisible supernatural spirit that
controls and determines the fate of man. When Bamya contravenes the covenant, when his
daughter cohabits with a white man Bwana Duncan in the city against Kaikara's edict,
Bamya family is wiped out by the wrath of God. So when one looks closely at what might
be called the invisible characters, one has a feeling that they are agents of death.

Regarding the principal characters Ruganda presents in the plays, they exhibit nothing but
evil, destruction and death. Wamala in The Burdens literally died the moment he was
driven by blind ambition to overthrow the government in collaboration with the “Yankees”
and their dollars. He was given the impression that he would be a better boss and that he
had “a presidential gaiety” (p 42). Consequently, Wamala was spared the public firing
squad but he was lucky he was clapped in for only two years” (p 42) and was stripped of all
the wealth he had “grabbed” within the short stint he was a cabinet minister: the mansion,
the cars, the cows, the ranches and the life of extravagance and opulence “We were big
pots then” (p 41) .Wamala and Tinka confess:

Tinka : Shopping at the supermarket over the phone
Wamala: Business deals at the Intercontinental.
Tinka : The hairdressers coming home.
Wamala: Bank managers in my study.
Tinka : An insidious upsurge of relatives and friends.
     Now it is this hovel. No friends, no relatives.

(The Burdens p 42)

Ruganda presents Tinka and Wamala as frustrated individuals who have failed to come to
terms with the new situation of poverty from a cabinet ministerial life to becoming paupers
living in the slums. Wamala feels inadequate as a man because as a husband, he cannot
afford to fend for the family. In fact the roles are reversed. It is Tinka who through her
distilling “nguli, the illicit brew and weaving mats that the family is able to barely survive
in the slums. Wamala confesses that the situation is unbearable:
Wamala: I suddenly realized we couldn't take the situation any longer you, me and the children. We get up at the crack of dawn. Tea without milk. Cold potatoes and beans. The searing stink of smoke and the smell of urine from Kake's bedding. We wash our faces with dew because water costs a fortune...Kaija goes to school. The cold morning making his teeth chatter and biting his bare buttocks. Kake chases butterflies... I drink and drug myself against depression and frustration. I come back home to the silent curses and the empty eyes of the children of uncertainty... day in day out till the Second Political Coming. I can't stand it any longer (pp 25-26).

John Ruganda here, has created a character who has lost hope in life and the political dispensation. Wamala's situation is aggravated by the nagging wife yet the "world outside is hell let loose. It's ruthless. It breaks one. Everyone orders you to walk with your tail limp between your thighs...they want you to know they are now on top sitting on your head... So when a man comes home from this hell, this world, this crowd full of power-hungry bastards with twitching hands-hands eager to grab and get rich, get rich quickly-a man wants sympathy and sweetness tender care and kindness (and a little respect). Not silent curses (pp 35-36).

To Wamala the world outside and home are "hell let loose". He feels more at home with his fellow drankards and thigh mongers at the Republic Bar. Although the drink "drugs one and keeps one hoping" (p 37), it doesn't wipe out the reality. The following morning when the drink has waned off poverty as well as frustration stares one in the face.

Ironically Wamala only pays lip-service to the wretched of the earth-the slum dwellers. When possessed with the dream idea of the safety matches with two heads on each end of the match stick which he hopes to sell to Associated Matches, and the idea of establishing an International Slogan Syndicate to sell political slogans, Wamala hopes to rise to the top again. He asks his wife Tinka "tear up the tatters...pull down this hovel. A big mansion awaits us...A limousine is beckoning" (p 20).

Paradoxically, Wamala looks forward to relive a life of luxury and extravagance without thinking about the common man in the slums. He is an opportunist and dreamer. He leads a life of empty existence. His spirit is dead and feels inadequate because he cannot fulfill his
obligations of the family. The only moment he feels elated after his downfall from the ministerial life, is when he comes back home with a bed for Kaija only his spirits to be dumped again by Tinka who derides him for bringing a cheap second-hand bed. He is a disillusioned man:

The feel of power is now an irritating memory for Wamala and his family...Wamala relives his former station through dreams and illusions of Men who have been on top but find hunger, poverty and the failure to meet family obligations a humiliating affair ...He finds it difficult to accept his defeat, so he resorts to drink to steel himself against the new realities” (Ruganda, “Introduction” (The Burdens pp v-vi).

So, when Tinka finally murders Wamala, it is anticipated. Tinka has eliminated a dreamer who had failed to come to terms with his new station in life. Wamala had in fact died many times before his death as a result of poverty, disillusionment, humiliation and loss of power. Tinka is a calculating cold-blooded murderer-an agent of death that hastens Wamala's end to the grave. A close look at The Burdens, shows that death is a catalyst that propels the dramatic conflict forward particularly through these two frustrated characters - Wamala and Tinka.

In The floods John Ruganda presents Bwogo as an agent of death. He is the head of SRB which he uses to terrorize the citizens. He is involved in “evil doings, especially the wanton individual or mass murders and attempted murders which he either commits or authorizes. Each time Nankya tries to raise the question of these murders, Bwogo gets violent, accusing her of provoking “or” needling him” (Bukenya 26 - 27).

Ruganda describes Bwogo as a monster, stinking with murder....a bloody murderer, a swindler and an extortionist (p 86).

Bwogo is an opportunist who has taken advantage of his relationship as a cousin to the head of state to enrich himself at the expense of the masses. As mentioned earlier, there are, “The Bwogo Estate everywhere in the country. The Mitchell Mansions. The Aphrodite Service Apartments. The Bay of Bachelors. The Camasutra Hostels and the Rainbow
Tourist Hotels...a private bank account in Switzerland...gold ingots in Bengal...all for one man, a bachelor at that" (p 76) while the masses are threatened with poverty deprivation, starvation and death. The elimination of Rutaro on a flimsy reason that he had danced with Nankya, Bwogo's mistress, the extermination of the islanders, the summary executions and torture of innocent citizens and the mass dumping of brutalized bodies in the lake symbolized by the gustily execution of the army brigadier with three nails in his skull and his genitals stuck in his mouth, all at the orders of Bwogo present a cool bloodthirsty individual who is an agent of both moral and physical death in the play. He is a rapist as witnessed by his raping Nankya in his office on a carpet. He is a hypocrite and a schemer who plans to execute Nankya's mother and Nankya herself his closest friend carrying his child. Bwogo is callous as symbolized by his stabbing mother ant in the cranium. He is as cold blooded as death itself.

Nankya though critical of the political system and the Bwogo's senseless and monstrous brutalization of the innocent, she, only pays lip-service to her confessed commitment to the poor. She makes empty threats to expose Boss's excesses and misuse of power to Amnesty International without taking pragmatic steps to do so.

Although she knows that the islanders including Nalongo with her twins were going to be summarily executed, she does nothing to warn them. It looks as if she was complicity to murder. Though she knows that Bwogo is a cold-blooded murderer, she goes ahead to cohabit with him to a degree of getting pregnant and hoping to be his legally married wife. The two have had their memorable escapades, dining and partying: Picnics every weekend. Movies on Mondays. Dining and dancing on Wednesdays. Parties on Fridays and the two were called the "inseparable ones" (p 90).

Nankya seems to lavish in luxury and would like to experience a life led by" a poached egg, bread and butter product "(p 70) like Bwogo. She seems to have forgotten how it feels like to live a squalid life due to poverty and deprivation: a "Dingy little room. Sharing it with rats and lizards. Cockroaches in the corners. Flies and mosquitoes. Everything wrapped in smoke and soot... one meal a day - if you can find it" (p 70).
This is the kind of squalid life Wamala, too, complains of in *The Burdens*. It looks as if Nankya condones this exploitation of the poor and therefore, she seems to abate the slow journey to death led by the dejected. In short the presentation of Bwogo and Nankya shows how Ruganda uses the principal characters to build his drama using death as a focal point.

In *The Floods* too, Ruganda uses Kyeyune as a symbol of old freedom and as a sensitive thermometer that points out the evils of the new political dispensation. In an environment that reeks of death and where man’s existence is mere survival in a hostile environment polluted by intolerance, governance and military dictatorship, Kyeyune typifies the suffering experienced by the ordinary helpless citizens. He also represents that which is virtuous in society.

While Nankya and Bwogo “are hard, harsh, and materialistic, Kyeyune is tender, reflective and deeply spiritual... he gives us an insight into the rich human values of faith, self-respect, honesty and consideration for others which the perverted greed and irresponsibility of people like Boss and Bwogo has destroyed and continues to destroy. Kyeyune is also the most conspicuous representative in the play of simple ordinary people and the sufferings, physical mental and spiritual, to which they are subjected by the wicked regime (Bukenya 27).

In spite of himself Kyeyune upholds what is morally right. “I don’t touch what doesn’t belong to me, son. That’s the custom here if you have forgotten already” (*The Floods* p 6). He reminds the Headsman who has grabbed the Fisherman’s dry fish.

Kyeyune’s psychological trauma because of the army brigadier who was dumped in the lake with three nails in his head, is a good illustration of the negative psychological effect on the citizens as a result of senseless killings and lack of respect for the dead. Kyeyune abandons his trade as a fisherman when he fished out the dead brigadier and when he found a finger of a human being in the bowel of fish when taking his meal. He describes the times as “turbulent and man swift of foot and trigger. He prays Kagoro not to let the grass suffer when the mighty ones size each others biceps” (p37). “The mainland is choking with (blood) the lake bubbling with it like a cauldron and the island is barricaded with blood” (p 36).
Nankya confirms Kyeyune's fears. Kyeyune's aberration is evidence of dehumanization the citizens have undergone at the hands of the murderous regime. Death or the fear of it has turned Kyeyune into a moving shadow always haunted by death.

In *Shreds of Tenderness*, too, the theme of death influences characterization. Sibling rivalry is motivated by greed for power and property. Odie the villain goes to any length including scheming to kill his own father and half-brother, Wak who narrowly escapes into exile. Odie is obsessed with revenge against his father who had preferential treatment for Wak. It is Odie, Wak refers to indirectly “People being killed for trifles... property, included. Brother informing on brother because of property. Son informing of father because of property” (p 118). Odie like Bwogo in *The Floods*, joins the SRB, the terror machine ia an informer.

John Ruganda presents Odie as callous and vindictive. His murderous tendencies are depicted by his obsession in torturing and exterminating the ticks and termites and his constant reference to Wak as a coward, a deserter who needs to be shot by firing squad. His placing Wak’s photograph each year for ten years in the obituaries, the mock burial of Wak and his eventual disinheritance of him, show him as a calculating cold blooded murderer, an hypocrite and fraud. He is, like Bwogo in *The Floods*.

So, John Ruganda uses Odie a villain to perpetuate the atrocities in the play. Hence the theme of death becomes pivotal in building character and the dramatic conflict.

In the *Covenant With Death*, the principal actress Matama is used by John Ruganda to depict death. Matama carries death around her neck like a necklace. She was fated to die even before she was born. Her death “happened before it happened” (p 103).

Kaikara the goddess of fruition is a vindictive goddess. Because Bamya and Matama contravened the covenant, the village is littered with death. “Death in and death out this our village is a butchery” (p 102). Bamya laments. But now that Matama and her parents have
been struck dead by the God's wrath "the air is purged of wanton affinities and the inherited
debt paid by an unknowing child (p102-103), Matama.

The three have been sacrificed in order to appease the gods so as to restore normalcy,
harmony and fertility in face of barrenness and prolonged drought . Matama is a victim of
circumstances. In her parents' frustration and anxiety to have a child, they mortgaged
Matama's life by agreeing to a covenant of barrenness by their daughter. Without
procreation then there is no life. Death pre-supposes life and therefore though Matama was
born she was as good as dead as witnessed by her cultural estrangement, and alienation and
rejection.

Matama's parents' selfishness in their zeal to be happy entered into an inhuman contract
that denied Matama joy and her fulfillment as a woman, married with children in society.
Her quest has been in pursuit of happiness that is why she runs away from the village to the
city though this quest has been futile and only leads to her death. The theme of death is
central in this tragic play that shows the capriciousness of the gods over which men have
no control. Although their circumstances are different, this is a case of pre-destiny like
Okonkwo's in Chinua Achebe's novel, Things Fall Apart. Okonkwo was evading dying a
weakling like his father, Unaka, only to face worse fate than his own father for Okonkwo
was finally buried like a dog.

Oedipus the king, in Oedipus Rex also had his fate pre- destined before his birth. Though
he tried to run away, he ended up meeting his destiny as had been ordained by the gods. He
was to murder his own father and marry his own mother: he commits murder and incest
both of which were an abomination. His wife (mother) like Kabooga, Bamya's wife
commits suicide while Oedipus himself gouges out his eyes and dies in exile. Matama, too,
cannot escape death as had been fated by the gods. So, a close look at John Ruganda's
presentation of the principal characters in his play is influenced by the theme of death
which is central in building his drama.
3.2.1 Language and symbolism: Effect of the theme of death.

On close look on John Ruganda's drama because of his inclination towards minimalism, a lot comes out in the long dialogue or monologue with a lot of attention to details. The stage directions help in characters interpretation and reaction. But as regards the theme of death, Ruganda uses emotive language and running motifs such as the floods and the storm to depict death.

Regarding moral decadence particularly sexual immorality, Ruganda uses vulgar or obscene language that is shocking and startling. Sample this:

Wamala: WARAGI WINS THIGHS....
“REX AND SEX FOR A MAN OF TASTE”.
Tinka: You're dirty-minded.
Wamala: The only thing that works these days.
Tinka: Dirt?
Wamala: Sex. Our new religion, forgetting alcohol for a moment.
Tinka: Your mind is as tattered as your jacket.
(The Burdens p 28)

The above example depicts Wamala as a demented person that has thrown decency and decorum to the dogs.

The vivid description of the erotic scene between Sid and Grace Muthoni in bed is sinful and almost alienates a decent reader or viewer from the play:

OO : (Exasperated) Fuck it.
Wairi : You are right brother. That is precisely what is happening now...the lights are dim. Toes are touching and conducting waves of ecstasy. Legs are subtly exploring regions long gone out of active use. Knees and thighs palm each other...beads of sweat are trickling into sheets...Sudden sparks and tangle of movements. Twisted faces and twisted prayers. Someone is calling upon her mother in vain. Calling Jesus too, between broken breath (Echoes of Silence p 70).
This is vulgar depicting a society deeply steeped in moral death. When Wamala and Tinka reminisce about their wedding, they remember. “Males eyeing females and the Bishop blinking...Thighs parting in the dark” *The Burdens* (p 41).

The above sounds like Bwogo’s poem:

"Being Fulfilled"
Behind hidden courtyard corners,
On the green wet grass
After formal partings and the party,
Girls gaze at the moon
Mournfully as they are filled.
And then they walk away
To their fathers’ apartments
Fulfilled (*The Floods* p 20).

Using the above example, Ruganda uses emotive language to arouse feelings and portray a society that is amorous and sensual incapable of resisting sexual appetites. It is a sinful world separated from God according to Christian concept which is exploited by John Ruganda.

The other method of quenching man’s lust for sex is depicted through shocking violent descriptions of rape especially by soldiers who rain terror on schools and rape school girls including nuns. Odie graphically describes the incident when Ali’s platoon raided Stella’s school:

A month before exam time. Drunk and lascivious, they plundered and left behind them wreckage of piteous things whimpering for life. You (Stella) three months in hospital brutalized and ashamedly expectant (*Shreds of Tenderness* p 31).

The rape of Nankya’s mother in *The Floods*, is equally shocking. It brings out the viciousness of soldiers:

Nankya: ...BANG! Mother’s door is burst open. Smashed to pulp. Four figures turn the house up-side- down... Mother is only sixteen. They look at her and burst out with laughter. Mother freezes with fright. Taut like a
bow-string. One of them rips her bra open. Horrible laughter. He commands her to lower down her school skirt. Her trembling hands just manage to do so. Horrifying burst of laughter. Soon the four men are on top of mother, one after the other before she passes out (The Floods p 98).

The “horrifying burst of laughter” depicts the vampire nature of the soldiers. The fear, the trembling hands but the innocence of a sixteen year old girl does not move them. The “military boots” sounds are agents of death and destruction. These sounds of military boots are ominous.

The vulgar presentation of sexual immorality progressively develops into a bizarre description such as the “horrifying laughter, the trembling hands, the ripping of the bra open” shocks the reader or viewer of John Ruganda's drama.

The emotive description of the defilement of Nalubale, the goddess of the lake by Nyamgondho, one of the straight ones, with “unquenchable lust” (p 50), depicts a society that is unmindful of the dire consequences on posterity: Before Nalubale who had been reclining on the rock naked had had time “together her garments (Nyamugondho) was on top of her hotly passionate, writhing with lust... for every thrust he made, witnessed waves of destruction on the island, for every ejaculation, floods ravaged the entire island to avenge her chastity. Since then we have witnessed several floods (The Floods pp 51–52).

The choice of words like “thrust, ejaculation” repels the reader or viewer and makes one feel disgusted and revolted against a society that is morally dead.

In The Burdens, Kaija in a dream narrates the brutal murder of his father in emotive words.

He sees his mother's powerful hands poised to strike... (her) breasts trembling with rage... the anger and hatred...she strikes at the breast, stab, stab...helpless groan...pool of blood...a massacre...the slaughtering down of the giant...there is too much blood. The flood breaks through the house... Everybody is terrified... (but) the flood keeps swallowing them up... until there is one sea of blood (The Burdens pp 73-74).
Ruganda describes the murder of Wamala's death in frightening and emotional words. Kaija's graphic narration of the dream brings out the brutality of Tinka and the anguish caused by the mercilessness and cruelty of death. To paint the horrifying experience of death as exemplified by the blood-curdling murder of Wamala by his vicious wife, Tinka, the playwright describes this murder as “a massacre” (the “slaughtering of a giant” with a butcher’s knife. In face of death one is “helpless and impotent”.

Although Kaija loved his father dearly despite Tinka's poisoning his mind against him, Kaija stands, “helpless and impotent” unable to save his father. When death strikes no one can arrest the moment not-even the closest friends. Death is a private affair and a lonely struggle between life and death. This shows the inevitability and invincibility of death.

The reference to the floods of blood in Kaija's dream becomes an extended metaphor of the brutality and murder of the citizens Ruganda portrays in his plays. In The Floods, there are floods of blood and destruction of life everywhere ironically including government maximum (in)security prisons:

Even the head of the State Research Bureau acknowledges that the maximum prison is "Hell of a place... pailfuls of shit and floods of piss and vomit. Blotches of clotted blood on the floor, graffitoes written out in blood on the walls and the Koran” (The Floods p 43). The careful choice of revolting words: “Hell” of a place, pailfuls of “shit”, “floods” of “piss” and “vomit”, “clotted blood” paint a shocking scenario of the kind of atrocities the innocent go through at the hands of the brutal military regime.

Though Bwogo himself is an agent of evil, he is “scared of the waves” (p 101) because “death stiffens”. This has happened to many girls attempting abortion. They bleed to death and in a “few hours, the blood is cold, the body stiff” (p101). So, the fear of death may restrain even the die-hards like Bwogo from doing evil as demonstrated in this case when Bwogo restrains Nankya from committing abortion.
The death of Rutaro is described in shocking terms:

Bwogo hard, remorseless and unfeeling...callously disposed of Rutaro who disappeared into thin air like a flea's fart. For two thousands shillings the military boots, kicked Rutaro and went tumbling down, his brains splotched all over the staircase from the fifteenth floor of The International Hotel. "Most wanted criminal killed as he was trying to escape. That's what the papers said (The Floods p 31).

The choice of the emotionally charged words and phrases "remorseless, callously, brains splotched all over the staircase," paint a very painful picture of and cruel death at the hands of the SRB boys with their "military boots".

At the Imperial Hotel the SRB boys on the spot bundled out the headmaster. His corpse was found floating on the lake a week later" (p 58). The death of the army brigadier with "three nails stuck in head, genitals in his month "as a result of vindictive envy" (p 59), is shocking.

Sometimes the description sounds hilarious though the situation described is grave. Daudi’s dog yapped at the presidential motorcade...The dog, the fast respondent, is charged with treason and Daudi, the second respondent, with concealing his dog’s intent...The dog will be deported and Daudi detained. (Shreds of Tenderness) (p 128). “Pepe spat on the president’s portrait in a public bar.” (p.125) and for that Wak’s father was summarily executed. There were no investigations done to verify the facts.

The above descriptions show the flimsy nature of crime used to eliminate the innocent. The descriptions sound humorous but satirical with biting criticism. This is comic relief, though the criticism is pointed against the military dictatorship for killing people over trifles.

The implication of the above illustration is to point out the effect of the theme of death on language designed to articulate societal concerns particularly the senseless murder and brutalization of the helpless masses.
For purposes of comic relief to deflate the tragic effect, Ruganda creates comic characters who are illiterates for satirical humour in an otherwise tragic circumstances. The Toilet Paper Tycoon in *The Floods*, sounds like Francis Imbuga’s Mulili in the *The Betrayal in the City*. Mulili speaks broken language because he is an illiterate though he commands so much power because he is an “eye and ear” for the head of state, Boss, who is his cousin.

In *The Floods*, the Toilet paper Tycoon, like Milili suffers from inferiority complex but because he is rich, he has Bwogo’s connections and the SRB boys are at his disposal for hire. For some inexplicable reasons, but most probably inferiority complex, the T.P tycoon bursts out in anger against an innocent headmaster:

> Do you heard me! No laughtering and drunkening and talking like Queen Zabeth? Do you thought because of your dengris you embrought you England here? You goes toilet now, if you don’t quiet. You heared me? The SRB boys were on the spot. They bundled him out of the Imperial and that was the end of him. His corpse was found floating in the lake a week later (p.58).

The orgy of killing and cannibalism to depict the remorselessness of the military regime as agents of death is well illustrated by the nerve wrecking description of the goings-on in the maximum (in) security prison:

> ...a slow tortuous process...mornings: digging mass graves and burials; afternoons carnage-the thudding of hammers against the skulls; evenings: enforced cannibal feasts on fellow inmates and at night: hallucinations (*The Floods* p 44).

There is dehumanization, too, as described by the reference to the islanders as “cows” going to the boat that was sunk into the lake.

These are man motivated murders through human folly that could have been avoided. Ruganda uses graphic descriptions to underline the theme of death in his drama.
There is reference to classics - the tragedies such as Medea into which Bwogo “plunges into the role of Medea before she kills her children.” (The Floods p.91). He “stabs” Nankya two times.

Stella also plays the role of Othello in Shakespeare’s tragedy Othello. “I will kill thee, And love thee after… “He” strangles “her”. (Shreds of Tenderness pp.50-51).

Then, there is Wairi taking the part of Ophelia in Hamlet, “through Ophelia, showing how Africa has led itself to be desecrated, defiled and ultimately driven to suicide by the West.” (Echoes of Silence p 29). This depicts neo-colonialism in collaboration with the new leaders that are but a change of guards cosmetically replacing colonialism. These are whites in black skins.

John Ruganda’s drama is a dossier of death, death and more death in various manifestations. He seems to be obsessed with death, a leitmotif running through his drama. Northrop Frye’s concept of symbolism as a unit that draws attention to itself and communicates meaning beyond itself informs this study. The recurrent reference to “floods of blood”, which is an extended metaphor from The Burdens, when Wamala was murdered by Tinka, the flood “breaks through the house racing down the hill into the valley. Everybody is terrified...and the flood keeps swallowing them up... until there is one sea of blood” (p 74).

The Floods itself is a metaphor of bloodshed, brutality and death. Bwogo asks Nankya whether the floods don’t frighten her. “lorryfulls of wailing civilians, driven to their death, over the cliff, at the point of bayonets” (The Floods p 19). “…the lake brimful with rotten corpses. No wonder the damned place stinks of; flood victims, mutilated bodies of army deserters, unidentified corpses of the enemies of the system, suicide cases” (p 34) amidst “floods of condolences” (p 60). Kyeyune prays Kagoro to protect them from the “floods of sorrow” (p 62).
The dead are no longer dead...they are up in arms to right their wrongs. They have risen from their deep slumber at the bottom of the lake and carrying shrouds of vengeance towards Bwogo the agent of destruction referred to as the flood’s masked characters engulfing Bwogo with floods of retribution... the odour of massacred blood must be expurgated (pp 46-47).

Symbolically here Bwogo is scared stiff at the thought of justice. The past has caught up with him and there is little hope for him to escape from floods that are bent to avenge their death. Nankya taunts Bwogo: “frightened of the floods…the head of the State Research Bureau is scared of the waves.” (p 101).

There is also the recurrence reference to” the irresistible beckon: the whistling, the itch in the feet and the eventual gallop towards” death (pp 12-13). When the hour strikes, no one can resist death.

The constant reference to and use of “floods, blood, storm and waves” are a presentment of death.

The eerie sounds of military boots (The Floods p 98) symbolize mayhem, rape, destruction and death. In The Burdens, Wamala remembers the sound of the military boots that came to arrest him for treason (pp 64-65). He is scared stiff and nearly shoots his son, Kaija, mistaking him for soldiers.

The incessant use of gunfire in the background in The Floods and Shreds of Tenderness reminds the reader or viewer the imminence of death. There is ricocheting of guns in Shreds of Tenderness (pp.2-3), to signify death and destruction due to civil war. The same applies to The Floods (p.49) where there is machine-gun fire outside between the revolutionary forces against the military regime.

The recurrent use of a pistol to signify violence and death runs through John Ruganda’s drama. In The Burdens, Nankya acting Kanagonago draws a pistol and threatens to shoot Wamala. This action carries Wamala “to the edge of hysteria and violence” (p.61) daring “
Kanagonago” to shoot him. Then Wamala extricates the pistol from “him” and charges blindly at Kaija, his son, whom Wamala mistakes for soldiers coming to arrest him for treason.

The use of a pistol as an instrument of destruction is used by Bwogo in The Floods (p.36). He “draws a pistol from his jacket and fires”. He misses, Kyeyune whom he mistook for revolutionary soldiers coming to arrest him. The happy quick-to-pull a trigger Bwogo, is reprimanded by Nankya: “you have killed an innocent man –again... I’m tired of meeting blood everywhere I go” (p.36).

In Shreds of Tenderness, Wak nearly shoots Odie with a pistol for calling him a coward and deserter. Wak: “if you weren’t my brother... I wouldn’t hesitate pumping some bullets into (Poking Odie’s ribs with the mouth of the pistol) this rotten carcass of yours” (pp 84-85). So, the use of a pistol becomes a leitmotif of death or fear of it in John Ruganda’s drama.

Although the recurrent use of a drink—a hard drink at that such as “enguli”, Dimple Scotch Whisky and Brandy, is a symbol of the need for amelioration, it is a paved road to violence that results into a slap, scuffle, near strangulation or catastrophe. In The Burdens, before Wamala fights with Tinka over the bottle of “enguli”, Wamala drugs himself with alcohol drinking directly from the “enguli” bottle (p.34).

Before Wamala attempts to struggle Kanagonago for being an exploiter of the common man of the slums, he empties the glass and starts drinking from the bottle of whisky before he” advances menacingly, pounces and grabs Tinka’s throat.”(pp 60-61). Wamala threatens Kanagonago with death.

In The Floods before Bwogo confronts Nankya for the final show-down, he orders for A DIMPLE SCOTCH (p.65), drowns himself with booze...”performs a mock fight and eventually tearing into her viciously with his teeth and fingers” (pp 68-69). Nankya has to struggles for her life.

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In **Black Mamba**, when Namuddu is about to spill the beans and expose Professor Coarx’s and Barewa’s lechery, Barewa rushes for a drink for her thinking that it “might sort out her wits” (p 61). Both imagine that Namuddu has become mad because she speaks the truth, in a society where truth is dead and long forgotten. The drink here is being used as an instrument to destroy truth.
3.3.0 The Theme of Death: Related Societal Concerns

3.3.1 Post-Independence: Demise of African Dream

John Ruganda's plays especially The Floods and Shreds of Tenderness (originally entitled Music Without Tears), are to a large extent influenced by the political despotic military rule of the Idi Amin Dada that was marked by brutality and death in Uganda.

These plays depict some of the most monstrous brutalities, death and destruction. Bukenya posits:

Many African countries have experienced several political problems, military coups, in the struggle to establish and consolidate their Uhuru. But 1970's witnessed a new development in these problems which left all of Africa and indeed, the whole world stunned with shock. This development was the advent of murderous military dictatorships which turned on its own citizens, killing and brutalizing them with the viciousness of preposterous monsters. The most notorious of such dictatorships were that of Bokassa in Central Africa Republic and of course, Idi Amin’s in Ruganda’s own native Uganda. (Bukenya 8)

With the advent of African, Independence from colonial rule, Ruganda seems to be disillusioned just like the helpless masses whose hopes and aspirations for a better prosperous future are dead.

In The Floods, for example, Bukenya Austin, (Personal interviewed 2nd October 2010) Ruganda has created negative monsters and agents of death and destruction such as Boss, Bwogo and ruthless State Research Bureau. Kyeyune laments that the ogre feeds on its own citizens.

Now we are no better than a drunkard’s cockerel unsure of ourselves anyone moment. Each down is as surprising as it is painful. We welcome dusks with partial sighs of relief and nights with vigils wrought with wails and squeals of terror. The ogre has turned against its kindred. (The Floods p. 12)
The advent of independence killed the African dream for prosperity, freedom and progress. This seems to influence John Ruganda's writing because his plays depict the agents of negativity and death that killed this dream. As a sensitive writer, John Ruganda inevitably had to respond to the social-economic and political environment around him. One of the motivating factors of a writer is to share his experiences with others.

Henrik Ibsen in "The Task of the Poet" (1874) expounds:

All that I have written these last ten years, I have lived through spiritually... No poet lives through anything in isolation. What he lives through all his countrymen live through it with him... To be a poet means essentially to see in such a way that whatever is seen is perceived by the audience just as the poet saw it. But only what has been lived through can be seen in that way and accepted in that way. The secret of modern literature lies precisely in this matter of experiences that are lived through. (Playwrights on Play Writing (Ed) Toby Cole p. 3)

Bearing in mind the above task of an artist or poet, it is important, therefore, at this juncture to examine John Ruganda's profile and how his biographical background influences his writing and informs John Ruganda as an artist. Ruganda, writing in a volatile social-economic and political environment, "manages to make a commentary on the political situation in Uganda with the hope of awakening people in their own predicament by pointing out he major causes of their problems (Sambai 2008:6).

In an interview with Mikaele Dolfe, New Africa, Dec. 1980 p 51, John Ruganda said "I like the truth as I see and perceive it. I want to share that truth with others". (Imbuga, Thematic Trends and Circumstance p 19).

A close look at John Ruganda's drama, confirms the above fact. John Ruganda's preoccupation with death helps him to articulate truthfully related societal concerns. Since this study focuses on the portrayal and use of the various concepts of death as a leitmotif in his drama, it is significant to consolidate related emerging themes in John Ruganda's drama.
As has been discussed in this study, John Ruganda is greatly influenced by the disillusionment of post-independence African states that are bedevilled with bad governance, power struggle, self-preservation, lust and greed for material wealth at the expense of the exploited masses. The emergency of political military dictatorship symbolized by Idi Amin Dada's reign in Uganda, heralds the death of the African dream for prosperity. Exploitation, brutalization, mediocrity and murder of the hapless masses marked the new political dispensation. Wak in Shreds of Tenderness articulates this disillusionment:

"Twenty years of our so-called INDEPENDENCE and we have had nothing to show for it except enough corpses to feed billions of vultures (p 67)."

The death of political independence is well portrayed in John Ruganda's drama. In Odie's experiment to explore what makes a murderer tick, he identifies, "Hunger for power. Impatience with stumbling blocks (and need for) self-preservation" (p. 26). Ruganda identifies what intoxicates the murderer particularly those in power to do away with their victims as "envy, fear or simply hatred (p. 50)."

The elimination of Rutaro whom Bwogo envisaged to be a rival over Nankya, the summary execution of the headmaster by the envious Toilet Paper tycoon, the brutal murder of the army brigadier with three nails in his skull most probably for his popularity with the army, in The Floods, are good examples of the death of conscience on the perpetrators of death.

Shreds of Tenderness, too, examines, "Ten years of massacres, murder, rape, firing squads" (p. 10) and genocides. The period was marked by instruments of torture as symbolized by the "ice trays, Bunsen burners, a tin of pesticides in imitation of guns" (p. 2) accompanied by "boots in the groin, butts on the head ... and pincers" (p. 18).

These are close to ten years when Idi Amin Dada was in power. "Ten years of solitude ...degradation humiliation and bitterness" (p. 83), even for those like John Ruganda himself who lived in exile. All this suffering is brought about "because of the slovenliness and
beastiality of the ignoramuses’ whose sole purpose is to grab as much as they can, in as little a time while the going is good” (p. 83).

These atrocities and injustices are visited on the populace without a murmur. The “political system is to make us carry our crosses and turn us into soulless robots” (p. 10). Wamala in The Burdens paints the death of freedom of expression more poignantly:

The world outside is hell let loose. It’s ruthless.... Everyone orders you to walk with your tail limp between your thighs. They don’t want you to raise your head ... it gives them a feel of power. They want you to know they are now on top, sitting on your head. And you beneath their buttocks suffocating (p. 35).

One does not have “to talk to be heard in these turbulent times that believe in the power of silence” Shreds of Tenderness (p. 8). So in this suppressed political situation and power struggle, “many have died, so many have to be scarred for life or exiled and cities charred and razed to the ground” (p. 49).

Ironically the hypocritical international community that professes to defend human rights, props up with guns, dictatorial black state “unpopular murderous regimes: (p. 82) as long as the West and East continue to exploit the raw materials. This is neo-colonialism. Tinka acting Kanagonago in The Burdens acknowledges that “as long as they (expatriates) are around we can always stuff our pockets and blame it on them” (p. 43).

African independence is a misnomer. Neocolonialism has driven a death nail into the African dream for high hopes and aspirations. The new crop of political leaders have very little regard for the little man; “your little men. They are dispensable pigs. As long as you have the power, you can afford to sneeze into their decrepit faces” (The Burdens p. 59).

The new political agromaniacs such as Kanagonago sixty years. Retired Saza chief. Fellow drunk and thigh-monger. Four wives; and a dozen daughters married one way or another. What bleating business does he want with politics? Should content himself counting grey hairs on his head (p. 29)
Wamala concludes that there is little hope, if any, to redeem the masses from poverty if African states continue to be ruled by the likes of the Kanagonagos. The murderous regime of military dictatorship is worse. The common man has no escape route from frustration and abject poverty except edging closer to his grave.

Everyone is “too engrossed in grabbing and hoarding” (The Floods p. 50) to care about the poor. Kyeyune an epitome of old wisdom and virtue is helpless and wallows in poverty. He laments:

The world around me is falling to pieces. Corpses upon corpses along the streets, in the jungle in the lakes but no one takes heed of squeals of terror in the homesteads being deserted (The Floods p. 50)

The list of atrocities is endless. “The disappearances, the massacres, the executions and random killings” (p. 89).

3.3.2 Poverty: Down Trend to Death

Meanwhile the masses have lost hope to ever raise themselves, from poverty and deprivation which cause death of self-esteem in an individual. John Ruganda paints a gloomy picture of the most devastating degradation of mankind – poverty.

In The Burdens, Wamala a former cabinet minister who was sacked because in his blind ambition, tried to overthrow the government with the help of the “Yankes”, the Americans with their dollars. The coup aborted and Wamala lost his ministerial post. He and his family now live in a hovel in the slums. Wamala confesses. “I drink and drug myself against depression and frustration” (p. 25). The family feeds on “tea without milk. Cold potatoes and beans. The searing sting of smoke. Day in, day out, until the second political coming” (p. 26).

The refugees in exile “live in little tattered shacks, tired, exhausted, hungry with caked bodies with sweat – and stench because water is hard to come by” (Shreds of Tenderness
The refugees are literary dead because among other things, they are humiliated and referred to as "Makwerekwere - third rate non-citizens always associated with hunger deprivation and cheap labour" (p. 80).

In The Floods, Stella describes the tribulations faced by the poor" living in a dingy little room. Sharing it with rats and lizards. Cockroaches in the corners. Flies and mosquitoes everything wrapped in smoke and soot (p. 70). These despicable living conditions also promote immorality:

Men and women stealing snatches of sex pretending the children are asleep. And little ones covering their faces with tattered blankets and putting on their rehearsed snoring to reassure their parents (p. 70).

In Black Mamba, poverty and unemployment cause prostitution and moral death or degradation besides spreading venereal diseases. "The slums are quite busy centres at night: looting, raping, fighting, murder and sometime suicide" (p. 34). Even respectable professionals like Professor Coarx is engaged in prostitution ironically against the grain of what he teaches. Law-abiding citizens are not spared either. They queue in brothels "to partake of the sweet plaque" (p. 35) meaning prostitution. There is complete disintegration of the African personality and decency in society that is dead because of moral degradation caused by poverty.

Namuddu, Barewa's wife in Black Mamba, lives in abject poverty down in the village before she comes to join her husband in the city. She lives in "a hovel, wearing rags, toiling away in the garden, sleeping on the hard bed and having poor meals' (p. 54). It is this poverty that debases both Barewa and Namuddu. For a husband to trade his wife to another man to sleep with her for money like Barewa does, is a high degree of insensitivity, moral degradation and death. Namatta's husband just like Barewa must have over-reached themselves. What use is education "economic development plans or religion for that matter, if everybody has thrown decency to the dogs" (p. 35), Odhiambo asks and concludes that life is sordid. The looting, raping, fighting, murder, prostitution and sometimes suicide are manifestations of spiritual and physical death.
In Covenant with Death, the constant reference to barrenness, the prolonged drought “leading to empty granaries, the dried up wells and the thirsty soil” (p. 100), are a prelude to death. Barrenness refers to infertility of the soil, and the subsequent hunger, starvation and death faced by mankind as a result of the wrath of a vindictive goddess whose edict was broken by Bamya.

In Echoes of Silence, poverty glares Double O and Grace Muthoni his wife in the face:

Muthoni at sixteen or seventeen looked whacked. Bare feet coated with dust. Brow beaded with sweat and a stained calico dress... Hunger, thirst and exhaustion written all over her (p. 45).

When finally Double O takes her in as his wife, they live in a hovel with “pungent smell of charcoal and paraffin... nauseating... there were Tina’s junked dolls tangled in the thread of the aged carpet” (p. 85). Double O’s environment contrasts with that of Njuguna whose house is warm with roasting steak in the oven.

Double O, conscious of his disability because of the weathered hand and his alienation because of ethnicity, feels more frustrated because of poverty. He cannot make ends meet. When he is deserted by his wife who takes along his little beloved daughter, Tina, Double O contemplates committing suicide. Imbuga puts it more pointedly: “the concern of the play is with the meaning of life in a world where loneliness seems to govern the characters’ lives” (Imbuga, Thematic Trends and Circumstances p. 306).

3.3.3 Marriage and Family Institutions: Demise

The ramifications of poverty have devastating effects on the marriage and family institutions. The death of the family institutions is aggravated by poverty. In The Burdens, Wamala is murdered by his wife, Tinka, because she could not take in poverty and loneliness any longer. Wamala as a husband could not sustain his family because of poverty. He is not pragmatic and has not come to terms with his new station in life after his downfall from opulence as a cabinet minister. He is a dreamer who cannot redeem his
family from the slums. The two Wamala and Tinka could not cope and the family disintegrates in the end.

In *The Floods*, Bwogo and Nankya could not form a lasting relationship because each is suspicious of each other. Their relationship is marked by misunderstanding fights and quarrels. Although they agree to marry at the end of the play, if Bwogo, miraculously escapes the gallows (though most unlikely), one wonders whether the two can have a lasting family relationship given the fact that Bwogo had schemed to eliminate Nankya with her mother though the plan misfired.

Besides Nankya comes from a poor background and accuses Bwogo of cruelty and lack of feeling for the common man. His (mis) treatment of Nankya when she was young still lingers in her mind. Although Nankya has acquired a new high social status through education to becoming a university don, the simmering discomfort of the gap and conflict between the rich and poor is felt in the relationship between Bwogo and Nankya – this would not augur well for a strong marriage relationship.

In *Echoes of Silence*, the marriage between Double O and Grace Muthoni fails because of poverty. Muthoni runs away with the rich American film star because Double O could not meet Muthoni’s high expectations.

In *Black Mamba*, Barewa and Namuddu, too, fail to have a successful marriage relationship because of poverty. Now that Namuddu has tasted the life of affluence for the short time with Professor Coarx, she is not willing to go back to a life of misery and abject poverty. Namaddu confesses to Professor Coarx:

> Our stay together has created dreams and expectations in me. It has induced me to despise my past because it appears too empty, and so meaningless! My heart longs after so many things now. What am I to do? (*Black Mamba* p. 54).
Now that Namuddu has developed expensive tastes while Barewa is a poor house-help, their marriage can never be the same again. It is literary dead. Poverty makes Barewa transform their marriage relationship ‘from intimacy to a casual business-like venture, in what they relate like partners in a commercial enterprise’ (Waliaula 57).

Although Wairi and Njuguna in Echoes of Silence, are rich and swim in luxury, their marriage is literary dead. Wairi is unable to conceive again after she gave birth to a still-born. She is barren and suffers from loneliness to a point of hallucinations.

In Covenant with Death, Matama and Motomoto each could not marry and have a successful marriage because both are barren. They faced cultural estrangement from their respective communities. They were forced to hibernate in the city because they were despised and felt cultural alienation.

The family institution in Shreds of Tenderness, is dead because of sibling rivalry for riches and recognition. Odie betrays his father because of jealousy for his preferential treatment for Wak, Odie’s step-brother. The father is murdered by the military regime when Odie frames him that he had spat on the presidential portrait in a public bar. Wak runs into exile when Odie informs on him to the SRB for being anti government and a reactionary. This is greed for power and property. Odie appropriates acres of land and the Nile Apartments.

John Ruganda presents Odie as an agent of destruction and death. Odie is characterized and presented as a vindictive person with inherent tendencies for destruction and violence right from his youth. He is presented as a hard-core with no remorse. When his grandmother dies, he rejoices about it since she had been too mean with her juice and biscuits. Even when he is caned for being callous, Odie does not shed a tear. He is also involved in mischievous crime. He kills his father’s cow with a catapult, he sets Kaggwa’s car on fire without regrets. He leads a strike in the university. This shows that he is a ring-leader and rubble-rouser. He tortures the termites and ticks with a Bunsen burner and ice cubes remorselessly. The height of his cruelty, callousness and destructive inclination due
to greed for property, as mentioned earlier, is when he informs on his father, and his half-brother, Wak to the SRB. When his father is eliminated and Wak runs into exile, Odie appropriates Wak’s inheritance.

So, John Ruganda presents a villain, right from Odie’s childhood to show a subtle hard core criminal that is an epitome of destruction and death. Poverty, jealousy, betrayal and greed contribute to the death of the family institution and by extension to the death of a nation. Without harmony, peace and unity at the family or domestic level, there can never be peace, harmony and prosperity in a nation. This is perhaps why “Wak and even his sister Stella are no longer interested in merely earning a living. They are concerned with the humanness of the individual and the importance of bonds of kinship. (Imbuga, Thematic Trends and Circumstances, p 306).

This bond would cement strong relationships at the family level, which is a pre-requisite for National Unity instead of strife, despondence and death.

3.3.4 Corruption and Bribery: Enigmatic Moral Death

John Ruganda also depicts the cancerous social malaise of corruption – the use of undue influence to solicit sexual favours, money or promotion through bribery. In The Floods, Nankya complains:

The land is caved in with corruption. The atmosphere hangs heavy with various grievances. Men deprived of the land they fought for... graduates gravelling in dustbins in search of sustenance; the civil service, some about MP’s salary hikes; temples tainted with martyred blood, and above all, uncertainty and death’ (The Floods p. 29).

In The Burdens, Wamala laments:

People don’t get jobs for nothing.
You need money to tune the ears of your prospective employers. (p. 27)
Francis Imbuga would have said "you need a tall relative" to attain a high station in life. That is where nepotism comes in. Bwogo in The Floods owns a business empire simply because he is Boss's cousin. All this points to social decadence, moral and spiritual death. The rich and powerful are unconcerned with the plight of the helpless.

Corruption in form of bribery is also exhibited in the press and government departments. Bwogo bribes the Meteorological Department and the media to announce the impending floods that were to devastate the island. This turns out to be a hoax but a scheme designed by Bwogo to eliminate Nankya. The (mis)use of the mass media for (dis)information to hoodwink the masses exhibits moral bankruptcy and spiritual death.

In view of what has been discussed in this chapter and elsewhere in this study, there is a strong relationship between death and the emerging related themes that reflect societal concerns in John Ruganda's drama. If and when these socio-economic cultural and political concerns are corrected, then man would live a life of co-existence in harmony and at peace with himself, with fellow men and with God.

In summary, this chapter has analyzed the development, treatment portrayal and presentation of the theme of death as a running motif in John Ruganda's drama. It has examined the dialectics of structural dramatic conflict and how death impacts on the structure particularly the construction of the plot. The use of the flashback technique whether narrated or enacted gives room for versatility on the part of the performers to recreate character and dramatic conflict. The fantasy projection exhibited in the play-within-play scenes allows the performers to bounce the audience both in time and place with ease. The chapter also has discussed the effect of death on characterization and presentation using Ruganda's unique dramatic techniques such as role playing and symbolic setting with a minimal Cast to depict the theme of death. Though the cast is minimal it is able to recreate the outside world bedevilled with moral bankruptcy, greed, self-inflicted physical and spiritual death.
The effect of death on language format and symbolism is also discussed as one of the tools to articulate societal concerns, revolving around travesty socio-economic cultural and oppressive political dispensation in post African states. As an extended discussion of this chapter, the relationships between the theme of death and other related emerging issues such as symbolic death besides physical death have also been discussed in this chapter.
4.0 CHAPTER FOUR: SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Summary of Findings
This study has analyzed the portrayal and use of the death motif that runs through John Ruganda's drama. This was in light of the objectives of this research which identifies the various concepts of death and their causes. It examines the effect of death on characterization, dramatic structure and language including use of symbolism and unique dramatic techniques.

This study also analyzes the relationship between death as a recurring motif and core towards exploring other related emerging themes that reflect societal concerns in John Ruganda's drama based on the six selected plays.

Chapter One spells out structuralism and literary analysis theories that inform the analysis of John Ruganda's portrayal and purpose of death as a running motif in his drama. Freytag pyramid model informed the structural analysis of this study in analyzing the structural dramatic action, conflict and interpersonal character relationship. From the literary analysis view the subject of death constitutes content which reflects Ruganda's response to the reality of the socio-economic, cultural and the volatile political environment, particularly so because of military dictatorship, bad governance and greed for wealth at the expense of the masses.

Chapter two explores the interpretation and purpose of death from various definitions, concept and perspective. This includes the African traditional and Christian perspective. It also interrogates the causes of physical and symbolic death in John Ruganda's drama.

According to the African perspective, death is ontological and the burial rites usher man into the spirit world — the home of ancestral spirits who may haunt the living if they are not accorded a proper burial. This exemplified by the army brigadier, with three nails in his skull, dumped in the lake. He is now the "Patron" of the lake beckoning the living to their doom as an act of revenge for his brutal death.
According to Christian concept, man faces spiritual death when he commits mortal sin. “Sin issues in death because it darkens the intellect, deadens the conscience, and causes animosity, hatred, malice and other sins against love” (Griffith 5).

John Ruganda borrows these definitions to construct the theme of death in its various manifestations, physical or symbolic, in his drama. He depicts moral and spiritual death and loss of conscience. Death manifests itself in the rampant monstrous murders. For example, the brutal and senseless killings and the despicable disposal of lorryfulls of corpses dumped in the lake as well as the amassing of wealthy amidst a sea of poverty is sinful and immoral.

In The Floods, Bwogo is an agent of destruction and death who uses the SRB boys as a terror machine on behalf of Boss to intimidate the restive citizens for self-preservation and perpetuation into power. There is uncertainty and death as Nankya puts it.

There is sexual immorality marked by adultery and prostitution. Namuddu, Barewa’s wife goes to bed with Professor Coarx for money. Muthoni, Double O’s wife runs away with Sid the American film star for money. Wamala and Vincent Kanagonago though married are described as “thigh mongers” in The Burdens. Njuguna, too, though married is never at home for he is with other women. Professor Coarx though married, he too commits adultery.

Society is bedevilled with so much hypocrisy and betrayal. Decency has been thrown to the dogs. There is loneliness, frustration and lack of meaningful human warmth and co-existence both at the family and national level.

Besides moral and spiritual death, there is physical death through natural disease like T.B. but most pointedly through floods of blood perpetrated by murders in cold blood. The death of Wamala, Rutaro, the headmaster, the army brigadier with three nails in his skull, the extermination of the islanders and the cannibalism in maximum prisons all indicate a regime whose conscience is dead. The shedding of blood in The Floods and Shreds of
**Tenderness** is a continuation of blood in *The Burdens*. The floods of blood that run through John Ruganda’s plays are used to build the theme of death as a leitmotif. It is important to note that these senseless killings are motivated by human folly: greed for power and property lust, hatred, jealousy and inferiority-complex as a result of illiteracy.

Apart from physical death caused by man or disease, there is also death as a result of god’s wrath and retribution especially when man offends the gods by either contravening a covenant such as one between Kaikara, the goddess of fruition and Bamya. Death is also visited on man who defiles the gods such as the raping of Nalubale, the goddess of Lake Victoria. In retribution to punish the insatiable lust of he “straight ones” the goddess unleashes her wrath through devastating floods.

The death of the African dream is not only aggravated by selfish and incompetent political leaders but it is also perpetuated by neo-colonialism that props up the murderous regimes for purposes of exploiting raw natural resources to enrich the Western and Eastern powers. The symbolic exploitation of Namuddu, Muthoni and Matama who symbolize mother Africa, by the expatriates, Professor Coarx, Sid and Bwana Duncan attests to this fact.

It is important to note that John Ruganda’s biographical and political background inform this study particularly to unravel the cause of his pre-occupation with death in his drama. Ruganda is disillusioned by the military dictatorship during Idi Amin Dada’s time and betrayal of the masses by the crop of new political leaders symbolized by Wamala and Kanagonago in the post-independence African states. Their leadership is marked by sheer incompetence, greed, power, struggle and self-preservation, senseless murder and intolerance.

John Ruganda’s life in exile where he suffered humiliation and frustration as a result of discrimination and envy influences the theme of death in his drama. He examines academic dishonesty coupled with corruption, betrayal and blackmail all pointing to the death of professional ethics, and academic integrity on the altar of mediocrity and
parochialism. Bwogo's accusation of Nankya for being an academic fraud in The Floods, illustrates this view.

The personal interviews conducted in this study confirm this proposition. The psychological trauma experienced by the refugees in a foreign country is rich material for John Ruganda's drama that he uses to vent his own frustration. Loneliness, alienation and frustration combined is a slow form of death. The situation is made worse when a refugee is denied at home as a returnee as happens to Wak in Shreds of Tenderness.

Prof. Oluoch Obura, Personal interview 6th November 2010 describes John Ruganda as a troubadour on a quest for a fulfillment of life as an artist who is as it were never found peace in his own native country, Uganda as metaphorically depicted by the dejection of Wak a returnee from exile by his own step-brother Odie in Shreds of Tenderness.

Even when Ruganda came to Kenya as an exile and later on went to Canada and South Africa, he only returned to Uganda to die as if he were a sojourn in quest for death. However, he is quick to add that one cannot grasp the full meaning of life without the acceptance of the inevitability of death. Although John Ruganda as an artist is preoccupied with the theme of death in his plays, as a person he was full of life even when he was in critical health condition admitted in hospital. He always gave his undergraduate students and artists hope and he always joked about death. Prof. Francis Imbuga, Personal interview 7th October 2010, argues that death or fear of it provides the conflict in most of John Ruganda's plays.

Exile can be a form of slow approach to death. So John Ruganda's removal from his place of birth (Uganda) could have had a subconscious influence on the treatment of death in his plays. In a foreign country it becomes difficult to make genuine friends because of petty jealousies and suspicion. Lack of real friendship can create a sense of insecurity. It may also lead to loss of credibility. An exile is assailed with the feeling of insecurity arising out of knowing that the job situation is not permanent. In exile a refugee cannot criticize
society. So there is the immobilization and death of ideas which in *The Burdens*, Ruganda refers to as mediocrity.

But John Ruganda refuses to succumb to the suppression of ideas. He vents his frustrations and articulates what he believes in through his drama. For example his venom or tirade is artistically directed against his own fellow colleagues in the Literature Department as a way of expressing his anger against the denial of promotion to senior lecturer or even professorship despite his credentials including his publications and sheer hard work. They killed his spirit and set him on a slow journey to his death.

Prof. Oluoch Obura, Personal interview 6th November 2010, says: Ruganda was vilified, criticized, ostracized and branded a rebel with Marxist ideas; a threat to the powers that be. He therefore suffered from alienation, estrangement and loneliness. These are some of the related themes of death in his drama.

This is an example of the suppression of truth and the death of intellectual honesty which John Ruganda deals with in his drama.

Following this interview with Prof. Oluoch Obura, in depth details on John Ruganda as an artist were obtained. Since his days as an undergraduate student at the University of Nairobi, Prof. Obura recalls Ruganda was always a happy man full of life. It is true death is depicted for instance in *The Floods* but as a means of expressing the temporariness and fragility of life. Death is always here, he says. Even when we as his students and dramatists visited him in hospital, he made fun and made us happy as if we were to exist forever. He lived his life to the full.

However the psychological trauma because of Ruganda’s refugee status is well explained in *The Floods*, as a result of frustration for lack promotion and recognition at the University of Nairobi where he was a lecturer. He got caught up in the local ideological differences with his colleagues at the University. However, he was popular with his students particularly the artists. He was an excellent dramatist, director and writer better
than anybody else. This caused petty jealousy in the literature department, Prof. Obura adds. He was never promoted to associate professor or senior lecturer. He was alienated and so were his students of drama who got mixed up in war they could not understand. Frustration is a slow form of death.

So when John Ruganda makes references in *The Floods* to undeserved promotion by Nankya to senior Head of Department through sexual favours and shoddy work without credentials and credible publications but lip-service to Marxist ideology, she half understands, it is Ruganda’s indictment of University administration for unfairness and discrimination against him because he was an outsider.

“If you make money your God, it plagues your like the devil”. Ruganda was the best yet he could not be promoted but instead he was accused of not toeing the line and was fought by his bosses who were politically well connected. He was accused of being a Marxist and so were his students who were accused unfairly because they were committed to art not politics. Ruganda attributes this to those in power up there on a pedestal of fake academic achievement trying their level best to keep their colleagues at the bottom of the ladder. Frustrating them, maligning them, and cooking up the most ridiculous excuses to block their promotion (*The Floods* p. 85)

This could be one of the factors that influences John Ruganda’s writing. He metaphorically looks at the death of values and integrity. He in fact, Prof. Obura recalls, Ruganda like the late great artist, Joe De Graft, advised students not to take life at face-value and to shun tribalism and discrimination. He advised his students to be weary of people of rhetoric. It is unfortunate he got involved in ideological wars with his colleagues who seem not to have understood him.

The causes of moral, spiritual, physical and related manifestations of death in John Ruganda’s drama point to a society that needs to re-examine itself for the public good and posterity.
Chapter three analyses the treatment of death in John Ruganda’s drama. First of all it examines the dialects of structural dramatic conflict, construction of dramatic action through character inter-relationships, conflict exposition and heightening tension to a climax ending into a denouement. As mentioned earlier, Freytag Pyramid model informs this study although John Ruganda uses the cinematic flashback technique when constructing the plot. The flashback whether acted or narrated create suspense, unfolds details of the plot, story and character previously unknown to the reader, viewer or even some of the characters themselves.

The chapter also examines the portrayal of the theme of death. Ruganda depicts the absurdity of life inter-alia, through the Theatre of the Absurd. He uses “controlled experiment”, “alienation effect”, role-playing, flashbacks and fantasy projection. These are unique dramatic techniques that characterize John Ruganda as a minimalist. He manipulates these dramatic techniques to portray the theme of death as a leitmotif in his drama.

The use of foreboding and a single symbolic stage setting helps Ruganda to build his drama around the theme of death. Ruganda as an artist believes in minimalism. As a minimalist Ruganda uses a limited cast and a single symbolic setting and minimal stage properties for economical reasons given the reason that Ruganda believed in taking theatre to the people through travelling theatre. *Shreds of Tenderness* has three, Stella, Odie and Wak. *The Burdens* has four, Wamala, Tinka, Kaija and Nyakake, the last of whom only appears briefly in the last scene of the play. In *The Floods* the principal characters are only three, Bwogo, Nankya and Kyeyune. Others like the Headman and the soldiers play minor roles while the crowd scenes played by he “floods” do so in panto-mime.

*Black Mamba* has a limited cast, Barewa, Namuddu, Professor Coarx, Odhiambo and Catherine Smith. Others like Police Officer and Police Constable are type-characters. *Covenant With Death* is propelled basically by Matama and Motomoto. The use of role-playing particularly in the long monologues and dialogue calls up on the versatility of the performer to recreate the characters that do not come physically on stage. For instance,
these characters include Njuguna, Muthoni, Kanagonago and Bosses. The use of the-play-within-a play calls for role-playing to re-create the characters, mood and atmosphere and have the ability to bounce the audience both in time and space. The use of a minimal cast and single symbolic stage setting is economical especially for plays designed to be performed for the public by travelling theatre without the cumbersome nature of carrying heavy props and gadgetry trappings of the stage. So, minimalism is one of unique dramatic strategies John Ruganda uses to build his drama around the theme of death.

The miso-en-scene visual and sound effects are effective in creating mood and atmosphere. The items of traditional regalia, the royal drum, the lion’s skin, the spear point to aristocracy and feel of power in The Burdens. Shreds of Tenderness, while set in the richly furnished living room, suggests modern power and affluence. The sound effects of, for example, the military boots, and the incessant ricocheting of guns or machine-guns create fear of death. The honking of the boat suggests urgency and imminence of death in The Floods.

Most of the principal characters in John Ruganda’s selected plays are to a large extent agents of evil and destruction. In The Floods, there is Bwogo, a psychophant, an opportunist and a murderer – a head of SRB terror machine that brutalizes and murders the masses. Odie, too, in Shreds of Tenderness, is an agent of death as a spy and member of the SRB.

Wamala though now poverty has turned him into a socialist as Tinka tells him, he led a life of extravagance and opulence at the expense of the masses when he was a cabinet minister. Kanagonago, Bwogo, Katalikawe and of course Boss, have amassed so much wealth while the rest of the population live in abject poverty, deprivation and perpetual fear of death. Even pseudo-marxist university dons such as Nankya seem to be attracted to the life of affluence while the common man starves without visible help in sight.
Moral degradation, corruption, betrayal, nepotism and sexual immorality leading to rape, prostitution and adultery so rampant in the plays are various manifestations of death in a society Ruganda depicts.

The singly symbolic setting used by Ruganda emulates that of Athol Fugard’s drama. For example in *The Blood Knot* the action takes place in a tiny room like a cell symbolizing lack of freedom during the racist South African regime. John Ruganda’s setting, too, suggests confinement, loneliness, frustration and death.

In *The Floods*, the island is hemmed in by death – the floods and the haunting spirits of the dead dumped into the lake. Wamala’s family in *The Burdens* is holed in, in a hovel in the slum threatened by ‘kondos’, hunger and deprivation.

Language use is influenced by the theme of death. To depict moral decadence, John Ruganda uses vulgar or obscene language to shock the reader or viewer out of complacency so as to be awakened to the bitter truth that decorum as well as decency is long dead and forgotten. This vulgarity is meant to portray a sick society whose amorous tendencies have led to moral spiritual death.

The same goes for the use of emotive and graphic language to describe the shocking incidents of brutality such as monstrous murders, rape, destruction visited on the helpless populace. The graphic description of bizarre murderous incidents point to nothing but death of conscience, due to the callousness and insensitivity by the agents of destruction and death towards their fellow men like a bitch that eats its own brood. No wonder Boss is described as an ogre that has turned against his own citizens.

The recurrence of blood, floods, storm, waves, sound of military boots, gun and machine-gun fire, all are leitmotifs of death that run through John Ruganda’s drama.
The use of alcohol particularly the hard drink is a motif, too. It is a means of escapism from the harsh realities in order to make the present bearable and the future worthy waiting for as Wamala says.

The use of mythology, African folklore, and story telling, is used by Ruganda to show the sanity of old wisdom and order that has now been destroyed and replaced with anarchy, mediocrity and violation of socio-economic, cultural and political order.

For example, the destruction of the palace that symbolized the abrogation of the monarchy in Uganda by violent means through the barrel of the gun, brought in chaos, mayhem and death. The new political leaders are stinking with leprosy and commonness like Wamala yet they occupy the throne and wield so much power which like ogres has turned the guns to their own citizens. Twenty years of the so-called independence yet there is nothing to show for it except enough corpses to feed billions of vultures, Wak laments in Shreds of Tenderness.

There is poverty leading to moral degradation and death of the marriage and family institutions. There is an exodus of refugees to neighbouring countries and abroad. In foreign countries these refugees suffer all social indignities and frustration as a result of discrimination, suspicion and deprivation.

Generally, through dramatic action, characterization including inter-personal character relationships, language and leitmotif use, John Ruganda is able to bring out the theme of death and other related emerging issues of societal concern he presents in his drama.

The use of satirical humour is an incisive but subtle criticism meant to expose and criticize human foibles with the view of correcting and making society better. This study is a reflection of truth as John Ruganda sees and shares it with his readers or viewers.
4.2 Conclusions

In summary this study has explored the interpretation of various manifestations of death and their causes as seen from various definitions, concept and perspective in John Ruganda’s drama.

It has interrogated the causes of moral, spiritual, physical and related manifestations of symbolic death in John Ruganda’s selected plays. These manifestations of death have led to a decadent society that has gone to seed and needs pruning and regeneration for a better future full of hope. Following the face-to-face informal personal interviews and discussion, this chapter has also analyzed the biographical background information that has provided useful insight into John Ruganda’s works and John Ruganda as an artist and why he seems to be pre-occupied with the theme of Death.

All this is given credence by his profile: In 1941 John Ruganda was born in Western Uganda, Toro at Kabarole, near Fort Portal at the foot of Mountain Ruwenzori. He went to St. Leo’s College in Fort Portal. In 1967, he graduated with an honours degree in English at Makerere University – Kampala. He was a founding member of Makerere Free Travelling Theatre and representative of Oxford University Press East Africa in Uganda and a holder of the prestigious creative writing senior fellowship in the Department of Literature of Makerere University. This award was once held by renowned authors such as V. S. Naipul, Robert Sserumaga and Ngugi wa Thiong’o. He was also the editor of The Makerere and Penpoint student journals, secretary of Kampala Writers Club and founder member of Ngoma Players Theatre Group and Chairman of the Uganda Authors and Linguistic Association (Sambai 2008).

His life in exile started when John Ruganda moved to Nairobi and eventually joined the Literature Department at the University of Nairobi till 1982, teaching, writing and directing theatre and television performances.
He worked and interacted with famous writers such as David Rubadiri, Taban Lo Lyon, Okot p’Bitek, Joe de Graft, Francis Imbuga, David Mulwa, Austin Bukenya the last of whom Ruganda had worked closely together at Makerere University as creative writers and performing artists with Prof. David Cook. At the University of Nairobi, he established the Nairobi University Free Travelling Theatre to take drama to the people. He founded The Nairobi University Players (NUP), Theatre Company that eventually was under the direction of Waigwa Wachira. The Free Travelling Theatre was training ground for actors, playwrights and directors. This produced prolific actors such as Prof. Oluoch Obura, who acted as Bwogo in The Floods, Wakanyote Njuguna (who starred as Wak) with the late talented Stella Awinja (as Stella) in Shreds of Tenderness and as Nankya in The Floods.

John Ruganda directed many plays such as Francis Imbuga’s Betrayal in the City, Ola Rotimu’s Our Husband Has Gone Man Again, Makotsi’s She Ate the Female Cassava, A Man of Kafira by Francis Imbuga, Athol Fugards’s Hellow and Goodbye and the Greek tragedy media besides directing his own plays such as The Burdens, The Floods and Shreds of Tenderness. It was The Floods that earned John Ruganda international fame, when he received invitation to perform the play in Yugoslavia and France in 1979. “The responses to the performances were so enthusiastic that some European critics were soon asserting that John Ruganda was the greatest dramatist from Africa.” Later N.U.P and Ruganda were to perform in Germany. Mtu Mzuri wa Stezum, a famous play by Abeid Shepherd’s but a translation of the famous play by Bertolt Brecht. They also performed The Island by Athol Fugard in Uganda before John Ruganda moved to Canada, in 1983, as a researcher, a teacher and a worker in the theatre at the University of New Brunswick. (Bukenya 1 – 4)

At New Brunswick, Ruganda did his masters and PhD studies. “His doctoral dissertation was Alienation and leadership figures in the plays of Francis Imbuga.” He later developed his thesis in a text entitled Telling the Truth Laughingly: The politics in the Drama of Francis Imbuga (1983). While at New Brunswick he also wrote Echoes of Silence (1986). Later in 2002, Ruganda wrote Igereka and other African Narratives. He later moved to South Africa as a professor of literature at the University of North. “In
July 2006, Ruganda was diagnosed with throat cancer. He passed away on the 8th December 2007 in Uganda at Kampala International Hospital, Mulago.” (Internet: http://www.Eastafricanpublishers.com/News/John%20Ruganda.htm)

A close look at the choice of plays Ruganda directed, have a close bearing to his concern for the plight of the down-trodden in society... an area Ruganda exploits to develop the Death Motif in his drama. Besides being a play director, he is one of the leading playwrights in East Africa. To his credit he has written six published plays: Black Mamba and Covenant with Death (1973), The Burdens (1972), Echoes of Silence (1998), The Floods (1980) and Shreds of Tenderness (1980). Titles of unpublished plays are: The State of Zombie, The Glutton, Pyrrhic Victory and End of the Endless. To demonstrate his impact on the East African scene, some of these plays have been selected as literature set books at Ordinary and Advanced Level National Examinations in Uganda and Kenya. Such set books include: The Burdens, The Floods and Shreds of Tenderness. Besides being a playwright, John Ruganda is also a poet. For example he wrote “Barricades of Paper Houses” and “Images of God” (Poems from East Africa pp. 143,146) and the “Flywhisk” in An Introduction to East African Poetry (p. 61) by Gitonga and Kairara. Ruganda is also a novelist. He wrote Ngereka and other stories (2002). He is also a critic as depicted by his text Telling the Truth Laughingly: The politics in the Drama of Francis Imbuga (1983). John Ruganda, therefore, is a renowned playwright, poet, novelist, critic, actor and director of local and international repute. This is the artist whose work, this study analyzes the death motif in his drama.

Following this study’s analysis of the portrayal and use of death as a leitmotif in John Ruganda’s drama, one safely concludes that this research has accomplished its aim and objectives. It has identified the various concepts of death both physical and symbolic and their causes. It has also examined the influence of death on characterization, dramatic structure, language and, leitmotif in John Ruganda’s selected six plays. It has also analysed how death advances other related emerging themes that reflect societal concerns in his drama.
Such themes as discussed in this study include among other things moral decadence, typified by sexual immorality including adultery, moral and spiritual death marked by misuse of power, excessive brutality, wanton destruction of life and property motivated by greed, self-preservation and perpetuation in power. This is aggravated by corruption and rampant exploitation of the helpless masses wallowing in abject poverty by power hungry political and economic elite in post independence African States symbolized by the military dictatorship in Uganda during Idi Amin’s despotic rule.

Abject poverty has aggravated the loss of hope in an individual as depicted by Wamala in The Burdens leading to the death of marriage institutions and family relationships yet marriage institutions are supposed to be the pillar for National Unity and co-existence. Ruganda depicts a gloomy picture of a people waiting for death unless they shake themselves out of apathy and complacency. One day, Wamala says the small man of the slum will rise and “throat” fat necks of the Kanagonagos. Ruganda, one concludes, indirectly advocates for the revolution of the masses.

Although the long monologues cause verbosity, they at the same time give room to the performer to display his versatility as a talented artist to re-create characters and scenario during the role playing during the enactment within an enactment. The single symbolic setting and limited cast are cost-effective productions techniques designed for travelling theatre to carry the drama to the people and communicate societal concerns economically and effectively.

It is also safe to conclude that John Ruganda’s drama is influenced by the political background of the events in Uganda especially the emergency of despotic military regime that brutalized the populace and deamed the hopes and aspirations of the masses.

John Ruganda’s upbringing in a humble rural background influences the techniques of his writing. The source of mythology, African Folklore and Story Telling in his drama, Bukenya, (Personal interview 2nd October 2010) says is as a result of John Ruganda’s rural oral literature background and upbringing. His tirade against the rich Bwongos is as a
result of the suffering and exploitation, Ruganda’s own mother suffered at the hands of the rich as a househelp.

Ruganda’s minimalist approach to theatre is as a result of the influence of Athol Fugard and his admiration for the theatre of the absurd.

In conclusion, John Ruganda successfully constructs and presents his drama around the theme of death as a focal point using his unique craftsmanship. The theme of death is the foundation of the architectural artistic plan of John Ruganda’s drama. One is almost tempted to say that without the death motif, John Ruganda would have no drama that effectively articulates the socio-economic, cultural and political issues he raises.

Since John Ruganda’s plays centred on the theme of death reflect or mirror society, that is why he has made remarkable contribution to African literature particularly drama. As indicators to his success John Ruganda’s plays, The Burdens, The Floods and Shreds of Tenderness, have been examinable literature set books for high school students for their Ordinary Level and Advanced Level school certificate examination in East African.

One of the many great contributions to the Kenyan drama scene by John Ruganda, Prof. Obura posits (Personal Interview 6th November 2010) was his involvement with travelling theatre at the University of Nairobi, the idea Ruganda had muted at Makerere University — Kampala Uganda. It was through this venture in his effort to take drama to the people that Kamirithu Community Theatre was born. Ruganda had the first ever resounding successful drama performance at Kamirithu in 1976 with Prof. Oluoch Obura playing the lead role of Dedan Kimathi with other artists such as Emesa Okare directed by John Ruganda, Obura recalls. It was a magnetic crowd puller production of mainly a peasant audience. When Ngugi wa Thiong’o saw the success of this Dedan Kimathi production, he took up the idea but the actual architect and pioneer of the Kamirithu Community Theatre was John Ruganda with the University of Nairobi Travelling Theatre. Credit should go where it deserves, to John Ruganda, Prof. Obura says with finality.
John Ruganda’s plays too, have acquired local and international acclaim and recognition. They have been performed abroad in German and Yugoslavia under John Ruganda’s direction with his travelling theatre. The plays are crowd-pullers because they portray the socio-economic, cultural and political evils that negatively affect society – society that is disillusioned and lives in perpetual fear of death. The fact that John Ruganda is a renowned playwright in East and Central Africa, he must be an exemplary artist. Prof. Obura who acted as Bwogo directed by John Ruganda in The Floods, describes him (Ruganda) as a most brilliant artist. As a director, he was unbeatable. He was a consummate artist committed to art and the artists. He concurs that Ruganda was literary married to his art that he spent most of his time up to the wee hours of the night with his artists.

Njuguna Wakanyote, Personal interview 7th November 2010, said John Ruganda was “a slave driver” who rehearsed one sentence or a phrase for three hours or even days till the artist got it right. He could rehearse his actors for months. He was never in a hurry to put on a show unlike many who hurriedly put up a shoddy performance to make quick money.

David Mulwa and Prof. Obura during the personal interview 17th October and 6th November 2010 respectively, concur with this view. Ruganda was a perfectionist and an artist per excellence. Njuguna adds: May be that is why he caused so much envy amongst his working colleagues at the Literature department at the University of Nairobi. However the ideological differences with his colleagues and personal wars with the administration did not deter or way him down.

Ruganda tells the truth artistically however bitter, as depicted by these selected six plays that use physical and symbolic death to mirror or reflect the socio-economic, cultural and political malaise of a society John Ruganda presents in his drama.
4.3 **Recommendations**

This study should serve as a motivation to inspire literary scholars to examine the death motif in other literary works by other African writers that may have the theme of death, both physical and symbolic as a leitmotif through their writing.

Another possible area for research would be around the following topic;

**The Theatre of the Absurd: Portrayal, and use in John Ruganda’s drama**

This topic would provide an opportunity to explore the development, treatment and portrayal of surrealistic theatre especially as a cost effective production now than ever before when there are many mushrooming drama groups sponsored by N.G.Os in their attempt to take drama to the people for purposes of sensitization and positive attitude change.

It would also be a welcome relief to the Kenya Schools and Colleges Annual National Drama Festival that has decried the too expensive drama productions that are too dependant on non-functional heavy props and gadgetry. *(Adjudication Report 2010 Kenya Schools and Colleges National Drama Festival).*
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Prof. Oluoch Obura, 6th November 2010, Saape Cafe, Koinange Street, Nairobi

Njuguna Wakanyote, 7th November 2010, Park Villa Hotel, Nairobi
Appendix 1

Programme of the proposed study

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<td>Defense of project proposal at department</td>
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<tr>
<td>Data collection and collecting (Library reading, informal interviews and consultation)</td>
<td>September – October 2010</td>
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<tr>
<td>Data analysis and drawing inferences (Editing, compiling, coding of data and consultation)</td>
<td>October – November 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing final research project (drafting and consultation)</td>
<td>November – December 2010</td>
</tr>
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<td>Submission of final research project</td>
<td>December 2010</td>
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<td>Graduation</td>
<td>July 2011</td>
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Appendix 2

Budget of the proposed study

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<td>Data handling instruments i.e. Video camera (own)</td>
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<td>DVDs Flash Disk Editing</td>
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Appendix 3

Research Tools

(a) Audio – video camera will be used to facilitate collection of field data to be obtained from face to face unstructured informal interviews with respondents who have interacted with John Ruganda and his works.

(b) Key informant guide during interview:

Introduction: This study focuses on the analysis of the portrayal and use of the theme of death that seems to be a repeated subject in John Ruganda’s plays. I shall be most grateful if you would kindly respond to these guiding questions:

(i) For how long have you known John Ruganda?

(ii) What was the nature of your interaction?

(iii) Would you kindly share with me any biographical background information on John Ruganda that might have influenced his writing?

(iv) Why does John Ruganda seem to be particularly pre-occupied with death in all his plays?

(v) What various concept of death both physical and symbolic does John Ruganda deal with in his drama?

(vi) And what does John Ruganda see as the causes of these deaths?

(vii) For what purposes does John Ruganda use death as a running motif in his drama?