

**AN ANALYSIS OF SEMANTIC ODDITIES AND PHONOLOGICAL  
MANIPULATION IN JASON KAP-KIRWOK'S POETRY**

**BY**

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Award of the Degree of Master of Arts of Kenyatta University.**

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## DECLARATION

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

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## **DEDICATION**

To my late grandmother: Salome Kagio Ngari, a true heroine, an embodiment of virtue, who impacted many a life, mine being but one of them.

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## DEFINITION OF TERMS

**Phonological manipulation** - This refers to the way the poet plays around with aspects of sounds as part of his style. In this study, this term will be used interchangeably with the term(s) phonological/sound gymnastics.

**Semantic oddities** - This is an umbrella term which denotes the use of features in which words are collocated in odd ways to denote certain complex meanings. In this study, this term will be used synonymously with the term(s) semantic absurdities/incongruities.

**Social Vision** –This comprises a literary writer’s idea of how society should be. This is normally embedded in his/her writing.

**Quatrain** - The term generally refers to a four-line poem that rhymes. In this study, we will use the term to refer to a stanza comprising four lines. This is the most common form of stanzaic organization.

## ABSTRACT

This study focused on semantic oddities and manipulation of sound aspects in two of Kap-kirwok's poetry collections namely: Heartbeats of the Mind and Loud Monologues Silent Dialogues. The study was premised on the knowledge that style is an important element especially as far as delivering the message of a literary writer is concerned. The study thus sought to investigate the rationale behind Kap-kirwok's employment of the above mentioned devices in his poetry. In an environment where people only seem to enjoy listening to recited poetry and with very little critical work on the same, we endeavoured to critique these two collections as a way of opening up the field for more critical work. The study was motivated by the wide gap we saw in our Kenyan literary scene where researchers were seen to have shied away from poetry, only focusing on such areas as the novel and oral literature. Our first objective was to identify and analyze examples of semantic oddities and phonological manipulation in the poems. Secondly, we sought to establish the significance of using these features as communicative devices. Finally, we also attempted to establish the poet's social vision. The study employed the sociological literary theory as well as the stylistics theory. The sociological literary theory was found to be useful in unveiling the message of the writer to the society. The stylistics theory also helped us analyse the relationship between form and content. The study adopted a qualitative approach. It utilized library research, which involves textual analysis of primary texts and use of secondary data. Purposive sampling was used to select poems seen to be rich in the above named aspects for analysis. The findings of the study show that Kap-kirwok has used both semantic oddities and phonological gymnastics as powerful tools to both embellish his work and also communicate his message to the society.

## 1.0 CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Background to the Study

Poetry is an important ingredient of the cultural heritage of most societies in the world. In Literature, its usefulness derives from its enormous pedagogical as well as aesthetic value. Amateshe (1988) rightly notes that it would be an insurmountable task to attempt an exhaustive definition of the term poetry. In trying to define the term, he says that, “In basic terms, poetry is music...” (3). Olembo (1986) on her part views poetry as, “The expression of ideas and feelings in the most appropriate language” (83). We therefore did not engage in an attempt to reach an exhaustive definition, but for our purpose, we defined poetry as a form of writing typically structured in stanzas, in which a writer expresses his/her thoughts, ideas and/or feelings.

Ogungbesan and Woolger (1978) concur with Finnegan (1970) that poetry is by no means a recent import into Africa from Europe, but an important and living part of African culture going back to the distant past. In nearly all African societies, there has been a thriving oral tradition of poetry. Poetry and song have been used to accompany the activities of daily life, to give utterance to a people’s joys and sorrows and to comment on life. Finnegan (1970) broadly classifies African poetry into four categories namely: Epic, Panegyric, Lyric and Elegiac poetry. An epic may be defined as a long narrative poem (Diyanni 2000). Finnegan notes that epic poetry records the adventures of a hero whose exploits are important to the history of a nation. A good example of an African epic is Mazisi Kunene’s Emperor Shaka The Great (1979). Panegyric poetry, which is one of the most developed and elaborate poetic genres in Africa, is concerned with the praise of kings, chiefs and leaders. It was commonly performed in the courts

of kings and chiefs by the members of their official entourage. Elegiac poetry commemorates a friend or a loved one who has died. It is an exceedingly common form in Africa and it is performed in funeral or memorial rites. A lyric is a short poem which is sung. Lyric poetry is the most common form in sub-Saharan Africa and its performance involves popular participation (Finnegan 1970).

Poetry has been classified using different criteria by different scholars. Alembi (1999) and Bukenya (1978) have for instance broadly classified poems on the basis of themes. Another criterion used to classify poetry is that of style, (Diyanni 2000). Finnegan's classification is based on function.

Modern African poetry exhibits diverse variety in terms of themes, structure and also language and style. In many instances, poets have borrowed heavily from African oral poetry as in the case of P'Bitek (1966). Other poets like Bukenya and Ntiru have borrowed from European poets like T.S. Eliot (Bukenya 1978). We note that modern African poetry has undergone a lot of changes in terms of form and structure with the free verse for instance becoming a popular form as opposed to the metrical patterns of the Western tradition. Thus, the modern poet may not follow those classifications rigidly and in most cases may go for modified forms of these categories. We note that there are also other categories of poetry especially those originating from the Western tradition. Diyanni (2000) enumerates about nine sub-categories under the broad classes of narrative and lyric poetry (409 – 412), but we will not go into their discussion as our study focuses on style in modern African poetry.

Ogungbesan & Woolger (1978) note that the modern poet is not much different from his/her traditional counterpart. The poems that a poet writes reflect the realities of the world he/she lives in. Ngara (1982) argues that the ancient bard had a social function and this has now been delegated to the creative writer. What is clear from the argument of the above scholars is that the poet was and still is a very important person in the society, for he/she has taken over the baton to continue with this noble duty. The modern poet therefore complements the work of his/her predecessor.

On the language of poetry, Ogungbesan and Woolger (1978) note that "...the words of poetry are compressed, charged with meaning and significance" (8). Nowotny (1962) on her part argues that "...poetry is language at full stretch, bringing into maximal interplay the various potentialities afforded by linguistic forms in artistic structures" (123). She further argues that the poet makes better use of the resources of language than the ordinary person for the purpose of articulating meaning.

A discussion of language leads us to the field of style as language is the raw material that the poet uses to communicate. The term generally refers to the way a writer uses language in order to communicate. The way he/she manipulates language resources is what we refer to as style. Epstein (1960) defines it as "the regard that what pays to how" (1). Since time immemorial, style in literature has been a subject of great interest to scholars. Interest in style began at around 465 B.C. in Athens in a city called Sicily. It first started in the form of oratory /rhetoric as there was no writing by then.

Aristotle, one of the foremost figures in the study of style (quoted in Randall 1960) defines the term “rhetoric” as “the faculty of finding in a situation all available means of persuasion” (280). Aristotle organized the tasks of the orator (which are also very important for the writer) as follows: invention, arrangement, language and delivery. The Aristotelian corpus had three productive sciences comprising: the **topics**, the **rhetoric**, and the **poetics**. The **topics** dealt with how to make a good argument while the **rhetoric** dealt with how to make a good speech. On its part, the **poetics** was concerned with how to make a good poem. Aristotle’s formal definition of art was that art is an imitation (a mimesis) of nature. The greatest among the things that Aristotle considered important for the speaker was arrangement, while clarity and appropriateness were paramount to style. For him, style is supposed to be proportionate to the subject matter. He further argued that poetry does not use form and colour as painting does but like music, it employs rhythm, harmony and language to imitate the actions of men, what men do and suffer, their happiness, and misery. For him, epic and dramatic poetry are the highest forms of poetry because they are the most imitative of men’s actions. (Ibid p. 280)

Though some of the principles he laid have been modified over the years, Aristotle’s corpus played a major role in laying the foundation of studies in style. Our study of semantic absurdities and sound gymnastics in Kap-kirwok’s poetry no doubt touches on some of those principles like use of language as well as how poetry reflects reality.

A study of style in literature leads us to the domain of stylistics. Style (form) may generally be referred to as the “how” while content may be taken to mean the “what”. Leech and Short (1981)

define stylistics as “the linguistic study of style” (13). The question of the relationship between form and content has preoccupied literary debate since the beginning of literary criticism with scholars like Plato and Aristotle. Scholars have been divided over the issue with some privileging content and others form. (Mugubi 2005) argues that any literary study that tries to divorce the ‘marriage’ between the two core aspects of form and content is erroneous since the two are inseparable entities. He further argues that in literary writing, the question is not just “what” is being communicated but “how” it is communicated. (17) This view is also propounded by Ngara (1982) and Indangasi (1988). Ngara (1982) posits:

What this leads to is recognition of the fact that sociological and aesthetic issues are of equal importance in literary criticism. We put emphasis on the aesthetic and formal dimensions of fiction (read poetry) only to discover how social, ideological and moral issues are discussed and given substance in an artistic way in a genuine work of art (18).

Indangasi (1988) decries the culture of privileging content over form. He talks of a situation where a work of art is “...far too often seen as a bundle of messages or themes” (5).

The arguments of the above scholars underline the importance of style in the role of communication of a writer’s message. Our study of Kap-kirwok’s poetry examined how he handles the marriage between these two core aspects. We sought to find out how and for what purpose he uses semantic incongruities and sound gymnastics to deal with social issues.

Though the controversy between form and content has not been resolved, it is generally accepted that the two, though existing as separate entities are in fact a unit. Griffith (2002) observes that literature is “Aesthetic” in that it gives pleasure and that it is an end in itself. He however also recognizes that the aesthetic qualities of literature are bound up with the ideas

conveyed by a work of art. What this means is that he concurs with his fellow literary scholars that we cannot have art for art's sake. At the same time, he recognizes that content would have to be clothed aesthetically for it to be literature.

It is important to note that the one most important resource in the hands of a creative writer is language, and what he/she does with it to come up with something special comprises his/her style. Ngara (1982) refers to this as a writer's idiosyncrasy. Chapman (1973) says of style that, "... good style has been used as a description of writing that was in some way praiseworthy, skillful or elegant" (12). Further on, he observes that a writer is free to select from language where he/she wills, aided by his/her peculiar sensitivity to the use of language. Chapman (1973) also notes that in most cases, the language of literature is often notably deviant and adds that a deviant feature, be it lexical, syntactic, or phonological can simply be noted as an infrequent item in the total. All these point to a writer's freedom to manipulate linguistic devices. Our study attempted an analysis of these deviant features. Our focus was on how Kap-kirwok has used semantic and sound deviations.

To understand his style and idiosyncrasy, a short biographical background of Kap-kirwok (the author of the poetry under discussion) will suffice to help the reader familiarize himself/herself with him. We have found it necessary to provide this background because the author is relatively new in the literary scene. Mr. Jason Kap-kirwok was born in 1960 in Mt. Elgon District. He holds a Bachelor of Science degree from the University of Nairobi and a Master of Business Administration (MBA) from Eastern University in Pennsylvania, USA.

He currently works with Heifer International; an award-winning economic development organization based in Little Rock Arkansas, USA, as the Senior Director of Global Strategy and Operational Change. Before joining Heifer Inc., he ran his own consultancy by the name Strategy Beyond Profit (SBP Consult) as the Managing Consultant. Before that, he was the Director for Strategy, Planning and Industry Affairs for Kenya Airways.

He has worked with many organizations in and outside Kenya where he has held many senior positions especially in the area of strategic planning. Such include: COMESA, ICIPE and ADC among others. He was also a lecturer at the City University of London in 2004/05 as well as at Daystar University in Nairobi in 1995/06. He served on the boards of several bodies such as the Nairobi Stock Exchange (NSE), Kenya Flamingo Airlines and Ken Cargo Airlines.

His writing history dates way back to his primary school days when he began experimenting with poetry. He has received several awards and honors including a first prize award for an essay contest on multiculturalism, open to all colleges and Universities in the USA, and the Jonathan Orr Award for Excellence in Research and Writing. He has written two poetry collections entitled: Heartbeats of the Mind and Silent Dialogues Loud Monologues. He has until 2009, been writing a regular column in the Sunday Standard newspaper entitled “Voices from the Diaspora”. He is currently working on a novella.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

Modern African poetry remains a largely unexplored field of study in Kenya. This is because most postgraduate literary studies have concentrated on the novel and oral literature, with modern African poetry getting little critical attention. Moreover, literary studies have dwelt more on themes and characterization than on style, yet style is fundamental to the understanding of the message of a work of art. The researcher felt that this was a wide gap that needed to be filled. We sought to study Kap-kirwok's poetry because there has not been any comprehensive study of his works though he has two collections to his credit. Unlike many poets who use complex language, Kap-kirwok's language is simple yet very forceful.

Since a literary writer is free to choose from the vast repertoire of linguistic resources at his/her disposal, this study endeavoured to study the rationale behind Kap-kirwok's choice of semantic oddities and sound gymnastics as his communicative tools to highlight social issues. In so doing, we hoped to establish their significance in unearthing his social vision as well as open up the field for more critical analysis.

## **1.3 Objectives of the Study**

The study was based on the following specific objectives: To

1. Identify and analyze any semantic oddities and aspects of sound manipulation in the poems of Kap-kirwok..
2. Establish the significance of using semantic incongruities and phonological features as communicative devices.

3. Establish Kap-kirwok's social vision as expressed through the selected features of style.

#### **1.4 Research Questions**

1. What examples of semantic absurdities and sound manipulation can be identified in the poems?
2. What functions do semantic oddities and sound devices play in Kap-kirwok's poetry?
3. What is the poet's social vision?

#### **1.5 Research Assumptions**

1. Identifying and analysing examples of semantic oddities and sound features contributes to the unlocking of meaning in the poems.
2. Kap-kirwok has used semantic incongruities and phonological components in his poetry purposively as communicative tools.
3. Semantic oddities and instances of sound manipulation play a major role as far as unveiling the poet's vision is concerned.

#### **1.6 Justification of the Study**

Though a lot of people enjoy listening to recited poetry, modern African poetry remains a largely unexplored field of study in Kenya. Noting this gap, Amateshe (1988) observes that like their counterparts in secondary schools, university students have tended to shy away from poetry research, instead preferring to tackle novels and plays. He adds that the best they have done to poetry is mere recitation. The reason for this could be what Okola (1967) refers to in the

introduction to Drum Beat as the predominant perception of poetry by many Kenyans as a dry, difficult and uninteresting subject. This is of course not true as a keen study of poems reveals a lot of hidden beauty and wisdom. This is one of the factors that motivated us to carry out a study on poetry – to be able to unearth some of this wealth.

A spot-check of the records of Master of Arts studies conducted by the researcher in the literature resource centres of two of Kenya's oldest, public universities, Nairobi and Kenyatta, revealed a glaring gap as far as poetry research is concerned. At Nairobi University, since 1979 up to 2008, the record showed that out of one hundred and three studies, only six were based on purely African poetic works. At Kenyatta University, since 1985 up to 2006, out of thirty five M.A studies, the one poetic study that was there was based on a Caribbean work. The staff members manning those two Resource Centres informed the researcher that there were some studies which were not in their records. All the same, these statistics revealed that this area has not been given enough attention.

Where studies had been done on poetry, the researcher discovered that they tended to focus more on the known or so-called 'major' poets at the expense of upcoming ones. This left us with a wide gap. We felt there was need to diversify and also widen the scope of knowledge in poetry, in order to give a hearing to upcoming writers. As far as we were able to establish about Kap-kirwok's case for instance, there has not been any comprehensive study of his poetry, despite the fact that he has two collections to his credit. As learnt from an interview with the writer, Heartbeats of the Mind comprises poems written from his primary school days all the way to graduate school. A study of the poetry of Kap-kirwok would thus act as an eye-opener to many

aspiring writers as it represents his growth as a writer. We hoped that this fact would be a major motivating factor to aspiring writers, some of whom may not have a rich literary background, to enable them gain the confidence that they can also write poetry. Kap-kirwok's ability to integrate rich symbols with the devices under investigation to bring out his message in such a powerful way, made it incumbent (as far as we were concerned) for studies be carried out on his poetry. This was in order to widen the scope of knowledge in this area.

Moreover, we found it necessary to study Kap-kirwok's poetry as a representative not only of our local literary scene, but also of the twenty-first century writing. This study was deemed to be invaluable to the literary fraternity as it would open (for us) a window into the world of the twenty-first century Kenyan writer, showing us how he/she exploits the vast language resources at his/her disposal to reach the readers. It was our hope that a study of Kap-kirwok's poetry would reveal how he views the world and the solutions he prescribes for our present day socio-economic and political maladies.

It is our hope that the identification and analysis of the various instances of the use of semantic oddities and those of manipulation of sound features will help readers of Kap-kirwok's poetic works readily perceive them as credible works of art. This will go a step further to enable readers see the many possibilities at hand that a poet can skillfully manipulate to the benefit of creativity. This will in turn contribute to the literary sphere of knowledge.

Ngara (1982) laments the fact that students of literature in Africa and elsewhere have concentrated on narration of themes and characters of works of art at the expense of the aesthetic

aspects of literature (34). Our study aimed at explicating these aesthetic aspects as a way of filling this gap.

### **1.7 Scope and Limitations**

In doing a critical analysis of a work of art, a critic can look at the many facets of it. Examples of the areas that he/she may look at are: themes, characters or even language and style. In our study of Kap-kirwok's poetry, we focused on style. Still, we found the style umbrella too wide and decided to scale down our scope to a narrower area for a more comprehensive coverage. Out of the many stylistic aspects that a creative writer may exploit for his communicative purposes, this study limited itself to only two of these, namely: semantic incongruities and manipulation of sound aspects. It was our hope that by doing a critical analysis of the author's use of the same, we would be able to unveil his social vision.

### **1.8 Review of Related Literature**

As far as we were able to establish, there were no comprehensive studies carried out on the two poetry collections, save for a book review on Heartbeats of the Mind in the Sunday Standard newspaper. Thus, for our literature review, we focused on studies done on various African poetic works. Under this, we looked at Nyagemi's study of two of Jared Angira's poetry collections as well as Wakarindi's study of Edward Braithwaite's The Arrivants, among others. We also included studies done in oral poetry especially those that focus on style.

Mburu (2001) was found to be significant to this study. Her book review of Heartbeats of the Mind in the Sunday Standard newspaper lauds Kap-kirwok's ability to inject fresh air in the

world of verse. She notes the poet's use of such poetic devices as rhyme and rhythm to address a wide range of themes. The review nevertheless, was found not to delve deep in the area of style which was the major concern of this study.

Wakarindi (2006) examines how the journeying motif and the narrative technique have been used to unveil the thematic concerns of the author in Edward Braithwaite's The Arrivants". Wakarindi notes the poet's aptness in using the journeying motif for various effects as well as "... to suggest rebirth and the inescapable frailties of the human condition that are common to all, the world over" (42).

Wakarindi also examines Braithwaite's use of elements of the narrative technique which, as she says, he uses to persuade his readers on certain viewpoints. She also highlights his skilful interweaving of such elements of the narrative technique as song, conversational tone, rhetorical questions and repetition to create an artistic whole. We found her work significant to our study in that it focuses on style although we noted that it concentrates on aspects different from those in our focus. In our study, we looked at a different set of stylistic aspects, namely: semantic absurdities and phonological gymnastics.

Alembi (1999) observes that words are of utmost importance in poetry and a careful selection of words greatly enhances the communication of the message. Our study of semantic oddities and manipulation of sound features was an attempt to unravel this careful selection of words.

Olembo (1986) was found to be significant to this study in that it underlines the idea of manipulation of sound aspects in poetry. The work has brief sections on the analysis of such sound aspects as alliteration, rhythm, stress and how they can be manipulated both for aesthetic purposes and for meaning (5-6). Our study endeavoured to widen the scope by exploring other sound aspects.

Mugubi (2005) was deemed important to our study as it clearly elucidates a number of areas that are the concern of this study. It provides the researcher with an in-depth analysis of the term 'style' as well as the relationship between form and content. It also further explicates stylistic techniques based on the broad linguistic branches of semantics, syntax, lexis, morphology and graphology.

Nyagemi (2008) which is based on two anthologies of Angira's poetry was found to be useful to our study. Nyagemi focuses on the way Angira has manipulated semantic elements to deliver his message. In a statement that indicates his appreciation of Angira's capacity to manipulate language, Nyagemi observes:

Angira's unique quality as a poet is his thought-provoking use of language. His love for semantic resonance and subtle allusions has been received both with endearment and revulsion, reverence and fear (28).

Nyagemi (2008) notes that the poem "Dialogue" "epitomizes the height of Angira's artistry, his rare ability to combine words, his mastery of diction" (58). In studying semantic oddities in our selected author's poetry, we endeavoured to study such artistry, such rare ability to combine words which we noted was also an outstanding feature of Kap-kirwok's poetry. Nyagemi's study was found to be of great significance to our study because it recognizes the value of semantic

absurdities in literary creativity. It is this dexterity in manipulating semantic aspects to address social issues that we sought to study in Kap-kirwok's poetry. But, while Nyagemi's study provided us with an incisive analysis of the use of semantic absurdities by Angira, we noted that he does not look at other forms of manipulation of linguistic resources by the poet. In our study, we went a step further and studied how Kap-kirwok has manipulated sound aspects in our endeavour to find out what role they play in communicating his message.

Mbugua (2005) examines the use of semantic deviation in Gikuyu children's oral poetry as a way of highlighting subversion. He demonstrates how the aspect of semantic absurdity is employed in certain oral poems for various aesthetic purposes. He gives an example of a poem "Gathigiriri" (ant) where oxymoron is used to create antithetical meanings (100). However, the section neither delves deep enough into the topic nor does it seek to explore other aspects of semantic absurdity.

Oiyo (2006) looks at the sounds of words in his analysis of style and social significance in Luo children's oral poetry. Acknowledging that this is a very important device in children's oral poetry, he says that children listen keenly to the many sounds in their environment and that they learn and derive pleasure from listening to such sounds. Oiyo however, holds the view that they advance little meaning if any in the poems. While we concurred with Oiyo's view of the aesthetic function of sounds in oral poetry, we noted that he does not look into the way sounds can deliberately be manipulated to advance meaning. Our study thus endeavoured to fill this gap whereby we have studied Kap-kirwok's manipulation of sound features to communicate meaning.

Kamau (1992) was deemed to be of invaluable significance to this study. He notes that most other studies on P' Bitek have concentrated on themes while neglecting the element of style. His study focuses on the poet's creative use of language which he notes is important particularly in the study of poetry. We concurred with his observation that, "Poetry, more than other genres of literature, relies on the skilful exploitation of linguistic resources for the realization of its meaning" (vii). Kamau's study however, was mainly found to concentrate on imagery and symbolism and fails to explore how the poet could have manipulated sound aspects as communicative devices.

Both Peck and Coyle (1995) and I.A. Richards (1929) were found to be useful to this study as they provide the researcher with guidance on how to go about the analysis and explication of poems. The information they provide acted as a compass to the researcher to be able to spot important details and know the direction to follow in the analysis of poems.

Bukenya (1978) notes that sounds play a very important role in poetry. He argues that sound aspects like rhythm, rhyme, alliteration and onomatopoeia are not decorations to a poem but are part of the poet's technique of communication. Our study sought to investigate not only how Kap-kirwok has manipulated sound aspects, but also semantic elements, as his tools of communication. The work was deemed significant also in that it provides a researcher in poetry with ideas on the process of explication of a poem.

## 1.9 Theoretical Framework

This study adopted two critical theories namely: the sociological literary theory and the stylistics approach. Since our study focuses on style, we found the stylistics theory apt in helping us analyse the relationship between form and content in Kap-kirwok's poetry. We also sought the aid of the sociological literary theory to help us analyse the poet's message for the society. For this, we used the sociological literary theory as propounded by (Achebe 1965), (Diyanni 2000), (Finnegan 1977), (Ngara 1985; 1990), (Ngugi 1981) and (Plekhanov 1953), among others.

The sociological theory argues that literary works should not be isolated from the social contexts in which they are embedded. The theory focuses on the values of a society and how those values are reflected in literary works. Here, a work of art is seen as a mirror of the society. According to Diyanni (2000), "critics employing a sociological perspective study the economic, political and cultural issues expressed in literary works as those issues are reflected in the societies in which the works are produced" (1366).

Under this theory, realism in a work is seen as a very important element. Plekhanov (1953) emphasized the need for art to illuminate, arouse, and convey actions, emotions and occurrences which are of relevance to society if it is to be meaningful. The sociological literary theory sees literature and society as having a dialectical relationship whereby literature is not only influenced by society, but it also influences it (Ngugi 1981). This theory was found to be useful in helping us to discover how Kap-kirwok's poetry has been influenced by the society from which it emerges and also see the influence it has, or seeks to have on society.

Finnegan (1977) acknowledges the link between literature and society, by saying that: “It seems obvious that the content and context of literature, and the way literary activity is organized are closely correlated with institutions of the society in which it is situated” (244). She underscores the importance of the link between poetry and society in her argument that one can neither understand the organization of literary activity in isolation from its social setting, nor grasp the functioning of the society without reference to the poetic activity which takes place among its members.

Of the sociological role of poets, Ngara (1990) says:

The impact poets make depends on the significance of what they say about social reality and how effectively they communicate their vision to their readers. What they say about social reality depends largely on their social vision (authorial ideology) and how successfully they communicate that vision is largely a matter of the effectiveness of their stylistic stance (aesthetic ideology) (p.xi).

Ngara (1985) notes that committed African writers are extremely sensitive to the social problems of their day and are constantly coming to grips with them, hoping to play a part in changing society for the better. They are therefore constantly defining the role of art and endeavouring to develop literary forms that match their social vision. The above arguments underscore the intimate relationship between literature and society.

Ngugi (1981) observes that at the level of the individual artist, the very act of writing implies a social relationship with society. Of the social role of literature, Ngugi observes that:

But more important, it does shape our attitude to life, to the daily struggles with nature, the daily struggles within a community and the daily struggles within our individual souls and selves (6).

Ngugi(1981) further observes that because of its social character, literature as a creative process and also as an end is conditioned by historical, social forces and pressures and it cannot elect to transcend economic, political, class, race or other issues of society. Ngugi's argument points to the dual character of literature as both a force and a product of society.

In the introduction to the text, Killam (1973) echoes the sociological function of literature in the following words:

Most African writers have felt from the beginning and especially since the early 1950s a special obligation to the societies in which they function; they have determined that literature has a social function to interpret and educate society (p.xii).

Achebe in his 1965 essay (quoted in Killam 1973), sees the novelist (read writer) as a teacher. He asserts that the writer cannot expect to be excused from the task of re-education and regeneration that must be done. He in fact believes that the writer should march right ahead.

The Stylistics theory was used in analysing the relationship between form and content. We based our theoretical analysis on the ideas of Ngara (1982), Leech and Short (1981), Wellek and Warren (1942) and Chatman (1971), among others.

According to Ngara (1982), a major concern of stylistic criticism is to give due emphasis to aesthetic aspects of literary works of art. He takes cognisance of the fact that a work of art must be objectively analysed and evaluated in terms of an aesthetically sound set of parameters, and that the student of literature should be trained to take stock of these parameters if his study is to be satisfactory and intellectually challenging (34). He further notes that the aesthetic parameters stylisticians are concerned with here are mainly of a linguistic nature. He observes that criticism

based on sound aesthetic principles will forever be useful because even though it may be overtaken by a more satisfactory theory, it will form a basis for further developments. In his discussion of stylistic criticism, Ngara refers to the linguistic idiosyncrasies which characterize individual writers saying, “We are not merely concerned with what is idiosyncratic about a writer but equally with the effect of his manner of presentation and with the relationship between language and content” (35). Ngara further observes that Stylistic criticism puts great emphasis on a writer’s use of language in which the critic identifies distinctive features and other idiosyncrasies of the author and tries to account for the author’s choice of these features. Our study, which focuses on sound manipulation and semantic oddities, was an attempt at unraveling these idiosyncrasies as well as their contribution to the delivery of meaning.

The stylistics theory recognizes the dialectical relationship between a writer and his society in which the writer is shaped by his society but at the same time helps to shape it (Ngara 1982). Ngara further notes that stylistic criticism is not merely concerned with the aesthetic and formal aspects of a work of art as it does not disregard the political, social and moral issues raised in contemporary literature. What this leads to is recognition of the fact that sociological and aesthetic issues are of equal importance in literary criticism.

Leech and Short (1981) observe that a study of style is rarely undertaken for its own sake but that critics do so because they want to explain something; the relationship between language and artistic function. They note that the motivating questions are not so much “what is being expressed” but “why” and “how”. From a linguistic angle, it is, “Why does the author choose to

express himself in this particular way?” From the critic’s viewpoint it is, “How is such and such an aesthetic effect achieved through language?” (13)

Apart from the definition of the term “style”, another major concern of literary scholars is whether or not stylistics is a branch of linguistics and also whether linguistics is sufficient to describe literary style. The general opinion of most proponents of the stylistic approach is that it is not, neither is linguistics sufficient enough to describe literary style. In Chatman (1971), Ullman argues that stylistics is not a mere branch of linguistics but a parallel discipline which investigates the same phenomena but from its point of view. From this argument, it is quite clear that the confusion is brought about by the fact that the subject of both disciplines is language, meaning they overlap in some areas. Hence, this confusion is misplaced as they approach the study of language from different perspectives.

Wellek and Warren (1942) argue that although stylistics bears a close relationship with linguistics, it is not possible to simply identify it (stylistics) with poetics or general theory of literature since the latter includes additional areas which are not under a linguistic or stylistic approach. Such areas include: plot, themes, characterization and even motif. The two critics further stress the necessity of a thorough grounding in general linguistics as a prerequisite to an understanding of stylistics. In concurrence with the above scholars, Chatman (1981) argues that the student of stylistics cannot get along without a general knowledge of grammar in all its branches.

Ngara (1982) sums up the argument of many proponents of the stylistics theory by making a distinction between linguistics and stylistics. According to him, the student of general linguistics is concerned with linguistic description, with the analysis of the various levels of language: the phonetic level, the grammatical, the lexical and the semantic level. The one of the stylistician on the other hand uses the principles of general linguistics to single out the distinctive features of a variety of the idiosyncrasies of the author. The stylistician also uses the principles of general linguistics to identify the features of language which are restricted to particular social contexts and to account for the employment of such features: why, when and where they are used (11–12).

### **1.10 Research Methodology**

The study was qualitative in nature. We mainly utilized library research which involved reading, analysis and interpretation of data from primary and secondary sources. First we conducted a thorough reading of the selected texts with a view of identifying the targeted stylistic features. We also sought for information from relevant written records, books, articles in journals and on the Internet. This information was related to various facets of our research for instance style, theories, sounds, semantic oddities and such other relevant topics. We only used interview method to generate a biographical data of the author and not on the poems in line with New Criticism which puts a premium on the word on the page. We visited many libraries such as the Moi Library of Kenyatta University and K.U.'s Literature Department's Resource Centre. Other libraries that we visited include the Jomo Kenyatta Library of the University of Nairobi, Egerton University library, The British Council Library and K.N.L.S. library at Upper Hill, Nairobi.

### **Population and Sampling Procedure**

We read and analyzed thirty poems out of the one hundred poems in the two collections. This was premised on the hope that the findings from the sample poems would give us a picture of the two books. We employed purposive sampling, and as our criteria for selecting the poems for analysis, we selected poems that were seen to be rich in semantic absurdities as well as in manipulation of sound features. Under semantic oddities, we sampled seventeen poems, seven of them from “Heartbeats” and ten from “Monologues”. Under phonological manipulation, we focused on thirteen poems but we made brief highlights on two poems that had been analysed under semantic oddities. Nine were from “Heartbeats” while four were from “Monologues”. The poems chosen were found to be varied in terms of length, structure, as well as the themes they handle. This was for the purpose of ascertaining validity, objectivity and reliability.

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

This process was guided by two theories: The Sociological Literary theory and the Stylistics theory. Guided by the Sociological Literary theory, we did a thorough reading of the poems selected for study. Poems that dealt with similar or related themes were grouped together to see if there were interrelationships among them. Then, using our chosen theories, we proceeded to do a critical analysis of the poems against their use of semantic incongruities and sound gymnastics. We sought to examine how he exploits semantic oddities and phonological manipulation to highlight societal concerns. Through this, we endeavoured to find out how far Kap-kirwok’s poetry reflects the society plus the influence it seeks to have on the same. Through the analysis, we were able to identify the major themes that he handles. This was found to be useful in helping us extract his social vision. The Stylistics theory was useful in helping us

identify and analyse the use of aesthetic features that were the concern of the study and their significance as far as delivering his message to the society was concerned. Through the two theories, we were able to extract Kap-kirwok's social vision. In our findings, we sought to see if we had achieved our objectives. The next chapter focuses on the way Kap-kirwok employs the tool of phonological gymnastics to speak to the society.

## 2.0 CHAPTER TWO

### PHONOLOGICAL MANIPULATION AND KAP-KIRWOK'S SOCIAL VISION FOR AFRICA IN HEARTBEATS OF THE MIND AND LOUD MONOLOGUES SILENT DIALOGUES

#### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on how Kap-kirwok manipulates sound features as communicative tools in his poetry. Noting the centrality of sounds in poetry, Mugubi (2002) argues that “Poetic language is purposely ordered to foreground the sound effects” (16) and this is because poems are meant to be recited or sung (26). Kap-kirwok is one poet who has employed sound devices markedly as a way of communicating his social vision. Under phonological manipulation, we focus on a variety of sound features such as rhyme, consonance, assonance, alliteration, repetition, ideophones, onomatopoeia, elision and rhythm in general. In doing this, we seek to unearth the poet's reason for using these aspects vis-a-vis his social vision for Africa. The chapter will seek to investigate both ‘normal’ and conventional sound features like rhyme as well as ‘deviant’ ones like elision. In our discussion of Kap-kirwok's use of various sound aspects, we will use both the conventional phonetic alphabets and also phonetic intensives in line with Mugubi (2002) where words are found to have very suggestive sound qualities.

The chapter comprises the analysis of thirteen poems, nine of which are drawn from Heartbeats of the Mind and four of them from Loud Monologues Silent Dialogues. There also highlights from “A SMOKER'S BATTLE” and “SHAKE(A)SPEARE JOKE” from a phonological perspective though they had been analysed under semantic oddities.. This is despite the fact that they had been analysed under semantic absurdities. This has been necessitated by the need to

analyse the poet's use of elision as part of his sound gymnastics. Our choice of these poems has been guided by how widely they have exploited features of sound within the scope of this study. In each of these poems, we try to analyze each instance of sound manipulation with a view to accounting for and justifying their use. This is done in the light of the poet's social vision for Africa as reflected in his poetry.

In our analysis, we have made an attempt to group poems that seem to address similar or related themes together. The classification is however broad and some poems may seem to belong to several categories. We have grouped the poems under such categories as: human nature and its weaknesses, life and its challenges, economic injustice/poverty, wisdom and philosophy poems, pain, suffering and death, urbanization and its implications, race relations, good versus evil, as well as hopelessness/ absurdity of life. It is important to point out that the categories are in no way exhaustive and would in many cases seem to overlap.

## **2.2 Economic Injustice/Poverty**

The issue of poverty does not escape Kap-kirwok's attention. In the poem, "**THE COMING STORM**" ("Monologues" 49), he focuses on its implications for street children and the society as a whole. The poem comprises seven stanzas with a mixture of short and medium - length lines. The beauty of the poem lies in its overall rhythm. This largely derives from its quatrain structure that ends with a common refrain: (except stanza seven) "the storm gathers". The poem is written in the third person's narrative voice. It highlights the plight of the poor, the deprived – 'the wretched of the earth'. The poor represent a section of the population which bears the brunt of the economic gap between the rich and the poor. This is where some have, but others hobble

around, hardly a morsel for their hungry stomachs. The poem reverberates with revolutionary overtones which foreshadow an uprising in waiting, to be occasioned by the inequality matrix existing in the society. This will be effected by those who have been deprived by the powers that be. The situation described in the poem arises from a capitalistic system which is known to perpetuate a big gap between the rich and the poor. Capitalism deprives the masses, (who are the majority) while enriching a few well connected people.

The title of the poem, which is laden with suspense, alludes to an imminent 'storm'. This suggests a heavy downpour likely to be accompanied by destructive action. This is symbolic not of a literal storm, but rather of an uprising due to suppressed emotions. The idea of the storm arrests the attention of the reader, who is eager to read on in order to discover its cause.

In the first stanza, the persona delves straight into one of the causes of the coming of the storm: "In the pained rumble/of every empty stomach,/--after days of vain foraging--/the storm gathers." In line one; the poet employs onomatopoeia in the word "rumble" to capture the sound made by an empty stomach. Here, the poet also employs ambiguity because the word first and foremost mimics the sound made by an empty stomach. On the other hand, the word also imitates the sound made by the thunder, which accompanies a storm. The frightening sound follows lightning, which often causes destruction and death. Thus, the word foreshadows some looming violence which is the way of removing injustice and ushering in equity. The onomatopoeia of the word "rumble" thus captures the twin effect of poverty on both the poor and the society at large. The state of economic inequality is alluded to in stanza one where some live in utter deprivation

while others wallow in luxuries. We see this luxury in stanza six where the persona talks of “...self-satisfied belch that issues from a contented throat”.

The poet makes very limited use of rhyme. This is a way of capturing the disorder brought by such a serious social - economic situation, the hallmarks of which are complete deprivation of certain sections of society, while others enjoy. The situation in the poem points to a state where some sections are locked out of the opportunity of partaking the national cake, thus giving the ‘big fish’ a field day to feast on it. The situation is too grave to be brought out in the beauty that comes with rhyme. The pain in the rumble is aggravated by the fact that it is a result of “days of vain foraging.” The fact that the persona, (possibly a street child) has been searching for food for days, yet he/she has not succeeded, is a very painful experience and could easily be projected on those who have, or are perceived to have. The poet uses the refrain; “the storm gathers” to show the causal effects where for instance having an empty stomach after days of searching, could lead to a violent uprising occasioned by the victims. In repeating the refrain, the poet is saying that the issue of economic inequality is not one that can be wished away. The society (leadership) has either to address it or face the consequences, since the bottled-up emotions will have to explode some day, leading to a bigger loss than the cost of streamlining the distribution of national resources.

In stanza two, the poet dexterously uses assonance to capture the “cry” of the hungry by use of words with the sound /i:/, which mimic crying. This is seen in the use of such words as: “sneaks”, “cheek” and “needless” in lines six and seven. The use of words that suggest sorrow

very well captures the grief that has engulfed the subjects. The coming of the storm is necessitated by the “bitterness” in line five and by the “needless grief” in line seven.

The third stanza also paints a grim picture because it talks of a “teardrop” departing from an eye. Line ten brings the alliteration of the /h/ sound in “having” and “hope”. There is also the /l/ in “lost” and “life” and both capture the idea of loss of hope. Lines nine and ten employ consonance of the /d/ sound in the words “sad”, “teardrop” and “departs”. This suggests something heavy falling. This mimics the sounds of tears falling to the ground, which enhances the theme of sorrow. It also captures the sound of the storm as drops of rain hit the ground; which again enhances the theme of violence as it points to an uprising against those who have caused the pain.

In stanza four, the poet uses alliteration of /g/ in line thirteen in “glazed” and “glare” which suggests anger and dullness, that have partly been caused (as suggested in line fourteen) by drug and substance abuse among street children. Anger is as a result of the street children feeling shortchanged in the game of life by those who have. The alliteration of /d/ in “Drugged” and “desperate” captures the hopelessness that reigns supreme in the lives of street children. The word “desperate” indicates hopelessness and exhaustion after a hard struggle, which, as suggested in stanza one, has been without success. This means that street children and indeed the poor work as hard as everyone else, but still find themselves wallowing in poverty. Consonance of /p/ in “desperate” and “spirit” also enhances the theme of despair.

The consonance of /k/ in “echoes”, “across” in line eighteen reiterates the idea of the sound of thunder that accompanies a storm and its attendant crushing sound. Further consonance of /f/ in “briefly” and “defied” in line nineteen captures the window period given to the society to address economic injustices before the storm finally commences.

In stanza six, the complacency of the rich and the deadly results that may emanate from it are captured in the alliteration of /s/ in “self-satisfied” in the first line of the stanza. This is suggested by the hissing sound it calls to mind like that produced by a snake, which is seen as deadly. Kap-kirwok uses a combination of alliteration and consonance of /l/ in “life”, “lived” and “full” in line twenty three to question the prudence of such a lopsided economic situation. He enhances this with a rhetorical question (at the end of the line) to question if a state where some have more than they need while others have nothing can really represent a case of “life lived to the full”. Assonance of “o” in “from” in line twenty two captures the folly of selfishness on the part of the rich because they have to pay for it anyway when the storm strikes. This is implied by the fact that words with “o” mostly indicate melancholy. Consequently, they need not be proud of their ‘high’ life as it is in fact an unfortunate scenario. All these sound features also contribute to the overall rhythm of the poem thus enhancing its aesthetic value.

Stanza seven ties up the loose ends, it represents hope in contrast with all the other stanzas which suggest some form of imminent danger. It portrays the storm not as a destructive but a kind of refining fire because: “But rejoice, dear brother/For in the eye of every storm/Lies calm waiting to be born/ And silence to enjoy”. The last stanza suggests that all is not lost and that a new dawn will come bringing with it hope. “Silence to enjoy...” will also come after the deafening sound of

the storm which represents the sound of battle. This silence to enjoy connotes the peace and equity that will follow the storm. What this means is that the storm will refine the society of all impurities of economic injustices and usher in an era of equity and tranquility.

### **2.3 Urbanization**

In **“MUMBAI.. THE TOOT ORCHESTRA”** (“Monologues” 37), Kap-kirwok highlights the theme of urbanization showing its implications on both natural phenomena and life in general.

The poet focuses on the issue of congestion and noise pollution in the urban centre of Mumbai. Events are seen through a first person narrator. The first stanza creates a picture of dullness and a slow pace of life as: “Boats rock lazily in the quay/Smoke chokes the sky making it look hazy/But though the sun’s stare is dull and glazy/It is enough to make the water shimmer in the bay.” The sun’s “stare” is also dull and glazy. In lines two and four we have rhyme of “hazy” and “glazy”. Assonance in “smoke” and “chokes” in line two enhances the image of both dullness and discomfort in the city in that the “o” sound normally implies melancholy. The alliteration of /s/ in “sun’s stare” in line three indicates lack of purpose. In the stanza, nature is shown to be corrupted by human encroachment in that the sun is “staring” instead of “shining”, which is the normal way of describing the sun’s appearance. The sky is hazy meaning dull, and only the water in the bay manages to shimmer. This ‘shining’, as the word “shimmer” suggests, is also weak and trembling. The poet seems to be alluding to the all important issue of environmental degradation and its attendant effect of climatic change. The first stanza indicates that so little of nature’s beauty is left that the water in the bay can only afford to shimmer.

In the first two lines of stanza two, the pace of life suddenly quickens. This is captured by the people swarming in massive waves and people and cars dodging one another. The combination of consonance and assonance in line five in the use of words with the broad “a” and /s/ sounds like: “swarm”, “massive” and “waves” portrays the image of large numbers of people. This is because words with “a” usually suggest large numbers. The rhyme of “waves” and “caves” in lines five and eight creates contrast between today’s world of noise, congestion and destructiveness with the tranquility of yesteryears when people lived in caves. The repetition of the word “people” in lines six and seven portrays the idea of crowding that is the hallmark of today’s world of mad rush, traffic jams (both human and motor) and all the hullabaloo that goes with the fast pace of modern life. The alliteration of /k/ in “cars” “cannot” and “collide” implies the hardness and mechanical nature of modern life. This is because /k/ suggests something that is hard. The rhetorical question in line eight illustrates the persona’s predicament and also shows his/her preference for past life.

Stanza three captures the climax of noise pollution with: “And O! the hooting of cars!/The city is a real Toot Orchestra/Horns jostle to be heard...triii, truuu, traaa/After a while it begins to sound like a kind of jazz”. The persona captures the notoriety of the hooting of cars (which is the main cause of noise pollution in the town) in the first three lines of the stanza. In the first line of the stanza, the poet underlines the noise made by hooting in the use of exclamation marks and interjections. By setting apart the line, the poet singles out the main cause of noise pollution in the town.

In the next three lines, the poet creates the metaphor of a musical group by the mention of a “Toot orchestra” in the second line of the stanza. The word “Toot” is onomatopoeic in trying to mimic the sound of hooting. The third line of stanza three indicates in the use of ideophones, the myriad hooting ‘tunes’ by different cars: “Horns jostle to be heard...triii, truuu, traaa.” This brings out the discordant sounds that emanate from the hooting. The sum total of all this hooting is that it creates a sound like that of a musical group playing different types of instruments (orchestra). The rhyme of “Orchestra” and “traa” captures the different type of noises produced by different cars just like the different types of instruments.

In stanza four, the persona presents a ‘hybrid’ that is the product of urbanization in the town: “Amidst this dance of life/Beauty and distaste freely mingle./Acrid smells submit to sweet scents in a trickle/A thousand gods cheer as human dreams are buried alive”. The “dance” in the first line and “beauty” in the second line suggest the benefits of urbanization in such areas as transport and communication. The poet juxtaposes this good with what is bad: “...distaste freely mingle:” to suggest that urbanization as portrayed in the town has brought both good and bad. The poet uses alliteration of /s/ in the third line of the stanza in: “smells”, “submit”, “sweet” and “scents”. The employment of both positive and negative metaphors in this alliteration portrays the ambivalent face of urbanization. The fact that the smells are acrid, (meaning they are strong and bitter) and yet they are submitting to “...sweet scents” which are only in a trickle, indicates that evil seems to overcome good. The last line sums up the persona’s impression of what noise in particular and urbanization in general may have done: “A thousand gods cheer as human dreams are buried alive.” This means that man’s true development and fulfillment is curtailed by the mad rush of today’s life. The small “g” in “gods” cheering,” suggests that those are false

gods, and not the true one. This means that the many voices that support untrammelled urbanization are so loud as to subdue the voice of reason, yet that does not make the trend right. The true human aspirations are curtailed by the evils that come with urbanization.

The poet is asking us to rethink our quest for blind urbanization and what implications it has on our modern day life. In mentioning caves in line eight, the poet is asking us to glance back on our past and see the good we can borrow from it, rather than embracing urbanization wholesale, without taking time to sort out the good from the bad.

#### **2.4 Human Nature and its Weaknesses**

In his characteristic way, Kap-kirwok inserts the moral dip-stick into the stream of human nature to measure the good and bad in it. The tool that he employs for this is sound gymnastics. This he does in a number of poems that focus squarely on human nature. One such poem is **“A NEON WINDOW IN DAMSTRAAT”** (“Monologues” 40).

The poem is monostanzaic, comprising a mixture of long and short lines. It has a regular rhyme in most parts. The events are told by a first person narrator who observes the goings-on on the street from his/her street window. The poem explores the theme of sexual promiscuity which he/she observes the people on the street engaging in. The title of the poem suggests that the persona is watching this scene at night because of the mention of the word “neon” which has to do with lights of different colours, commonly found in discotheques and entertainment joints at night. Lines one to four give the setting: “From my street window/Under Damstraat’s neon

glow/I watch the traffic/A flow of eye traffic.” The lines tell us that the place is Damstraat and that it is at night. The persona is watching people as they walk along the street.

Lines five, six, seven and eight portray eyes as the ones being used to communicate different types of desires/wishes. This is derived from the common belief among psychologists that one’s eyes can tell a lot about the kind of person one is or what they could be communicating without voicing it. In line five, we have alliteration of /p/ in “peeps” and “pass” which suggests the quick succession of secret looks. The internal rhyme of “shy” and “sly” in line six symbolizes the hidden agenda in the ‘peeps’. Lines six to eight continue to describe the diverse types of peeps. The poet uses alliteration in lines six and seven to highlight the peeps which are loaded with sexual overtones: “Some are shy and appear sly/Some sneaky but with graphic desire”. The words “sly” and “sneaky” mean deceit and trickery. This alludes to the conduct of sex commercial workers while trying to woo prospective clients.

The rhyme of lines seven and eight in “desire” and “fire” symbolizes a burning sexual urge that cannot be quenched. The word “fire” is a strong metaphor which points to the destructive nature of fire in that when we fail to use it correctly, it burns and destroys. This image of fire is the poet’s tool of foreshadowing what happens when people are guided by the “lust” and “thirst” of line nine. Lust refers to sexual desire that is driven by mere bodily desire rather than love, which in turn means that it is very temporary.

Lines eleven to fourteen reveal the repercussions of indiscriminate sexual engagement: “Then disgust and guilt/Once the cup is filled/Ebbs and flows.../Comes and goes...” The poet uses

consonance to capture the ugliness of lustful sexual behaviour in “disgust” and “guilt”. This is brought out in the /g/ sound in the two words which resemble the interjection: “ugh!” that refers to something awful and dirty. The poet dexterously foregrounds the idea of dirt by setting apart the two words in their own sentence, “Then disgust and guilt”. This comes in sharp contrast with the fulfillment that was intended in the feelings of “desire” and “fire”. It is ironical because instead of the street revellers getting fulfilled and happy, they end up being haunted by feelings of disgust and guilt.

It is important to note that at this point, the poet deliberately interrupts the rhyme he has maintained all along, in order to capture the disorder and the irony of the situation. Instead of the street revellers getting the fulfillment they had hoped for, they get the opposite – guilt and disgust. This would presumably be after coming to their senses, and realizing to what level of muck they have sunk. The previously maintained rhyme in lines one to thirteen is the poet’s way of building suspense. This is because rhyme captivates the attention of the reader as he/she reads on to see if something good will come out of it. However, what ensues is disgust and guilt. The incompleteness of lines thirteen and fourteen suggests the lack of fulfillment that comes with promiscuous sexual behaviour. Lines fifteen and sixteen represent the persona’s reflection on the way people live. The rhyme of “amaze” and “daze” capture the persona’s bewilderment at the way people live; because the word “daze” suggests inability to think clearly due to being stupefied by shock or a blow.

In lines seventeen, eighteen and nineteen, the persona says: “My street window/Is also a window/Into the hearts and minds”. We find the poet employing ambiguity here as a way of

making his manner of presentation forceful. The word “window” is ambiguous as in the literal sense, it refers to the persona’s room’s window from which he/she is able to observe what happens on the outside. Figuratively, “window” doubles up as an opening into the personalities (hearts and minds) of people showing what kind of people they are. This metaphor makes the message very forceful. In lines twenty and twenty one, the persona revisits the idea of people’s personalities and his/her verdict is that they lead so dangerous lives, that it makes him/her to get shocked. Here the persona’s cause for worry is the fact that these lifestyles of sexual promiscuity could lead to deadly diseases like AIDS, break-up of marriages and other forms of social disorder. The regular rhyme that is used in most lines not only enhances the aesthetic value of the poem but also suggests that immorality has become the norm.

“**FULL DISCLOSURE**” (“Heartbeats” 49), is another poem in which Kap-kirwok highlights human nature and its weaknesses. The poem zeroes in on the self-defence that most people exhibit when confronted with the guilt that follows the failure to fulfill certain obligations. Closely related to this is the issue of procrastination and failure to face the truth by human beings. People who fail to fulfill obligations mostly claim they did not know everything about a situation. Events in the poem are seen through a first person narrator, the “we”.

The poem comprises four quatrains, written in regular rhyme in most parts. The first two lines of the first stanza establish the conflict of the poem. “We get into situations/They become our stations”. In these lines, the poet rhymes the words “situations” and “stations” to draw a direct connection between the way circumstances may at times lead us into certain states in life. This very aptly captures the element of being grounded where for instance one may say “I am

stationed in K.U.,” to indicate where they work. The use of consonance of /t/ in stanza one and two in such words as “protest” and “next” not only points to negativity and failure but also captures the motif of recurrence and loss. Consonance also enhances the idea of being stuck and immobilized. Lines three and four reveal people’s reaction to these situations and states whereby if they (situations) are bad, many people are usually in denial. The denial notwithstanding, the reality does not change. The half - rhyme of “regret” and “late,” both being negative words, enhances the idea of loss and failure.

Stanza two reveals that the failure in stanza one is not a one-time affair but a recurrent occurrence: “Won’t happen next time we say/And wait yet for that day/Another day comes next/Again we look for a pretext”. The rhyme of ‘next’ and ‘pretext’ in lines seven and eight captures the theme of recurrence and its attendant self-defence. The rhyme of “say” and “day” also strengthens the idea of self-defence which causes time wastage as the days pass by (procrastination).

In stanza three, the persona comes out more explicitly especially in line nine where he/she says: “I was denied full disclosure”. The poet deliberately inserts inverted commas to highlight the self-defence of the culprit. The poet rhymes “disclosure” with “posture” to unveil the hypocrisy of the culprit. This means in spite of his/her whining about not having the full knowledge, this cannot be excused because it is just a posture and therefore just an excuse. A “posture” symbolizes artificiality – for instance, the way one poses when taking a photo; the way he/she would like to appear, and not what he/she really is. These two lines reveal the hypocrisy and vanity of self-defence as opposed to coming out in the open and facing our weaknesses as they

are. Line eleven exposes the vanity of this self-defence in that it just exhausts us for no good reason and therefore does not add value to our lives.

The fourth stanza sums up the persona's opinion of the whole issue: "There is nothing like full disclosure/For it is not possible to be sure/Not in this life and not in the next/I say "next life" only half in jest." Lines thirteen and fourteen reveal the persona's belief that there is no assurance in anything in this life because that is the nature of life. The repetition of the word "disclosure" in lines nine and thirteen underlines the persistent desire by human beings to have an assurance of the success of ventures they engage in. The repetition of the word "not" three times in the stanza emphasizes the impossibility of knowing full details of everything we engage in. The word 'next' is also used twice to suggest the possibility that even recurrent attempts will be unsuccessful if we try to hope that we must have full details in order to proceed with life issues. In a nutshell, the poet is addressing the perennial problem of procrastination and failure to face reality. The poet is urging people to learn to move and confront situations because if they wait for a perfect time and condition when they are sure of succeeding, they may never get them. This way, the poet demonstrates that procrastination and self defence are enemies of growth and success.

The poem "**A SMOKER'S BATTLE**" ("Heartbeats" 48) has been analyzed for a second time, this time from a phonological perspective. The reason for this is that it is an example of a poem in which the poet makes use of a deviant sound feature (elision) which involves leaving out a syllable or letter.

The poet uses elision in the second line of the second stanza in: “Cause you are now a part of me - it seems”. Apharesis (omission of the first syllable) in the word “(be) cause” is for the purpose of creating a musical pattern in the poem. This form of phonological gymnastics is of the deviant type. It is important to mention that the poet has made very limited use of this device instead choosing to stick to the more conventional sound features like rhyme and alliteration. Another poem in which the poet has again used elision with the same word is the poem: **“A SHAKE (A) SPEAR JOKE”** (“Heartbeats” 8). In both cases, he uses the device for adding aesthetic value.

## 2.5 Life’s Challenges

Kap-kirwok is well aware that the road of life is awash with challenges and in the poem **“WHEN...”** (“Monologues” 18), he takes a go at the subject. The poem comprises five quatrains each of which carries a conflict. Its rhythm is enhanced by rhyme and such sound features as alliteration and assonance. Events in the poem are seen through the eyes of a first person narrator, the “I”, who narrates how he/she handles various emotional states and challenges. Here, the poet explores possible ways of handling different stress-related challenges/conflicts.

In line one of stanza one, the persona states the first conflict, which is a headache. This headache may be the physical headache or a disturbing issue. Lines two to four reveal what the persona does to counter the problem: “I usually take a light broom of soft feathers/And gather the painlets from all corners of my mind/Into a heap of throblets and expel them through my ears”. “...light broom of soft feathers” creates a soothing effect in the /l/ of “light” plus the /s/ of “soft” and “feathers”. This refers to ushering in of thoughts of peace which in turn calm the pain. In lines three and four, we have internal rhyme of “painlets” and “throblets”. Gathering the “painlets”

into a heap of “throblots” is a way of demeaning the problem so that it becomes a challenge small enough to be handled. The poet is implying that if we face challenges with a positive attitude, we will surely succeed.

Stanza two introduces the second conflict which is anger, in line five. Lines six to eight give the formula for a cure: “I usually take a hose pipe with a fine spray-head/And flood the blood in me with water from the sea/And thus quench the fire in my blood until it is dead.” Here, unlike in the first stanza, the solution involves some intense action as suggested by the hosepipe with a fine spray head. This is captured in the consonance of “hosepipe” and “spray-head”. The /p/ sound creates an aura of forcefulness and bombardment. This is also enhanced by the /d/ sound in “flood” and “blood” as the persona tries to fight back the anger. The persona seems to be alluding to the Kiswahili saying that, “Dawa ya moto ni moto” (The medicine for fire is fire) suggesting that fire has to be countered with fire. Line seven also involves the use of assonance in ‘flood’ and ‘blood’ which captures the neutralizing effect of water as it quenches the fire of anger. We have rhyme of “me” and “sea” in lines five and seven which symbolizes the calming effect of the sea. The poet is saying that the fire of anger should be countered by calmness like that of the sea. Rhyme of “head” and “dead” in lines six and eight refers to the act of killing the fire of anger in the mind, which is the control centre of a human being, by resolving to remain calm.

The third stanza deals with the emotion of worry. The persona claims that he/she sorts this out by trying to trace the source of the deception. In lines nine to eleven, worry is personified by being referred to as a charlatan. The persona reveals his/her knowledge that worry is a liar who

waylays his/her victims trying to blackmail them into believing that there is some pain awaiting them. This is captured in the alliteration of words like “turn”, “trail” and “treacherous”. The alliteration of “trail” and “turn” creates the image of a person following another with the intention of harming him/her. The /t/ sound of those words suggests secret danger. In line eleven, we have alliteration in “pathways”, “promised” and “pain”; all of which imply that worry is a liar who deceives people there is danger ahead, thus preventing them from achieving their goals. The poet is alluding to the fact that worry instills fear and intimidation which prevents one from pursuing desired goals. In line twelve, the persona states his/her way of dealing with it: “Then, having weighed its sting, dismiss it with disdain.” The poet employs alliteration of “dismiss” and “disdain” to show how the persona refuses to be cowed by fear and worry. In the stanza, rhyme in “pain” and “disdain” (lines eleven and twelve) creates a juxtaposition of the two emotions whereby disdain or contempt nullifies the “sting” of the alleged “pain”. The sum total is that he/she manages to dismiss the fear.

Stanza four deals with sadness and the persona states this in the first line of the stanza. The alliteration of “hits” and “hammer” captures the bombarding force of the attack. The next three lines provide the solution: “I usually look up in the clouds on a clear day/And up there, see lions melt into a sea of mist/As winds of fury blow my sadness away.” The poet uses a mixture of alliteration and consonance in the /k/ sound of the words: “look”, “clouds” and “clear”, to suggest the counteractive forcefulness with which the persona resists the mood by looking up. The solution is shown in the last two lines of the stanza where “...lions melt into a sea of mist/As winds of fury blow my sadness away.” “Winds of fury” suggest determination in resisting the mood of sadness.

The poet is saying that when we are discouraged, we have to resist the mood of despair by looking up to others who have faced similar circumstances successfully. The metaphor of “...lions melt,” is a strong one which epitomizes the defeat of the seemingly insurmountable difficulties and intimidating circumstances we all face. The alliteration of “melt” and ‘mist’, which refers to the thawing away or disappearance of our problems, suggests that if we remain persistent and courageous, our problems will disappear just like mist or the way ice melts. “Fist” and “mist” rhyme to contrast the hardness of the attacks with their consequent disappearance after our persistence. Rhyme of “day” and “away” suggests the brightness (as of day) that follows the defeat or the going “away” of sadness.

The last stanza deals with a rather unique conflict which alludes to sexual temptation. The persona recognizes the propensity of sexual engagement for great misjudgment and destruction. This is clearly shown in the second and third lines of the stanza where he/she says: “I know not to whom to turn/Nor anywhere to which to run”. The use of alliteration in the first line of the stanza, in “sweet” and “smoulders” resembles the sound produced by teenage boys while trying to woo girls “sssss” and thus it aptly captures the idea of seduction. The word “smoulder” alludes to a fire that is fanning itself and which if unchecked may grow into an unquenchable inferno. This points to a growing sexual desire which if uncontrolled, can lead to destructive behaviour. The assonance of /u/ in “whom” and “to” seems to mimic ululations suggesting despair on the persona’s part. The use of “Wh-” words in the second and third lines in “whom”, “where” and “which” captures this confusion or dilemma. In the last line, he/she expresses the recognition that the answer is only found in God. This is captured in the alliteration of “my” “maker” and “me”.

The poet seems to be advancing the argument that all other emotions are manageable but resisting sexual temptation needs divine help. No matter how controversial the argument may sound, indeed history is replete with examples of heroes and heroines who have fallen to sexual temptation.

## 2.6 Racism

The first poem that we will look at under this category is: **“TINT OF MY SPIRIT MEASURE OF MY HEART”** (“Heartbeats” 38). In this poem, Kap-kirwok addresses the all-important issue of racialism by juxtaposing skin colour vis - a - vis character.

This is an eight-line poem written in two stanzas. It is written in the first person’s narrative voice and it has regular rhyme in most parts. The subject matter of the poem is the personality of a person as distinct from the colour of his/her skin. This short and compact poem touches on the all-important issue of race relations which, for generations has brought untold suffering to people of different races. This is due to perceived superiority of people of certain races which has made them believe they have unlimited supremacy over those of the ‘inferior’ races. Blacks/Africans have over the years borne the brunt of White superiority complex. The above poem clearly portrays the discrimination that Blacks face at the hands of their White counterparts.

That the poem deals with race relations is signalled by lines one and two where the persona says: “Black is what your eye can see;/As black as black can ever be.” The poet employs repetition, a major sound feature in poetry, by using the word “black” three times in the first two lines, to emphasize the idea of colour. Kap-kirwok also combines repetition with alliteration in line two

in “black” “black” and “be” as a way of highlighting the idea of blackness. Rhyme of “see” and “be” in lines one and two juxtaposes the idea of what eyes can see (colour) with what the reality (true nature) is. In line three and four, we have what possibly the poet meant to be rhyme in “tint” (colour) and “spirit” (personality) but it cannot pass for rhyme as the final syllable sounds are different. Rhyme in the first stanza is not just a way of enhancing the aesthetic value of the poem; it is also used by the poet to highlight the deception of the eyes as represented in what appears, as opposed to what really is. The poet is communicating a very important idea and also warning us against being guided by the superficial. This is because many people everyday are deceived into choosing things like shoes, clothes, jewellery and even partners for their good looks rather than based on their value. It is only later that such people realize the folly of their actions, often when it is too late to correct their mistakes.

The second stanza introduces the idea of poverty that Blacks are so much known for. In the second stanza, the persona is more direct and confrontational against the “you”: “But do you know the measure of my heart/Wherein lies a wealth of a different sort?” He/she challenges the “you” to declare if he/she knows the quality of person he/she is. The poet rhymes “attention” in line five with “mention” in line six to underline the idea of how deep the black pigmentation is so that it is self-revealing. Kap-kirwok combines alliteration and assonance in the /a/ sound of “arrests” and “attention” in lines five and six to warn people against being misled by the things that stand out while forgetting to note those that are implicit. Both words also display assonance in their /e/ sound which enhances the aesthetic value of the poem. In: “Being so evident and needing no mention” (line six), the poet is drawing a line between what appears and what could be. In line eight, consonance of /l/ in “lies” and “wealth” underlines the fact that one’s character

is more important than outward appearance since appearance by itself is not worth much but character is of immeasurable value. Line eight asserts that in the heart (personality) of a person, there lies a different kind of wealth, meaning that Blacks have talents that far outweigh their outstanding black colour.

Line eight also underscores the negritudist idea propounded by Sedar Senghor in his poem, “**Black Woman**” (Reed & Wake 105). The poem extols the beauty of the black woman which in turn symbolizes the beauty and wealth of Africa. The term “wealth” in line eight also alludes to the sum total of African wealth in terms of the rich cultural heritage, the beauty of African skin, landscapes and also wildlife. The poet’s avoidance of rhyme in the last line is his way of capturing his dislike of racialism because of the social discordance that it causes. The idea in the biographical theory that a writer’s experience has a bearing on his writing could be true here. This is because the poet (who has spent substantial time in the West) has no doubt come face to face with racial discrimination during his stay abroad. The poet is echoing the idea that was advanced by Martin Luther King in his historic “**I HAVE A DREAM**” speech. Here is an excerpt of the speech:

I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the colour of their skin but by the content of their character (Edenmuller 2008).

Just like the idea advanced by Martin Luther above, Kap-kirwok in this poem emphasizes the need to evaluate a person’s personality based on his/her character as opposed to basing it on his/her outside appearance. The message of this poem is not only important for people across racial boundaries, but more so for people in Africa where people have been known to perpetuate ethnic rivalry and in extreme cases, wars.

As with the previous poem, Kap-kirwok revisits the theme of racism and its ills in **“INNOCENCE IN SMILING DAYLIGHT”** (“Monologues” 26). The poem is made up of three quatrains written in regular rhyme. The lines in each stanza gradually grow longer and this enhances the rhythm of the poem. The persona in the poem seems to be narrating a rude encounter he/she had and which emanated from racial differences. The persona innocently gets into a trap and suffers simply because of his/her black colour. The persona’s black background is alluded to in line eleven where he/she says: “Then the pain hit me and left a stubborn black stain”. He/she is in an environment where he/she is dealing with White people as suggested by line three: “A white monitor lizard, a proud peacock in a human face”.

The first stanza sets the stage where we have some White security officers (white monitor lizard) manning a certain gate/entry point. The officers’ racial inclinations are personified in the first two lines: “Intolerance and ignorance strutted side by side./Nearby, pride and prejudice jostled for equal space”. The alliteration of “pride”, “prejudice”, “proud” and “peacock” in lines two and three aptly capture the evils that are the hallmark of racism. We find that the White officers are full of intolerance, ignorance, pride and prejudice. These vices mostly represent the mentality that most White people have towards Blacks in their presumption that Blacks are foolish and inferior. Ironically, these views are themselves based on a fallacy because all research done has proved that colour does not have any implication on the personality of a person.

In lines three and four, the poet cleverly uses animal metaphors to refer to the White officers and their inhumane behaviour: “A white monitor lizard, a proud peacock in a human face; /A silent,

steely strut and a head nod most loud and assured.” Alliteration of “strutted”, “side”, “silent”, “steely” and “strut” in the first and fourth lines of the first stanza captures the pride and indifference of the security officers. In line four, we see hypocrisy where at first the persona is given a “nod most loud and assured” suggesting that at first the security officers try to paint a non-racist picture by allowing the persona to enter a ‘Whites Only’ area. Their true nature is however revealed when they appear later to accuse the persona of breaching the law. By employing the metaphor of “A white monitor lizard...,” the persona is alluding to the nature of a lizard which is cold-blooded by virtue of being a reptile. This symbolizes the cold and inhuman character of the security officers. Peacock on the other hand, is the embodiment of pride and is often used in the simile “as proud as a peacock”. Here, the persona is using the metaphor to bring out the cold and beastly nature of the officers.

This is further developed in the fourth line’s alliteration in the officer’s “steely strut” which enhances the theme of pride. The persona is essentially saying that the officers are beasts clothed in human skin. Assonance of “intolerance” and “ignorance” coupled by alliteration of /i:/ in the same words capture the negative and detestable face of racism. Rhyme of “space” and “face” in lines two and three illustrate that the many ills of racism only serve to portray its nature as a beastly monster.

The dominant motifs in the second stanza are ignorance and naivety on the part of the persona. This is shown in the first and third lines of the second stanza where the persona ignorantly walks around enjoying the good within the restricted area, “unaware of the coming pain”. The second line suggests that the persona had thrown common sense to the wind despite the nudging of

virtue and curiosity trying to bring him/her to his/her senses. This alludes to the prompting of the inner voice that often warns us when we're about to enter a dangerous place but which we often ignore.

The alliteration of "curiosity", "courted" and "common" in the second line captures the desperate and vain effort of the mind as it frantically tries to bring the persona to his/her senses (in order to save him/her from pain). This is further strengthened in the rhyme of "vain" and "pain" in lines two and three of the second stanza. Rhyme of "gently" and "cleverly" in the first and fourth lines of the second stanza captures the stealthy approach of the sly officers. This is further enhanced by the alliteration of "prey" and "patiently" in the last line of the stanza. The deception of Whites is captured in the use of the metaphor of a wolf which in most African oral narratives epitomizes cunning and deception. The metaphor of a sheep also aptly captures the motif of naivety as a sheep in the African oral tradition symbolizes foolishness. The two metaphors aptly capture the prey/predator matrix that characterizes the relationship of the persona and the Whites. The use of images from African oral tradition greatly enhances the effectiveness of the poet's style as it adds oral flavour to it.

The third stanza represents the climax whereby the persona comes face to face with the sting of racial discrimination. This is in the "cracking of a sharp whip" in the first line of the stanza. This refers to the moment when the persona suffers pain in the form of a fine, being arrested or even being denied something simply because he/she is black. The second line suggests that the persona at first does not realize that he/she is suffering because of his/her skin colour. The last two lines represent the dawn of the truth whereby: "Then the pain hit me and left a stubborn

black stain; /That's how in smiling daylight, my innocence was made to strip." The fact that this truth strikes the persona like a thunderbolt is suggested by the use of the word "hit".

The result of this experience on the persona is that it leaves behind a "stubborn black stain" meaning that it changes the attitude of the persona permanently so that he/she also gets bitten by the racial discrimination bug. The fact that the stain is black suggests that this experience corrupts or ruins his/her character so that as alluded to in the last line ("...my innocence was made to strip"), he/she loses his/her innocence. This suggests that the persona also learnt to become prejudiced against people of other races because what had looked like a clean and innocent venture (as suggested by smiling daylight) turned out to be the opposite. Rhyme of "whip" in line nine and "strip" in line twelve coupled by that of "pain" and "stain" in lines ten and eleven respectively show the absurdity of racism. This is because instead of its pain reforming or producing submission, it produces stubbornness, negativity and resistance. The poet is essentially telling us that racial discrimination is a vice that should be done away with, in that it corrupts both the one practising it as well as the recipient. This way, it only adds to the number of ills that the world has to fight.

## **2.7 Absurdity/ Hopelessness of Life**

Life at times seems to lack hope, purpose or simply turns out to be absurd. This is a subject that emerges time and again in Kap-kirwok's poetry. In fact, it appears to be one of his pet subjects. In "**HOPE'S... DREAMS ADRIFT**" (Kap-kirwok, "Heartbeats" 52), Kap-kirwok explores the uncertainty, purposelessness and ambivalence of life. The poem is made up of three quatrains. The poet uses a first person's narrative voice through which he makes observations about life.

The poem comprises short and long lines that reflect the two-sidedness of life. The title of the poem sounds hesitant after the word “hope’s” suggesting that the poet is not fully convinced that life is about hope.

Stanza one captures the uncertainty of life in that “bits and pieces of thought/flicker on and off...aloft/now dim, now dark, now bright/fragile flutters like fireflies in a dark night”. The use of the metaphors “bits” and “pieces” in line one reflects the incompleteness of life. In lines two, three and four, the poet develops the idea of uncertainty through the use of the symbol of light where thoughts are said to be at times “dark”, “dim” and other times “bright”. Line three employs alliteration in “dim” and “dark” which captures the idea of the woes that befall us in life. Moreover, line four employs alliteration and assonance in “fragile”, “flutters” and “fireflies” to dramatize weakness and unpredictability just like the weak and voiceless /f/ sound. The idea of flickering suggests fragility and unpredictability like what we normally see of a candle whose light keeps flickering. Kap-kirwok also uses onomatopoeia in the /fl/ of “flutters” and “fireflies” to symbolize quick movement. This anaphorically alludes to the shortness of life.

The simile of fireflies very aptly captures the idea of uncertainty because a firefly flickers on and off and its light on a dark night is unreliable because it is intermittent. The image of fragility and weakness is strengthened by the fact that a firefly is rather weak and fragile. Rhyme of “bright” and “night,” in the first stanza symbolizes the ambivalence of life. This is whereby sometimes we have hopeful thoughts and at other times it’s all hopelessness.

In stanza two, the poet further develops the idea of incompleteness by beginning the stanza with the same kind of words like in stanza one. Use of the words “scraps and shreds of dreams” in line five suggests hopelessness because we have “fractions” and not “wholes”, which implies incompleteness. The stanza, nevertheless still carries some hope in line six where the scraps and shreds are “coasting and floating about... in teams.” This is seen in the fact that they have not sunk. Lines seven and eight however revisit the idea of uncertainty and ambivalence of life in: “Shattered laughter and sweet cries,/Drift about like wounded eagles in windy skies.” “Shattered laughter” is oxymoronic suggesting laughter that is damaged and so is “sweet cries” which also suggests a mixture of both grief and happiness. The idea of life being unpredictable and uncertain is captured in these oxymorons. Rhyme of “dreams” and “teams” captures the idea of hope in that dreams suggest plans and a vision for big things. “Teams” suggests unity and numbers which are ingredients of every good and successful venture. “Cries” in line seven rhymes with “skies” in line eight to capture the image of helplessness and danger. This is seen sometimes when the sky has very dark clouds which in turn give it an ominous look.

The simile of “...wounded eagles in windy skies.” in line eight captures the idea of the pain and disruption that the wind causes to the eagles which, being incapacitated, would prefer calmness as opposed to wind. This idea is enhanced by the alliteration of “wounded” and “windy” in the same line. The line portrays the idea of how ambivalent life is; quite often punctuated with sadness. Lines seven and eight have consonance (of the /t/ sound) in “shattered”, “laughter”, “sweet”, “drift” and “about” all of which bring out the purposelessness of life.

Lines nine and ten in stanza three allude to a deteriorating state as the poet uses negative images in: “Relics and ruins of faith, /Litter my mind... my heart”. The alliteration of “relics” and “ruins” very aptly portrays the idea of defeat in battle. Faith symbolizes the fighting spirit in human beings, which enables them to fight and keep on in the face of adversity. This is reminiscent of the Pauline teaching in the Bible where he exhorts the Ephesians: “...besides all these, taking the shield of faith, with which you can quench all the flaming darts of the evil one” (Ephesians 6:16). In this excerpt, faith is presented as a weapon that should guarantee one victory. The fact that what has come out of this faith includes relics and ruins implies doom, which is quite ironical. The word “litter” suggests something that is useless and dirty so that the persona seems to suggest that relics and ruins(failure) fill his/her heart with their destructive effect. Line twelve points to a state that is irredeemable as: “The soul is homeless and the spirit is sad”. The inevitable result of that defeat in life is shown in line twelve where the soul is said to be restless and the spirit sad. This means there is no joy – only sorrow. Note that stanza three has no rhyme; the stark reality of sorrow is too painful to be captured in the order that is rhyme. With this verdict, the poet cannot bring in rhyme for that would be in discordance with the situation he is reflecting. In this poem, the poet focuses on one of the most absurd facts of life; the fact that no matter how hard we try to make life happy, life very often disappoints us in that it seems to be more willing to offer us more sadness than joy.

**“P’KWITAI SAID...”** (“Monologues” 23), also deals with the subject of absurdity of life, just like the previous poem. It is made up of five couplets. Events in the poem are told by a persona who speaks in the third person’s narrative voice as he/she narrates to us what the other speaker in the poem (P’kwitai) said. The poem can be divided into two sections with the first three stanzas

reporting to us what P'kwitai said. The last two stanzas represent the second person's report on what transpired in P'kwitai's life. In fact, the last two sections represent an anticlimax where things ironically turn out to be the opposite of what P'kwitai expected and had professed.

In the first stanza, P'kwitai states his puzzlement with life in his mention of the mystery of creation and secrets of the body. Alliteration of "mystery", "my" and "mind" in line one links the images of mystery and mind to show the inability of the speaker's mind to comprehend the mystery. Mystery suggests something hidden and unfathomable so that here, the mind is unable to come to terms with the meaning of life. "Mind" and "find" rhyme to enhance the obscurity in the mystery of creation. "Find" suggests using great effort with the resulting ironical state of the mind being unable to understand or grasp the meaning of life. The poet successfully uses inversion by pushing "none can find" to the ultimate end instead of possibly after "And O..." This creates rhyme in "mind" and "find" and it is part of the poet's way of giving the poem a rhythmical pattern.

In stanza two, we have alliteration in "wind's" and "wise" as well as consonance of /v/ in "voice" and "privilege". At the same time, we have consonance of /l/ in "privilege" and "life" as well as that of /r/ in "privilege" and "right". These create a soothing effect which is in sharp contrast with the hard fact presented in the second part of the line – "life is a privilege not a right". Line four in the second stanza reveals the naivety of P'kwitai where he invokes a curse on himself should he fail to handle the privilege availed to him by life properly. This line reveals the simplicity of P'kwitai's mind in that, he seems to assume that if you are good, life will treat you well, which is not always the case. This is because there are some very good people who have

been treated very harshly by life. Rhyme of “right” and “might” carries a warning to P’kwitai that he should be wary of trying to use force in getting what he may believe he deserves.

Stanza three reveals P’kwitai’s belief in God as shown by: “My creator has the secret to life, for only He has a mission. /In prayer and supplication, I will seek from Him my vision.” Here we have rhyme of “mission” and “vision” – which are the key elements of strategic plans of most successful organizations. This rhyme enhances irony in that P’kwitai has done what needs to be done (just like successful organizations do), yet life turns its back on him. We see alliteration in “supplication” and “seek” both of which point to a rewarding life because of his piety (as alluded to in stanza two). But again, this turns out to be ironical. The rhythmical pattern not only adds aesthetic value to the poem but also enhances the harmony that is suggested by P’kwitai’s virtuous life.

Stanza four however presents contrast as suggested by the word “yet” to indicate that things have turned out to be ironical. The second part gives us a hint of what this may be: “he found himself in a rude bind”, which suggests that something bad, unexpected or even undeserved, nevertheless, befalls P’kwitai. The second line of stanza four comes even closer to revealing the truth in that: “In blinding reality he found out life was far from kind”. Rhyme of “bind” and “kind” enhances irony in that it reveals that contrary to P’kwitai’s belief that life will be kind when one lives virtuously, he finds himself in a difficult situation, one which actually imprisons him.

Stanza five further develops the motif of unfairness of life where we are told that: “Life had taken an abrupt nasty turn on the road/The smile had gone from the face of his dear God”. The first line of the stanza very aptly captures the harshness of life in the alliteration and consonance of /t/ in “taken”, “abrupt”, “nasty” and “turn”. The persistent use of words with /t/ sound brings out the harshness of life as they represent some form of sudden bombardment. The last line sums up the fate of P’kwitai as ‘the smile had gone from the face of his dear God’. On the whole, Kapkirwok exploits a combination of sound features like rhyme and alliteration to lend aesthetic value to the poem. In addition, the sound features are used to enhance the theme of absurdity in life.

## **2.8 Good versus Evil/Virtue versus Vice**

In the next group of poems, the poet brings to the fore the age-old issue of choice between good and evil. The first poem in this category is “**KENYAN O KENYAN**” (“Monologues” 39). The poem deals with the theme of patience versus impatience. This is one of the shortest poems in the two collections, comprising two quatrains. In the poem, the poet juxtaposes the patience of Kenyans in some circumstances with their impatience in others.

The first two-word line of stanza one (O Kenyan) introduces the subject of the poem, and also indicates that the poet is lamenting for Kenyans. The individualization of the address is deliberate on the part of the poet to create emphasis. Line two reveals “you’s” misplaced patience and line three goes on to emphasize the same idea. “Blissfully” in line three looks like a typing error. The persona signals that the patience is not productive as it causes the “you” to ache. The poet employs repetition of “patience” in lines two and three as a way emphasizing this

brand of 'patience' which (as line four suggests) is counter - productive and therefore not a virtue. This would on the surface appear to be in sharp contrast with common ethics where patience is seen as a virtue, but what we get in stanza two makes us understand the stand of the persona.

In line four, the poet gives the reason for satirizing this patience because as the "you" dilly dallies in false patience, those in "...political power rapes your pride". The poet uses alliteration of "political", "power" and "pride" to show the repercussions of their misplaced patience. The reason for the persona's castigation of Kenyan's patience is that he/she is foolishly allowing the powerbrokers in political circles to "rape" his/her "pride". The word "rape" is a powerful figure of speech as it suggests defiling, which is regarded as such a deplorable act in most African communities that in some of them it calls for such harsh penalties as death. By using the analogy of rape to denote what the citizens are allowing their leaders to do, the poet wishes to awaken them to the serious repercussions they may be in for due to their laxity. The poet is thus calling upon the populace, to take charge of their country's destiny, and to stop entrusting it to leaders who are only out to enrich themselves.

In stanza two, the poet uses both consonance and alliteration to pass his message. In line six, there is consonance of /d/ and /r/ in "driving", "crowded" and "road" which capture the irony of Kenyan's behaviour. This is seen in the fact that common sense calls for patience on a crowded road which Kenyan is ironically not willing to embrace. The alliteration in lines seven in "gift" and "god" shows the poet's skilful way of using irony to show that impatience is actually not a virtue (gift) but a vice which can only come from a false 'god'. The poet is in other words

telling Kenyans that they should be ashamed of being impatient. The poet continues with his onslaught on Kenyan's impatience in line eight where again he uses alliteration of "displayed" and "deride". Here, the poet portrays the folly of Kenyan in laying bare his/her weakness and exposing himself/herself to public shame rather than trying to cover himself/herself up. In stanza two, the poet shows clearly that by showing impatience on the road, Kenyan gets nothing but a crown of shame on his/her head. By contrasting the two sides of patience, Kap-kirwok seems to be asking his fellow Kenyans: "Why do you display impatience towards trivial issues (like traffic jams) while you sit unperturbed as the country's destiny is thrown to the winds?" By demonstrating the irony of Kenyan's behaviour, the poet is challenging Kenyans to apply virtue appropriately and not where it is inappropriate.

In the poem that follows, Kap-kirwok seems to present positive patience as opposed to the kind presented in "KENYAN O KENYAN". In "SPIDER'S PATIENCE" ("Heartbeats" 3), he deals with the theme of patience using a spider as the central character. The poem comprises four stanzas written in regular rhyme. Events in the poem are told in the first person's narrative voice of the "I".

Stanza one introduces the theme of the poem, though the poet craftily uses suspense to avoid direct mention of it. The regular rhythm produced by the rhyming regular lines (in stanza one) sets the mood and the atmosphere of the poem. There is an aura of calmness and order as shown in: "I once sat one afternoon/Beside a row of adult corn/And watched the spider/As it spread its web wider." Rhyme of "spider" and "wider" in lines three and four not only enhances the beauty of the poem but also captures the atmosphere of order and quiet confidence in which the spider

seems to carry out its work. The alliteration of “web” and “wider” in line four coupled with the assonance of the /e/ sound of “spread” and “web” enhance the musical pattern. They also capture the atmosphere of serenity in which the spider is working.

Stanza two creates an air of expectation and suspense with the web getting ready. This is clearly shown in lines five to seven in: “When the web was ready/The spider, its senses steady/Sat in the middle to wait”, and we get ready to see some instant action. This mood of expectancy is carried in the rhyme of lines five and six in “ready” and “steady” respectively. The alliteration of “spider”, “senses” and “steady” in line six also enhances this atmosphere of expectation. “Sat in the middle to wait,” in line seven heightens our expectation but line eight slows the action and expectation down. When the persona says: “I could not see any bait” (in line eight), this is deliberate on the part of the poet to capture the quiet dexterity and patience of the spider. Lines seven to eight also enhance the sense of quiet patience with the use of such words as “sat” and “wait”. The lack of bait in line eight (suggesting a lack of a tool of trade) makes us at first doubt the spider’s ability to catch its prey.

Stanza three very vividly juxtaposes the spider’s patience with the impatience of other entities. This is captured in the repetition and rhyme of “watched” (three times in two lines) where this illustrates the persona’s impatience. The poet foregrounds the spider’s patience by also bringing the analogy of the “sun” which is also shown to be in sharp contrast with the spider as it cannot wait to set. This eagerness is shown in the use of the word “soon”. Alliteration of “sun”, “soon” and “set” of lines eleven and twelve not only enhances the aesthetic value of the poem, but also

brings out prosopopeia in that it portrays the sun's inability to wait. This personification of the sun is a form of semantic incongruity.

Stanza four highlights the persona's resignation after having waited endlessly to see the spider catch its prey to no avail. This is brought out by the rhyme of "tame" and "game" in lines thirteen and fourteen which suggest that the persona had his/her senses disciplined in having to partake of the activity of waiting. The rhyme in the poem gives it a regular rhythm.

Line fifteen captures the persona's bewilderment as he/she cannot understand where the spider gets its patience. The poet seems to have deliberately juxtaposed the impatience of human beings as shown in the first two lines of the stanza with the patience displayed by the spider in the last two lines of the poem. In this poem, the poet contrasts the patience of the spider with the impatience of Kenyans as seen in the poem, "**KENYAN O KENYAN**". This is where a very tiny creature displays more sense in carrying out its activities in quiet calm than the Kenyan persona. The poet engages in sound gymnastics in the second last line when he uses archaicism of the word "whence" instead of the more current "where" in order to create rhyme with "patience". This unusual use of language also lends a sense of novelty to the poem. The fact that this kind of English is found in the Bible adds an aura of sacredness to that kind of patience. The poet seems to be telling us that this is the type of patience that is truly virtuous.

"**WHAT IS WHAT?**" ("Monologues" 48), is yet another poem that focuses on the theme of choices in life. The choice in this case is between good and evil. The poem comprises ten couplets. The persona is telling the events in the first person's narrative voice. The fact that the

title is in form of a question indicates the dilemma that the persona is in. The first couplet establishes the conflict –“I hear two noises/Two noisy voices.” The use of the word “two” twice in the two lines is significant as it denotes the two extreme sides of life. The persona captures his/her indecisiveness between the two extreme choices in life by use of rhyme in “noises” and “voices”. The poet deliberately corrupts the spelling of the word “noises” (by spelling it as noises) in line one in order to create rhyme with “voices” which enhances the musical pattern of the poem. The other reason for this is to show the disruption and confusion that is often involved in making choices between the two. In stanza one, the persona identifies one of the choices/voices – the idea of thinking and making the right choices.

Rhyme of “right” and “night” in lines three and four gives the couplet a melodious quality while at the same time linking good thinking/judgment to night, to suggest that sometimes good thoughts and judgment may bring evil rather than good. This emphasizes the theme of absurdity in life. Stanza three balances the action by introducing the opposite side, where the persona explores the idea of being guided by feelings rather than reason. The persona’s voice alleges that this creates an atmosphere of happiness. The rhyming of “good” and “mood” captures the sense of satisfaction that is brought by following one’s feelings. The next three stanzas (four, five and six), mark an escalation of the personas dilemma climaxing at stanza six. This is reflected in the use of rhetorical questions. Repetition of “right” and “wrong” in stanzas four and five enhances the sense of indecisiveness between the two sides. Stanza six marks the climax of the dilemma where the persona confesses to being at a loss concerning the two. The rhyme of “true” and “clue” underlines the dilemma the persona is trapped in.

So as to support the balance between good thoughts and good feelings, the poet rhymes “good” and “food” in stanza seven. In this poem, the poet seems to justify the presence of both good and evil as necessary ingredients in making the world to run normally. He is saying that both are necessary in life because if life was all smooth, it would be too monotonous. He is suggesting that it is necessary to also listen to feelings, to allow for some freedom in choice, and not just to insist on being led by hard and fast rules on what is right and wrong. The poet seems to be questioning the society’s over- insistence on right thoughts at the expense of some indulgence.

In stanzas eight, nine and ten, the persona actually seems to be stabilizing on one side of the argument. He/she comes to terms with the two sides of life; that they are both necessary as they make the world to balance and tick. In the second line of stanza eight, there is alliteration of “takes”, “two” and “tango” which adds a musical element to the poem. It also captures the harmony that a balance between the two brings. The rhyming of “balance” and “dance” enhances this rhythmical element, meaning that the presence of the two in life makes it refreshing and all-rounded, and not just one monotonous drone of one-sided extremities. The persona is still pushing for the idea of the need for the two. By use of the phrase “of course,” he/she shows the inevitability of both in life. In stanza ten, the persona delivers his/her verdict on the issue, questioning why people complain about evil deeds yet they are part of life. Alliteration of “cause” and “complain” in the last line of the poem adds to the aesthetic value of the poem. The use of the metaphor of a coin is an excellent figure of speech because it vividly captures the two-sidedness of life. Its use is made more effective by the fact that the presence of money (coin) is in many cases seen to be directly proportional to that of happiness or vice versa. The poet sums up the argument of the poem by revisiting his earlier style of using rhetorical questions to

enhance the sense of dilemma. All in all, whether the argument in the poem is right or wrong, it no doubt jostles our minds into giving a thought to the issue of choice between good and evil. This is one issue that has over generations determined the course of history and the destiny of many people.

## **2.9 Wisdom and Philosophy**

Some of Kap-kirwok's poems focus on wisdom and philosophy. One such poem is: "**I WILL CAGE A WILD THOUGHT**" ("Monologues" 11). Events are narrated by a first person narrator, the "I". The poem comprises two sestets. The first stanza concentrates on the process of hiding, whereby the persona contemplates 'hiding' (not physically but mentally), which alludes to the idea of taking a mental retreat. The second stanza explores the benefits of that hiding. As the title suggests, the persona is aware that the idea of hiding his/her mind within his /her "mental cocoon" is wild and thus the title, "**I WILL CAGE A WILD THOUGHT**".

In lines one and two, the persona says: "I will erect a barrier around my mind/I will hide inside my mental cocoon." This is a form of semantic incongruity in that erecting a barrier around the mind or hiding inside the mind is rather absurd. There is consonance in line one in the trills of "erect", "barrier" and "around", which paints an image of impenetrability. Lines two and three rhyme in "cocoon" and "soon". "But" and "butterfly" alliterate to draw contrast between a butterfly which emerges soon from a pupa and the persona's mind which will hide for some time. In lines four and five, we have alliteration of "firm", "flaming" and "fortress" while in line five we have "sure" and "secure". Both of these lines employ alliteration to symbolize safety

and security. The last section of line five reveals the reason for the persona wanting to hide, which is the “burning madness” of today’s life.

The persona creates a sharp contrast between the burning madness that is the outer world of real life as juxtaposed with the inner security and calmness inside his/her mental cocoon. The word “fortress” connotes a strong building which is hard to penetrate because it has strong security structures. By comparing the mind to a fortress, the persona is emphasizing the power of mental resolve; that the mind is as strong as or even stronger than a fortress. The poet here is suggesting that to escape the evils of today’s world, one needs to develop a strong mental resolve that will help him/her resist external pressure. That is the only way to keep oneself from being entangled in wrong things. Rhyme of “fortress” with “madness” draws sharp contrast between the security that the (mental) fortress brings and the madness that is there in the rush of today’s life. Rhyme of “mind” (line one) and “kind” (line six) stresses the power of mental resolve in resisting different forms of temptation and pressure.

In stanza two, the persona goes ahead to enumerate the benefits of living in the mental cocoon as: “I will not with my eye remember/Nor with my mind see pleasure/Except sweet memories to treasure/I will pay no heed to the prayers of my mind/That way I will not get myself into a bind/I will send my wild thoughts to exile in Pemba.” Lines seven and eight are oxymoronic in that the persona talks of: “with my eye remember” and “with my mind see pleasure”. This is seen in the fact that the “mind” and not the “eye” remembers while in line eight, the “eyes” and not the “mind” sees. Here the poet deliberately interchanges these senses as a way of foregrounding them since they are the two key senses through which people get tempted. Line nine talks of

“...sweet memories...” to treasure which is another benefit of caging the mind – the persona will just enjoy remembering good things. Rhyme of lines eight and nine in “pleasure” and “treasure” creates contrast because “pleasure” refers to things which are tempting while “treasures” refer to the truly good things that have happened. In line ten, the alliteration of “pays” and “prayers” echoes the idea of the persona abandoning the quests of his/her mind – whereby here, prayers symbolize desires or wishes. In line ten, ‘mind’ rhymes with ‘bind’ in line eleven, which means that since the persona will not be thinking about his/her wishes and aspirations, then he/she is not likely to get entangled (‘into a bind’) in the affairs of this world.

Here, the poet wants to emphasize that the mind (and not the body) is the driving force of a person’s life, since it controls the body. Through this, he shows the power of mental resolve as far as remaining focused is concerned. The persona’s final resolve is that he/she will send his/her thoughts (which are wild) to exile – in Pemba. The thoughts are said to be wild because in real life, it is not possible to fully avoid getting involved in the issues of the day. Rhyme of “remember” and “Pemba” is significant because both symbolize the past. This is because Pemba is a major historical landmark, having been one of the oldest towns on the East Africa coast. Assonance of /e/ in “send”, “exile” and “Pemba” in line twelve is significant in that it emphasizes the idea of retreating.

## **2.10 Conclusion**

The findings in this chapter disprove the widely held myth that sounds in poetry are only used for the purpose of embellishment. In his poetry, Kap-kirwok demonstrates that sounds are a powerful tool which literary writers can exploit to communicate important issues to their readers.

The poet exploits features like rhyme, alliteration, assonance, consonance, elision, ideophones, rhythm and onomatopoeia to create symbols and images that are pregnant with meaning. In doing this, he proves beyond any reasonable doubt that there is immense unexploited potential in sound aspects, which can be harnessed to address pertinent issues in the society. Like all gifted artists, and in line with Ngara (1982) on the stylistics theory, Kap-kirwok understands the importance of having a balance between matter and manner. Thus, many a times, he also uses sound features for their aesthetic value. We have seen this for example in his use of elision in a poem like **“A SMOKER’S BATTLE”**. Use of the free verse in Kap-kirwok’s poetry means that a feature like meter (in the strict sense of the word) is not prevalent but rhythm is nevertheless achieved through other sound features. Though the trend of modern poetry has been seen to lean towards the free verse, no doubt Kap-kirwok’s use of sound features like rhyme and alliteration is outstanding. The researcher finds it imperative to mention that there were some cases which were possibly intended to be rhyme but which cannot pass for rhyme in the strict sense of the word. We find this attributable to the fact that the poet does not come from a linguistic background and therefore may not have followed strict phonetic rules. Examples of such ‘false rhymes’ include the use of such words as: “turn” and “run” in the poem **“When”**(“Monologues” 18), “tint” and “spirit” in the poem **“Tint of My Spirit, Measure of My Heart”**(“Heartbeats” 38) and “quay” and “bay” in **“Mumbai”**(“Monologues” 37). The next chapter focuses on Kap-kirwok’s use of semantic oddities.

### 3.0 CHAPTER THREE

#### SEMANTIC ODDITIES AND KAP-KIRWOK'S SOCIAL VISION FOR AFRICA IN HEARTBEATS OF THE MIND AND LOUD MONOLOGUES SILENT DIALOGUES

##### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on Kap-kirwok's use of semantic oddities in both Heartbeats of the Mind and Loud Monologues Silent Dialogues as his communicative tools. In our explication of these poems, we try to unearth the meaning underlying the use of such subtle language and style. Under semantic oddities, we have explored the poet's use of such features as paradox, oxymoron and ambiguity. In this exercise, we have selected and explicated seventeen poems vis-à-vis their use of the above mentioned devices. The poems are of varied length, themes, and also structure. They are drawn from both collections with seven of them coming from Heartbeats of the Mind. The other ten are drawn from Loud Monologues Silent Dialogues.

Even before venturing into the poems themselves, it is important to note that the titles of these two collections are examples of semantic oddities. To begin with, "Heartbeats of the Mind" is in itself paradoxical in that it is the heart that is said to register heartbeats and not the mind. The poet deliberately chooses to use this eye-catching title as a way of capturing our attention but more so, as a way of giving us a hint that he intends to talk more about feelings as symbolized by the heart, and thoughts as symbolized by the mind. The second title, "Loud Monologues, Silent Dialogues" is also oxymoronic in that monologues are the ones that should be silent, since it is the individual talking to himself/herself. Thus, there is no need to be loud but the poet, in his clever use of language, deliberately chooses to talk of "loud monologues". On the other hand, dialogues are supposed to be loud since they involve discussion between two or more people.

However, the poet in a surprise move chooses to talk of “silent dialogues”. Perhaps, he is saying that it is possible for people to communicate even without verbalizing words.

Kap-kirwok’s poetry touches on a wide spectrum of themes such as Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS), nurturing one’s talent and urbanization among others. We have grouped the poems under various categories based on the themes they deal with. The categories are in no way exhaustive and some of them seem to overlap. The purpose of the categorization is to lend some cohesion to the analysis.

### **3.2 Human Nature; its Uniqueness and Weaknesses**

This is the first category of poems that we deal with and, poetry being about human beings, a good number of poems fall under this category. The first poem we analyse is: **“THE MOB KILLED HIM,”** (“Heartbeats” 54). The poem comprises two stanzas and it captures a mob justice incident or what is commonly referred to as the administration of ‘instant justice’. The first stanza captures the real act of the lynching while the second stanza mainly dwells on the reflections that follow the killing – guilt feelings. The events in the poem are seen through the eyes of an observer (an omniscient narrator) who witnesses the incident. The poem highlights a social problem that has gained magnitude in the last couple of decades or so in Kenya. This could be due to the increasing crime rate that has been a side effect of urbanization. In such incidents, impatient citizens, tired of rigorous legal processes (which are often seen to deliver unfair judgments) could have contributed to the trend.

In the poem, the persona metaphorically refers to the mob as the “mad herd”. In line four, the mob sets upon the suspected criminal with crude weapons like whips and rocks. It is only after the suspect has died that the people comprising the mob slink away with their consciences accusing them. The use of the word “mob” means a disorganized group of people, possibly not innocent themselves. It is thus ironical that they are “whipping” to remove “sin”. Often in such incidents of instant justice, the executors of the ‘justice’ have no clue why they are punishing the ‘criminal’. This is the kind of picture we get in the poem.

The poet skillfully employs paradox to capture the gravity of the mob’s crime in the use of such metaphors as “bayed” and “mad herd” in line four. Paradox comes in as the word “bay” refers to the noise made by a hound. This image is strengthened by the use of the other metaphor, “herd” which again refers not to people but to animals. The poet’s use of these two metaphors at first sounds wrong because he is attributing animal traits to human beings. This is deliberate on the part of the poet. It is meant to bring out the beastly nature of the mob. The fact that they can mete out such a gruesome death to a fellow human being can only be termed as beastly. What aggravates this scenario is the possibility that the ‘culprit’ could be innocent. This is because the media has often reported cases where self - righteous and overzealous civilians have lynched relatives or family friends seen walking with children after having assumed that they have kidnapped the children.

The poet captures the finality of the crowd’s act in the use of the pleonasm –“died dead” (a form of semantic redundancy) in line five. If they have done such an irreversible thing to a person who could be innocent, then God’s wrath surely awaits them. The poet dexterously juxtaposes the fact

of the finality of their action against the possibility of the victim's innocence with the words in lines five and six, "The man died dead, the mob slunk away./All knew what they did but not why." This is the poet's skillful way of emphasizing the irreversibility of the mob's action. He quickly follows this with the rhetorical question in line eight to capture the gravity of the matter: "But will God, one day not settle his score?" The last line of the poem highlights the serious repercussions that could result from their action. The poet seems to be telling the society to stop this trend because of the injustice that may be committed during such incidents and the inevitable judgment that it may bring from God. The self-righteousness of the mob in this poem compares well with the biblical story in which some people wanted to stone a prostitute who had been caught in the act. Jesus outwitted them when he challenged whoever did not have sin to cast the first stone (The Holy Bible, Revised Standard Version John 8:7). Thus, in this poem, the poet successfully employs semantic incongruities to warn the society against taking the law into their hands especially on issues they are not sure about. He does this by showing the 'injustice' of the mob 'justice'.

In "A SMOKER'S BATTLE" ("Heartbeats" 48), Kap-kirwok confronts the perennial problem of smoking, and what it reveals about the weaknesses of human nature. Events in the poem are seen from a first person narrator, the "I". The poem is made up of four quatrains. In the first stanza, the persona introduces the central conflict – the smoker's dependence on cigarettes. The third and fourth lines bring out the persona's predicament, "Softly killing me - I can vouch, /Yet it is what makes me tick". The irony of the matter is in the beautiful and harmless description given to 'the stick', yet which has deadly results. The word "tick" suggests the ability to function efficiently; usually something that helps one to work efficiently is supposed to be life -

supportive and beneficial. The fact that something can have the dual quality of enabling someone to function efficiently and yet be lethal brings out the absurdity of the persona's situation.

In the first stanza, reference to the stick is rather distant using the impersonal pronoun "it" in line four. In the second stanza, the persona becomes rather confrontational by addressing the stick directly using the second person pronoun, "you" which underlines the idea of battle. He/she also states his/her predicament in line five: "Can't do without you however hard I try". In line eight, the persona uses an oxymoronic expression to refer to his/her relationship with the stick – a friendly enemy. This is the poet's intelligent way of capturing the paradoxical relationship between the smoker and his/her cigarette stick.

Paradox is seen in the fact that a friend is supposed to be helpful, which the stick is by virtue of helping him/her to tick. The negative side of the stick is however brought out in the reference to it as an enemy. This is understandable following what the persona states in line three that the stick is softly killing him/her. Only an enemy can kill a person, thus the appropriateness of the expression. The motif of friend - enemy is perpetuated in line nine, and further developed with the introduction of the metaphor of a love affair. This is captured in the expression "love - hate" affair in line fourteen. This is a very appropriate image because of its social relevance, since it echoes the many love relationships in the society which one or both partners feel is counterproductive, yet find it difficult to break. Referring to his/her relationship with the stick as a love - hate affair thus aptly captures the persona's dilemma. The fact that this relationship is hateful (hence with the propensity for lethal repercussions in his/her life) and at the same time loving, brings out the absurdity of it all. The rhetorical question in the last line clearly shows the

persona's helplessness and especially in his/her evocation of God's help: "But, dear God, when will I quit, which day?"

The third stanza further develops the metaphor of the love - hate relationship and the paradox of the whole matter is shown in line ten where the persona says in a kind of self-defeatist tone: "Each time I hate you, I love you, you hear me?" The two lines that follow further demonstrate the helplessness of the persona as no matter how much he /she tries to stop, he/she finds himself/herself continuing with the habit as shown in: "Every time is my last time to commit this crime, /But then the last time with you is every time!" The conflict caused by this relationship is captured in the poet's use of an exclamation mark at the end of line twelve to show his/her anguish. The poet ends the poem on such a helpless note as a warning to those who may want to enter into an affair with smoking that such can only be a love - hate one or a friendly - enemy one, and thus something to beware of.

In "**THE SEESAW**" ("Heartbeats" 39), Kap-kirwok addresses a very common social problem: the recurrent conflict in relationships. This is a rather short poem comprising two quatrains. The speaker is an observer of the goings - on in the relationship of two people – possibly a married couple. The persona introduces the conflict in the first two lines of the first stanza thus: "Today their peace resolve is stronger, so it seems; /Because after a quarrel, it always seems so". In these two lines, we are introduced to the peace resolve which is said to be strong as they have just emerged from a quarrel. The subsequent two lines, however seem to introduce contrast: "And yet they both know secretly the truth..." in that they know only too well that the peace is not to last for long, what with the recurrent quarrels that seem to cling closer than a louse? The use of the

word “seems” twice in the first two lines of the poem underlines the uncertainty in the relationship.

The second stanza dwells more on the quarrel, which the persona refers to in line six with the oxymoronic metaphor, “permanent stranger”. This is a very effective image in that the quarrel is a ‘stranger’ since it doesn’t live with them but only comes to ‘visit’. The word “stranger” has the effect of distancing the quarrel as being foreign in that it is not called “a visitor” but “stranger”, which has scary connotations. This alludes to a person who is unknown and also one who is likely to be harmful. “Permanent” is also effective in that the quarrels are so common that they can only be termed as “permanent”. The word “permanent” also underlines the quality of the quarrels being stubborn and obstinate. This is the poet’s way of using semantic absurdities to effectively capture the strange behaviour of the people in this relationship. It clearly shows the inability of the people involved to maintain their peace resolve. This is because the permanent stranger in form of quarrels always comes to pull down any structures put in place for maintenance of the peace resolve.

Line seven gives us the result of their intermittent relationship: “And so they live life on a resolve - quarrel seesaw”. This oxymoronic metaphor is used to reinforce the previous one in line six. The two oxymorons paint the image of a balance with two entities being weighed, whereby the one that is heavier tips the balance. This metaphor of a seesaw excellently captures the fluctuations in this relationship. Line eight sums up the persona’s impression of the relationship: “As if the seesaw is part of their life’s resolve”. Kap-kirwok seems to be appealing for stronger “resolves” or determination in maintaining our relationships.

In **“I ONLY CRY TEARS OF JOY...”** (“Monologues” 19), we see how human beings sometimes display emotional temperaments that are rather unique. The events in the poem are told in the first person’s narrative voice. The persona reveals to us a part of his/her nature which he/she feels is unique. The title of the poem is paradoxical in that tears, as an expression of human emotions are generally associated with sorrow and grief. The two extreme human moods are happiness and sorrow. Of these two, happiness is associated with comfort and satisfaction. Consequently, the normal way in which happiness presents itself is through laughter, excitement or at least calmness. On the other hand, sorrow presents itself through crying, screaming and shedding of tears. In this case, it is clearly a case of absurdity for the persona to claim that he/she only sheds tears of joy.

The first stanza deals with the theme of sorrow, which would naturally call for tears. While the first two lines present a normal situation that would call for shedding of tears, the next two lines present a case of absurdity in that the persona’s reaction is in sharp contrast with that of others: “When sorrow throws its vile blow, /And everyone’s tears freely flow;/And, though screams of grief feel my ears,/I urge my tear glands in vain to shed tears.” (19)

The use of the word “feel” (in line three) together with the word “scream” is paradoxical because the sense of feel in a human being is the skin. At the same time, sound is heard, not felt as in his/her statement. Thus the statement of the persona that he/she “feels screams” is semantically absurd. This is the persona’s way of saying that he/she is touched by the grief or showing the magnitude of the grief; that it is so much, possibly as a result of a devastating experience like

death. When the persona says he/she “feels” screams of grief, it suggests that the grief is so much that it is almost tangible, and thus it can be felt. Then the persona goes ahead to show the results of his/her attempt to cry but in line four, the tear glands, not just the eyes, refuse to yield tears. This suggests that it is not only the eyes that are bankrupt of tears but even tear glands.

In the second stanza, the persona expands on the subject, giving other incidents that call for tears in lines five and six: “When pain preys on my sweet thrill,/And the ache is such that it could kill”. The use of the alliterative “pain preys” is a strong metaphor which compares pain with a predator that devours its prey. The damaging effects of pain are captured in the use of the word “prey” which means to destroy or feed on as in the case of a lion feeding on an antelope. This line clearly indicates that the persona is touched by the grief to the point that he/she succumbs to some form of “crying” in “...in my heart cry” but in a paradoxical state of affairs, there are no tears, his /her eyes remain dry because tears forsake him/her. This situation portends a deteriorating condition because it indicates that tears are actually deserting him, which further complicates the situation and heightens the tension.

The final stanza marks a drastic change in the general mood because we move from a mood of sorrow and grief to that of joy. In the opening line of the stanza, use of the word “But” marks the turning point. The persona gives his/her reaction to the events on the other extreme of happiness. “But when cheer and joy make merry,/And friends toast champagne and sherry;/When victory leaps sky high, and honour to enjoy,/Then only do I bath my cheeks...with tears of joy”(Ibid.). The first three lines of the stanza represent happy circumstances which naturally call for merrymaking. The persona uses the three lines to emphasize the happy moments through

repetition by the use of the word “when”. Here, the poet employs suspense very powerfully in order to capture our attention. He withholds from us the persona’s reaction to such joyful circumstances and only reveals it at the end of the last line (the very last section) in order to create impact, “Then only do I bath my cheeks...with tears of joy”. This line represents the climax because as we see – “the persona bathes his/her cheeks with tears of joy.” Its significance is also enhanced by the fact that it is as surprising as it is ironical. The use of the word bath is significant as it suggests large quantities; to bath cheeks with tears, a ‘flood’ of the same is needed. In this case the tear glands are portrayed as being willing to release ‘streams of tears’ to greet joy. This case clearly represents a case of semantic oddity.

### **3.3 Pain, Suffering and Death**

Since time immemorial, man has had to frequently contend with the tripartite challenge of pain, suffering and death. While sometimes the challenges present themselves on the psychological front, other times they come in the real physical form. Kap-kirwok, being well aware of this fact, devotes a considerable percentage of his poetry in the collections to this subject. One such poem is: “**SUNSET IN THE MORNING**” (“Monologues” 36), which deals with the threat of death that is occasioned by AIDS on a young person’s life. Events in the poem are narrated by a first person narrator, the “I”. The poem comprises four sestets (a stanza made up of six lines), written in a mixture of long and short lines. It comprises the persona’s revelation of the toll the disease has taken on him/her.

The title of the poem is itself a form of semantic incongruity in that it is paradoxical. The use of the word “morning” suggests dawn, that a new day is beginning or forming. Sunset on the other hand refers to the time when the day is coming to an end, which is evening. Usually the sun sets

in the evening and not in the morning and the normal way would be to talk of sunrise in the morning. Thus, talk of the sun setting in the morning is rather abnormal but Kap-kirwok deliberately chooses to use it in order to highlight the plight of the persona in a more forceful way. This is also a way of creating suspense and arresting the attention of the reader, as the reader gets eager to read and find out the cause of this abnormal state of affairs.

In the first stanza, the persona introduces the conflict by highlighting “today” where the word is used twice in the stanza. The word “today” thus is significant in showing the contrast between the beauty of “today” in lines three and five with the state that the persona is in. It is important to note that the word “today” and its variants are mentioned six times in the poem (lines three, five, eleven, twelve, thirteen and nineteen). This is because the disease has put him/her in a situation where he/she is only sure of today. Here the weather seems to be very kind and promising, which is in sharp contrast with the state the persona is in as shown in line one: “My eyes are closed wide, wide open”. Since it is in the morning, we expect that the persona’s eyes should be open but here the eyes are closed once and open twice. This suggests a middle state between sleep and being awake, which in the case of the persona symbolizes a middle state between life and death. This is the state the persona perceives himself/herself to be in. Here, the persona uses “being awake” to symbolize being alive and healthy while being asleep signifies death. The idea of the eyes being closed once but open twice gives a ray of hope in that the persona is more alive than dead.

The poet aptly uses oxymoron to capture the state of the persona while at the same time utilizing suspense. It is important to note that so far we have not been told what is ailing the persona. We

do not know the reason his/her affairs seem to be running contrary to the norm. The persona manages to conceal this fact until stanza three where he/she divulges what is ailing him/her in the line: “But dear God, aid me so I may kill AIDS”. The poet also avoids the use of punctuation marks at the end of most of the lines of the poem to quicken the pace of the narration, as well as capture the anguish the persona is in. After the full stop in line six, the rest of the lines are without punctuation marks until line seventeen where we have a full stop (followed by an exclamation mark at the end of line eighteen). This is the poet’s way of capturing the mental state of the persona who feels that his/her life is quickly lapsing out.

The poet chooses to capture the reality of living with AIDS (which to many is tantamount to death) in the use of the oxymoron, “morning sunset”. This aptly reveals the persona’s perception that though he/she is alive, he/she is as good as dead. The persona’s predicament is complicated by the good morning weather suggested by the “smile on the sun’s face”, the brightness in line three and the kindness of the wind in line four. All these connote the optimistic state of affairs in life in terms of positive growth in the economy and good weather for agriculture. In addition, he/she has a promising academic future as alluded to in lines fifteen and sixteen in: “I will finish school/I know am no fool”. This optimism enhances the persona’s desire to live as shown in line five, “O! I want so much to live today”. The poet introduces another form of absurdity in the paradox of lines five and six where the persona wishes to live so much that he/she “could die right way”. Again, this creates a bizarre state in that he/she would want to live so much that he/she at the same time wishes to die. These two create a discordant state of affairs which is a form of semantic incongruity.

In the second stanza, we see the effect of the disease on the persona's health and this effect is both physical and mental. The first four lines are significant in revealing this. The persona talks of the "ears" hating to "see" the morning sunset, suggesting that he/she highly detests his/her present state where things are moving in the reverse. The use of "ears" to "see" is significant because it is paradoxical – ears are used to hear but not to see. This on one hand suggests that the persona is so disturbed mentally that his/her mind has gone berserk, and thus he/she is unable to think rationally. The other possible interpretation would be to emphasize the persona's state where seeing portends a more concrete way of perceiving things than just hearing. This compares well with Angira's poem – **"THE SPRINTER"** (which first appeared in Zuka) where instead of talking of "smelt", he talks of "felt" your scent in stanza three:

I felt your scent  
Come  
Through the wind (Kariara & Ellen 58).

Here we find Angira, like Kap-kirwok employing a form of paradox in interchanging the way senses perceive different stimuli. In the same line, (line seven of **"SUNSET IN THE MORNING"**) we have the oxymoron "morning sunset". Sunset suggests end of the day, yet the absurdity is in the fact that the day is ending as it is beginning. This portrays the plight of the AIDS patient in a very powerful way – possibly a young person in school, just beginning his/her life, but at the same time living with the threat of having his/her life prematurely cut short by this deadly disease. The physical effects of the disease on his/her health are seen in lines eight to ten where "Evil water overflows in my ear cups/The throb is so faint/The pain so quaint". Here the evil water that overflows in his/her ear cups refers to the virus - infected blood flowing in his/her system, causing the excruciating pain suggested in line ten. Line eight also suggests the overwhelming psychological torture afflicting the persona which is almost audible.

Stanza three presents a semantically incongruous situation of both hope and hopelessness. Hopelessness is seen in the persona's acceptance of his/her fate that he/she knows that he/she is "dying each day" (line thirteen), meaning that he/she is gradually sliding towards death. This has to do with the deteriorating health due to the damaging effects of the virus. Line seventeen indicates hopelessness in that the persona is voicing his/her anguish, due to the effect of the pain. Contrast is suggested by the use of the word "but" in line fourteen where the persona takes on another nature, like a soldier in the offensive, out to kill and not a prey to be killed by the virus. This is clearly a case of paradox. The persona nevertheless calls on the Almighty for the ability to achieve such a momentous feat, for AIDS so far has not been conquered; it has remained a predator. This suggests a psychological rather than a physical kind of victory like accepting to live positively. This is in line with the advice offered to Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) positive people as a way of lengthening their lives. Lines fifteen and sixteen also build the image of hope where the persona reiterates his/her faith in his/her academic ability by stating that: "I will finish school/I know am no fool". The last line of the third stanza denotes the persona's intention to seek the professional services of a doctor who will help him/her know how to manage the disease.

The last stanza captures the climax of the persona's mental state where he /she is quickly sliding into a state of mental hysteria. The first four lines portray the persona as being hypersensitive, feeling that the clouds and the old are deriding him/her. This could be a symptom of the mental depression the persona is experiencing as is common with people suffering from AIDS. This is especially so when the symptoms of the disease begin to show and the victim feels like everyone

knows of his/her state and is laughing at him/her. The last two lines (Lines twenty three and twenty four) reflect the climax of the persona's mental anguish almost at breaking point where he/she says: "O, my mother, my river cloud, hold me tight/I am flowiing into thhe briiigght nnnningghhht!" It is a normal human reaction with many people to call upon their mothers when trapped in a seemingly insurmountable problem. This is because mothers are considered by many people as second only to the creator in terms of love and intimacy. The last line very vividly captures the mental discordance and hysteria inflicted on the persona by the disease.

There seems to be a progression of the symbolism of deteriorating health because in stanza one there is brightness which gives way to pain and despair in stanza two. The third stanza however, encompasses some degree of hope before the persona slips into a state of despondency in the last stanza, possibly as he/she approaches death. The last section of the last stanza is a form of semantic incongruity in that the persona is flowing into the 'bright night'. The oxymoron: 'bright night' symbolizes death, and also portrays the ambivalent attitude that the persona holds towards it. Here death seems good in that it frees the persona from the physical and mental anguish he/she is trapped in by virtue of harbouring the disease. In that case, death brings brightness. On the other hand, death is perceived negatively in that it cuts short the high aspirations of the persona suggested by hope of academic excellence and good weather in the first stanza. Thus, death can only be a dark night. Thus in this case, the poet also utilizes ambiguity. On the overall, the visual C-structure of the poem adopted by the poet appears deliberate, to reflect the inner hollowness inflicted by the disease on the persona.

### 3.4 Africa; a Puzzle

In this section, we analyse poems in which Kap-kirwok specifically focuses on Africa. In some of the poems, he mentions Africa explicitly, while in others, he alludes to Africa in the issues raised therein. He portrays Africa as a land of absurdity; one of both woes and good. One such poem is: **“TEARS AND CHEERS FOR AFRICA”**, (“Monologues” 44). The poem is written in seven couplets. The events in the poem are narrated in the third person’s narrative voice, except the last stanza which is written in the first person’s voice.

The poet juxtaposes tears and cheers in the title of the poem to create a paradox. This is because tears suggest sorrow while cheers suggest joy, and these seem like two incompatible emotional states. The first two lines of the first stanza introduce the paradoxical state of affairs in Africa. We find tears flowing; which suggests sorrow and discomfort, against a background of rich dances and laughter. Dance is one of the major cultural artefacts that characterize the rich African heritage. It is seen as a ‘cultural export product’ because it is a form of tourist attraction for most African countries. Laughter on the other hand is associated with the amiable African disposition especially when it accompanies dance. Line two however introduces a contrasting scenario altogether – that of poverty and hunger. That people are hungry and needy contrasts sharply with line one which suggests joy and pride in the African culture. This contrast reflects a state of outright absurdity. Lines three and four in the second stanza present an even worse position from that of stanza one because: “Sorrow soars like a vulture above this womb of a mankind./Menacing clouds cast shadows over this graveyard of a kind.” This scenario paints a picture of doom and imminent danger because the simile of “sorrow soaring like a vulture” suggests death. The vulture is a scavenging carnivore which soars over a place with dead bodies

searching for something to feed on. The fact that sorrow soars over the womb means that it scavenges on the offspring of the ‘womb’ and thus the descendants of mankind are condemned to sorrow right from birth. Here, the poet has used irony to create paradox. The absurdity of the line is in the fact that “womb” suggests productivity, yet sorrow soars over the offspring of the womb – which connotes death. As if that is not enough, in line four we have “menacing clouds casting shadows over this graveyard of a kind”. “Graveyard” symbolizes mass deaths due to the hunger that is alluded to in stanza one and disunity resulting in wars in stanza four. Reference to Africa as a “graveyard of a kind” suggests that the continent is doomed and the people are condemned to a life of hopelessness. The clouds suggest an imminent storm that is about to bombard the land, leaving in its wake a trail of death. The storm helps to flatten the graves very fast; meaning that the people forget their past sorrow (which is as a result of mistakes they have made) quickly. Subsequently, there is a vicious cycle of people making mistakes that result in sorrow; generation after generation.

In stanza three, the poet uses personification to create paradox in that ignorance “mocks” and “triumphs over” literacy and scientific study. Here, “hieroglyphics” epitomizes early civilization while “astrophysics” represents modern technological development. The poet here uses prosopopeia to drive the point home effectively. Ignorance is given human qualities of “mocking” and “standing” while astrophysics is also said to have a “prostrate body” (that is lying on the ground). Paradox comes in because ignorance is a vice that Africa has been trying to fight and eradicate through education. That education and science which are said to be the keys of development are being triumphed over by a vice like ignorance suggests retrogression; which is a case of absurdity. The poet here suggests that Africa has been unable to exploit both early and

modern knowledge to eradicate ignorance. Instead of development, Africa's systems are retrogressing and dying. The picture created is that of education and ignorance being involved in a fight, with the ironical result of evil winning over good. This is the height of absurdity.

Stanza four touches on the issue of unity, where the situation is again paradoxical in that Africa's people seem to prefer disunity to unity. Line seven alludes to civil wars that are engineered by ethnic suspicion and hatred. A case in point is the 1994 genocide in Rwanda where about a million Tutsis were massacred by Hutus. Again, the assertion by the persona that disunity's fruit is sweeter is oxymoronic. That these people still live as nations and yet they are disunited represents an absurd situation. This is because a nation basically represents a people united by common goals and aspirations. This stanza is a satire on bodies like African Union (AU). The folly of it is that despite such bodies being in existence, Africa is on record as one of the continents with the highest cases of insecurity and civil wars. This phenomenon is common in conflict areas such as the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Somalia, Sudan, Nigeria and recently in Kenya where post - election violence was witnessed after the contentious results of the 2007 elections.

Stanza five hints at the fact that some good is nevertheless not lacking in Africa. This is because there is time. This is of course against the background of the Western culture (of workaholism) that glorifies work and materialism at the expense of almost all forms of leisure. This workaholism quite often gives rise to negative repercussions like family breakdown. "Honey" in the same stanza epitomizes all the good that is available on the continent. The persona however reveals the absurdity of the scenario by saying in line ten that Africa might export time for

money. Here the poet uses satire to create paradox in that Africa prides itself in having plenty of time; a view which is in itself rather myopic. We often hear of the saying that: “There is no hurry in Africa”. The absurdity of the saying lies in the fact that we waste our time bragging that we have it in excess, and can even export it. Meanwhile, other nations use their time diligently to create wealth and money, which we later go to borrow in form of foreign aid – a state of utter absurdity.

In stanza six, the persona openly declares what he/she perceives Africa to be – a paradox, a land that cannot be understood, having the look of good yet a graveyard. The first line of stanza six is paradoxical in that it talks of a “black box”, which refers to the communication gadget within a plane that could lead to discovering causes of a plane crash. This is significant because it suggests that Africa has the ‘gadgets’ (read resources, potential) for success, only that they are lost (unexploited) in the maze of mismanagement. Thus, Africa is seen to lack key (leadership) elements that would usher it into its destiny. That it is compared to a question mark in an empty space is rather ambiguous in that such a question mark does not make sense when the question being asked is not provided. The metaphor of a question mark is also significant in that it suggests that Africa is perplexing; a puzzle indeed.

Stanza seven sums up the persona’s verdict on Africa: “And now, let’s toast to the sick health of Africa/All raise your glasses and clink two tears for Africa!” This stanza presents an ironical situation in that people normally toast and clink glasses when celebrating something good. The absurdity of this situation is that Africa is sick and yet people are celebrating. The question we ask ourselves is, “Is the poet saying we should give up, and adopt an indifferent attitude towards

Africa's self-wished woes?" The last line seems to have the answer to this question where the persona talks of clinking – not glasses but tears for Africa. Here, Kap-kirwok seems to be making a call for people to nevertheless empathize with Africa by doing something to help. He is also calling upon Africa to stop seeking for help from external sources and instead solve her own problems.

Okot p' Bitek (1989) presents a similar picture of Africa as shown in the excerpt below:

What is Africa  
 To me?  
 Blackness,  
 Deep, deep fathomless  
 Darkness;

Africa, Idle giant  
 Basking in the sun,  
 Sleeping, snoring,  
 Twitching in dreams;  
 Diseased with a chronic illness,  
 Choking with black ignorance,  
 Chained to the rock  
 Of poverty,

And yet laughing,  
 Always laughing and dancing,  
 The chains on his legs  
 Jangling (125).

Though this picture is presented through Ocol whom the poet aims at satirizing, it nevertheless presents some undeniable truths about Africa. Like Kap-kirwok, P' Bitek argues that Africa is a land of laughter and dance but also one plagued by ignorance and poverty. Both allude to the fact that in Africa, there are lots of unexploited resources. The idea in this poem supports Kap-kirwok's argument that Africa is a puzzle yet to be understood.

In **“WE DID NOT BELIEVE THE SEER”** (“Monologues” 45), the poet focuses on the failure of a people to believe in their seer and the repercussions that ensue. Though the poet does not explicitly indicate that it is about Africa, the contents clearly show that Africa is the subject. The events of the poem are seen through the eyes of a first person narrator, the “we”. The persona is an observer of the events in his/her community, to which he/she feels a collective sense of responsibility, as shown by the use of the plural personal pronoun “we”. The poem is made up of four quatrains and it has a mixture of short and long lines.

The persona introduces the seer who is the subject matter in the first line thus: “We did not believe the seer”. That the idea of not believing the seer is significant as far as the message of the poet is concerned, is suggested by the repetition of the line at the beginning of each of the four stanzas. The first line of the fourth stanza emphasizes the seer by the use of the personal possessive pronoun, “our”. The poet continues to develop the metaphor of the seer in the next three lines of the first stanza in a kind of a symmetrical pattern by mentioning what the seer did, “The seer who foretold the snake/ The snake that crawled its way from the sea/The sea from where winds blew kisses of death”. In this pattern, the object of the line becomes the subject in the subsequent line.

The metaphor of a snake denotes evil and venom. That the snake crawled its way from the sea is reminiscent of the serpent that crawled to Eve in the Garden of Eden and which finally occasioned the fall of man in the Bible (Genesis 3:1). This suggests some bad omen. That the snake is said to have crawled from the sea is absurd because snakes are not sea animals. This also alludes to the symbol of jinn’s (ghost - like sea creatures at the East African coast) which are

said to have an abode in the sea, only coming to human habitation to wreak havoc. The word “crawl” carries with it some eerie overtones. The sea symbolizes colonialism and its attendant destructive effect. The image of death and destructiveness is strengthened in line four where the sea gives rise to “winds that blew kisses of death”. This alludes to such effects as people being shipped to the West to serve as slaves, which brought both physical and psychological death. This is a case of semantic oddity. This is because kisses normally suggest love and intimacy. That kisses bring death reinforces the image of the snake’s propensity for destruction. Another form of paradox in the line is the fact that from a geographical perspective, the breeze from the sea should precipitate the formation of rain which is beneficial and life - supporting. Furthermore, the breeze that blows from the sea is viewed positively as it provides a cooling effect especially in the tropics which are usually very hot. It is thus paradoxical that the winds should have deadly results. The metaphor of a snake is a twin image that alludes both to the construction of the Kenya - Uganda railway (1896-1902) and the coming of the train. It is appropriate because both are long and narrow thus resembling the structure of a snake. The construction of the railway caused a lot of land to be forcefully alienated from Africans. The poet uses it to connote all the negative elements of Western civilization as embodied in such systems as capitalism. The metaphor of a snake alludes to the negative use of the train by colonialists to transport raw materials from Africa. The kisses of death refer to the destructive fumes emitted by trains which cause air and noise pollution, both of which are environmental hazards.

In stanza two, the poet further develops the metaphor of “the seer” by revealing another of the prophecies – the coming of the pale ones. This refers to White people whose skins are pale compared to African skins which are dark. The word pale epitomizes weakness and poor health

as contrasted with the dark and healthy African skin. This suggests that Whites had little to offer because the only things they had were death and poor health. This is of course contrary to the portrayal the West gave itself as the ‘saviour’ of Africa. In lines seven and eight, we get to hear of other negative influences of the coming of the pale ones: “Pale ones that carried walking sticks that spat fire/Fire that shattered lives of many from a great distance”. The metaphor of walking sticks alludes to guns that maim, cripple and kill – all forms of destruction. This is quite ironical because walking sticks are mostly used by aging people for support but these ones are said to cause death and mayhem, which is a case of semantic incongruity.

Line ten in stanza three highlights the third prophecy that the seer foresaw which was the sowing of poisonous seeds. This had the subsequent effect of causing fights between son and father in line eleven. This basically alludes to the infiltration of such policies as individualism into the family unit, with the resulting effect of eventual family breakdown. It also refers to the breakdown of societal morals where the youth no longer respect the old as a result of Western influence. Kap-kirwok of course understands that this is a serious repercussion as the family unit is the backbone of society. It follows then that a strong family leads to a strong society, while the opposite is also true. The fact that the poisonous seeds are causing breakdown of the family unit means that they have the propensity of causing societal collapse. The poet is trying to draw a contrast between this scenario and the strong African family unit, with its strong social fibre – the hallmark of African socialism. The semantic absurdity of the whole scenario is that they are fighting over “the meaning of meaning” (line twelve). This is a case of ambiguity as it on one side suggests that they are fighting over petty things or things that are not there. On the other side, “meaning of meaning” denotes a specialized field of study like philosophy. This implies

that they are fighting over highly technical, foreign ideologies while neglecting the simple rules of life, like love for one's relatives. "Poisonous seeds" (line ten) is semantically absurd because usually seeds have life in themselves because they germinate into plants that bring forth food: be it crops for human beings or vegetables for animals. The fact that the seeds are poisonous drastically alters the equation since they are destructive, contrary to what would be expected. Seeds, especially to a hungry people connote hope. That the seeds are poisonous points to an even more poignant fact: the deceptiveness of Western influence which seems positive yet it is as destructive as the poisonous seeds.

In stanza four, the persona emphasizes the fact that the seer is one of their own - yet rejected. This is reminiscent of the Biblical passage where Jesus said: "Truly I say unto you, no prophet is acceptable in his own country" (Luke 4:24). This enhances irony where we would expect the prophet to be embraced by his/her own people but unfortunately this rarely happens. The verdict of the people on the seer in: "You are too old and senile..." (line fourteen), further emphasizes his rejection. Lines fifteen and sixteen give other results of the 'we's' rejection of the seer: "And now we reap the bitter fruit of our unbelief/As we reel, blow after blow, from them that he foretold." The oxymoron "bitter fruit" in line fifteen is significant as it suggests that the poisonous seeds of line ten have started bearing fruits – but, ironically, bitter fruits. This is not surprising from the picture painted in stanza three because if the people have sown poisonous seeds, then they can only expect bitter fruits. This is obviously a case of absurdity as naturally, fruits are sweet and nourishing – a favourite with most people. They are also known to enhance health but in this case they are seen to be harmful.

In the last two stanzas, the poet successfully develops the motif of farming where in stanza three, it is sowing and stanza four it is reaping. Considering what the Bible says that one has to reap what they have sown, then the ‘we’ are reaping bitter fruits as a result of their actions. Okot p’ Bitek (1989) also advances the idea of sowing and reaping with reference to the idea of disillusionment as shown below:

We sowed,  
 We watered  
 Acres of cynicism,  
 Planted forests of Laughter  
 Bitter Laughter.  
 Corrosive venom,  
 Men shed tears  
 As they rocked  
 Held their sides  
 Laughed, laughed,  
 Floods of tears  
 Turned red;

We manured the Land  
 Frustrations sprouted  
 Bursting the soil  
 Like young banana trees,  
 Fat Frustrations

Flourished fast  
 Yielding fruits  
 Green as gall (Song of Lawino & Ocol 143).

In this excerpt, we find that the cynicism that the populace planted has given rise to bitter “fruits” which alludes to something dangerous. Here, P’Bitek seems to be warning the people of the causal effects of their actions: that whatever they do will have some consequences, which they have to live with. Like P’Bitek therefore, Kap-kirwok uses the metaphors of “sowing” and “reaping” to lend forcefulness to his poem as they emphasize the inevitability of facing the consequences of one’s actions.

In line sixteen, they are also reeling from “blow after blow from them that he foretold.” The word “reel” suggests disorientation, loss of sobriety or focus due to pain, alcohol or some other harmful effect. It implies that the “we” are no longer healthy and effective because the pale ones are continuously bombarding them with blows. That the “we” are already reeling and the pale ones continue to bombard them, can only signal imminent death due to fatigue and exhaustion. The poet seems to be warning the people against being indifferent to warnings especially from internal sources as failure to heed warnings may bring ultimate destruction to the society. The failure or inability of the people to resist the coming of the White man has caused the breakdown of many an African society’s moral fibre, wars, violence plus wreaking havoc on many African systems. This warning is reminiscent of Mugo wa Kibiro in The River Between, who is said to have foretold the coming of people with clothes that look like butterflies. Just like the seer in this poem, Mugo wa Kibiro is said to have been rejected by his very own people. It is important to note that the poem has a systematic progression of ideas whereby the first stanza focuses on the coming of the railway and the results. The second stanza portrays the coming of Whites and their guns plus the destruction they caused. The third stanza focuses on the general negative effects that set in after Whites settled in Africa. The last stanza reveals the regret that Africans felt for allowing Whites in Africa.

**“YES I AM A BEGGAR...”** (“Monologues” 50), is another poem in which Kap-kirwok uses semantic absurdities to address the “dependency syndrome” that is especially prevalent in Africa. The events in the poem are seen through a persona who is a beggar, talking in the first person’s narrative voice. The poem has four stanzas with lines in each stanza growing gradually longer (with every subsequent line) in a rhythmical pattern. In the first stanza, the persona introduces

himself/herself in the first line and quickly follows this with a rather startling claim in line two: “But I have no problem at all.” This is as ironical as it is absurd because it is almost a foregone conclusion that a beggar can be taken to be the embodiment of penury in any society. The persona quickly gives one exception to his/her state of “not having problems” in lines three and four; that his/her bowl shines less brighter than that of the minister, who is also on a borrowing mission. The persona draws sharp contrast between his/her bowl which shines less brighter and the minister’s briefcase which ironically must be shiny and executive. That the beggar and the minister are both beggars is highly paradoxical, the only differences being that their target groups and tools of trade are different; one carrying a bowl and the other a briefcase. Of course here Kap-kirwok is using paradox to satirize leaders for their embarrassing ways.

Stanza two opens with the persona re-asserting his/her status of being a beggar in the first line. In line two, he/she continues to develop the metaphor of a beggar who again and strangely so, is not complaining. This again may be a case of absurdity because beggars are arguably some of the most disadvantaged members of the society. This is especially when it is considered that every member of society has a right to a decent living. The fact that certain forces in the society may have conspired to deny the persona this human right is clearly a case of injustice. Looking at the scenario from that angle then, a beggar would most likely be a bitter person. Not so for our persona. He/she in fact seems to adopt a commanding and authoritative tone. The persona, in the last two lines of the stanza, goes ahead to mention another woe of beggars – tattered clothes, but also compares this with roads which display a similar characteristic especially when it is raining. This alludes to the numerous potholes on our roads which make them to look variegated like tattered garments. Again, the persona uses irony to show the semantic absurdity of roads which

are also 'tattered' and yet there are huge budgets set apart for their maintenance. The persona is definitely referring to mismanagement of public funds where money meant for development finds its way into the pockets of a few.

In the first line of the third stanza as in the other two stanzas, the persona reinforces the metaphor of a beggar through repetition. In the next line, the persona ironically claims that he/she has no trouble really, which is quite paradoxical. Line eleven enhances paradox where the persona says that: "Though today the jigger in my ear is bigger". The line is first and foremost paradoxical because in most cases, jiggers infest legs and not the ears. The poet here uses ears as one of the crucial senses in acquiring learning and information. Consequently, education and knowledge are seen as keys which can be used to free people from the perennial tripartite problem of poverty, ignorance and disease. By claiming that the ears are infested with a bigger jigger, the persona is pointing at the indifference and unwillingness of leaders to learn how to manage their countries well. It also points at the parasitic nature of political leaders who like jiggers milk public coffers of funds meant for development. This is a very powerful metaphor as it aptly portrays the sleepy, ignorant and indifferent nature of politicians, simply unwilling to listen to the cries of many people, who are wallowing in the sea of poverty. The metaphor of "jigger in the ear" in the third stanza also refers to the populace who seem resigned to their impoverishment and who cannot protest against their sub-humanization.

As the poem develops in stanza three, the persona assumes the position of the minister (as seen by those who give aid) portraying himself/herself as the villain. That he/she will be deaf to insults of "dog", is rather perplexing because in normal circumstances this would easily provoke

one to retaliation. But surprisingly, here our persona – representing our politician is deaf and quiet to this insult. This satirizes our political elites who usually have to stoop low to their benefactors from the West, sometimes at the expense of compromising their dignity, all this because of their dependency syndrome.

The first line of the fourth stanza begins with the usual assertion. The next three lines make a rather paradoxical addition that he/she strives to beg better every year in order to increase the daily ration. This alludes to the idea that leaders keep coming up with new strategies to help them get aid, for example in form of programmes and projects. The paradoxical fact is that the aid they get is not for development projects, but for increasing the “ration” (read amount) they can embezzle. Line fourteen’s claim that our nation is rich is ironical, revealing the absurdity of it all, because a nation cannot be rich yet it is borrowing. On the other hand, it is paradoxical because African nations are well endowed with natural resources which they can exploit and do away with their dependency. The poet satirizes Africa’s dependency syndrome because he is aware that we do not borrow because we lack resources. It is simply because we misuse what we have, expecting to be helped by the ‘developed’ countries.

The fact that the art of begging is presented as one to be learnt in stanza four portrays the folly of the persona’s nation as represented by him/her and the minister. That a minister can “strive” so hard to learn how to beg better, instead of directing that effort towards production of his/her own resources, reveals the myopia of the ruling class. Instead of learning how to fish, Africans still expect to be given ‘doles’ of fish which can hardly be sufficient. Here, Kap-kirwok continues to castigate the culture of dependency that is very ingrained in Africa. This is especially because of

what is revealed in stanza one of the poem that these handouts – christened ‘aid’ are hardly sufficient. This is because of reference to it as a “dole”, which suggests something meager or little. Another reason for the persona’s attack of the habit of borrowing from foreign countries is that it breeds contempt, leading to loss of dignity on the part of Africans. Africans have tended to be underrated by Whites, sometimes justifiably so, because they worship Whites like gods of providence, who are there to drop Africa manna from the heaven – that is the West. Another thing that is rather paradoxical and also ironical is that the dole (which does not sound like something attractive) is carried in a briefcase, which symbolizes wealth and class. This is absurd because you would expect African leaders to adopt modest lifestyles that are commensurate with their electorates’ economic standing, but not to lavish in luxuries, while the rest of the populace is languishing in poverty. It is thus ironical that the minister should present himself like a rich person yet he is on a borrowing mission.

### **3.5 Governance**

The subject of governance is crucial in the successful management of any organization. The issue of bad governance and political mismanagement seems to be one of the major concerns of the poet and thus, it does not escape his notice. One poem in which he highlights it is: **“MASTERS OF IGNORANT WISDOM”** (“Heartbeats” 40).

The persona, who is also a member of the community under discussion, narrates the events in the poem in the third person’s narrative voice. The poem has two stanzas each of eight lines with an alternation of long and short lines. The poet captures the political mismanagement in the use of the oxymoronic title “Masters of Ignorant Wisdom” which appropriately communicates the

double-sided character of the crop of leadership of the time. The term “ignorance” denotes a state where someone lacks information, knowledge or skills. Wisdom on the contrary denotes a state of being knowledgeable, intelligent and clever. This metaphor creates a form of semantic absurdity in that in a normal situation, one is either said to be wise or ignorant but not both at the same time. The poet cleverly employs this seemingly odd semantic expression to bring out the strange state of affairs in this community. In line three, the persona reveals why ‘they’ consider themselves the masters: “Their grip on the reins of power is firm”. The fact that “they” are firmly in control of political power makes them consider themselves secure. The persona gives us the reason that has occasioned such a sorry state of affairs in line six: “while we all sleepwalk”. This sleepwalking can be attributed to a state of fatalism on the part of the populace, whereby they have given in to hopelessness. The persona is however careful to sound an alarm to politicians that they should not be so complacent as line five carries an ominous warning to them: “Oblivious of the echoes of history, they prance”. The meaning of this is that history is replete with examples of evil political regimes that finally came to an end. In this context, the word “oblivious” implies that they have chosen to ignore the echoes of history. The persona’s further warning is carried in line seven, where we find a very ironical state of affairs, in that “the sun rises less brighter with rays of rage”. This presents a state of semantic incongruity in that normally we expect the sun’s rising to bring warmth, brightness and joy. Contrary to this, the sun rises “less brighter” and even more ominously, “with rays of rage”. In this case, paradox is seen in that the rising brings dimness, pointing to the deteriorating state of affairs. This can only suggest that even the sun is annoyed. “Less brighter”, which is a form of grammatical incongruity also emphasizes the fact that the affairs of the society are moving on a faulty note. The sun here epitomizes the populace which is angry and fed-up with the regime and this

portends a situation which has reached breaking point. The poet is actually sounding a warning to the leaders that they are sitting on a time bomb.

In line eleven in the second stanza, “the land lies ruined but patient in silent beauty”. This creates an intriguing state of affairs but one which carries some hope in that the land has not yet lost its beauty. This beauty refers to resources. That the land is “patient” implies a state of expectancy for better things. A further case of semantic absurdity is seen in the fact that there is rubbish on the land yet it is said to be beautiful. Lines eleven, fourteen and fifteen however suggest that all is not lost because there is hope. That those who sleep in daylight will see, suggests that they’ll rise to the occasion and demand their rights and then, echoes of history will be heard again as change finally comes.

### **3.6 Hopelessness/Absurdity of Life**

One of the major concerns in Kap-kirwok’s poetry is that life too often appears hopeless, uncertain and absurd. In this category, we focus on how Kap-kirwok exploits semantic incongruities to address this subject. One poem in which he does this is “**TODAY WHILE I AM HERE**” (“Monologues” 3). In the poem, he reveals the joys and uncertainties of life’s journey:

Events in the poem are told from the first person narrator’s point of view. It is in form of three quatrains. The lines in each stanza start short and then gradually grow in length with each subsequent one. In the first two lines of the first stanza, the persona claims that his/her senses are pilgrims on a journey far and near. Line three introduces paradox in the poem in that the journey

is said to be both far and near. This suggests that this could either be the physical or mental journey that one makes temporarily and then comes back. In this case, this is the meaning of the “near” journey. The “far” journey refers to death which is a long journey – one from which a person never returns. Another form of semantic absurdity is seen in the use of the word “dreams” which is downright ambiguous. Searching for truth in dreams in line four is ambiguous in that, most of the time dreams are deceptive; they can make one imagine that he/she has something very good only to wake up and discover it was all illusionary. The reverse also happens. The other implication of the word is with reference to the vision or goal that a person has in life. This refers to things like: building a house or starting one’s business. By “searching for truth in dreams”, the persona seeks for the fulfillment that comes with accomplishing a long - held aspiration.

In the second stanza (line six), the persona compares himself/herself to the African bee, “Dishing out sweet pains without fear”. “Sweet pains” is oxymoronic because sweetness is associated with a state of being free from pain. These two are strange bedfellows but still possible especially considering their source – the bee which gives honey for sweetness and stings for pain. Here, the persona refers to the ambivalent nature of human beings who are both good and bad. In this case, the metaphor of a bee is quite effective. Line eight is outrightly paradoxical in that the “I” is “teaching death how to dodge me!” The reason for this is that death is something that no one on earth has been able to control. It has conquered the big and the small alike with none escaping its sting. The persona’s claim that he/she is controlling death points to doing what a human being can do to “keep death away”: eating well and seeking medical attention when sick. This is

nevertheless limited because even when one is healthy, he/she can die instantly from such unforeseen causes as road accidents and fires.

Stanza three begins with the repetition of a line that begins all preceding stanzas; “Today while I am here”, which alludes to the temporariness of life. This means that we only have now/today to do what we have to do. Line ten revisits the idea of dreams that was introduced in line four to refer to the vision of the persona as well as his/her aspirations. “I’ll discover the secrets of my heart, /And relearn the meaning of “dear”, in line eleven refers to self-discovery through self reflection as well as making adjustments in life. Here, it means the persona will try to catch up with the meaning of some concepts that have changed over time and also try to discover his/her purpose in life. Line twelve is absurd because the persona claims that his/her heart is travelling without a chart. Here, a chart refers to a compass or a map to guide the pilgrim. The absence of this crucial document underlines the risk of getting lost or not achieving much. This concluding line points to the absurdity of life in that sometimes, due to lack of proper goals, we fail to achieve our targets; thus rendering life unfulfilling.

**“SO MUCH OF LESS TIME”** (“Heartbeats” 37), is another poem in which Kap-kirwok employs semantic absurdities to highlight the subject of mortality and the passage of time. The events in the poem are told in the first person’s narrative voice with the persona evaluating and reflecting on the passing of time in his/her life. The poem is in form of two quatrains.

The title of the poem is first and foremost paradoxical in that it talks of a situation where there is a lot of time yet very little of it at the same time. This state is rather absurd in that the two

antithetical states are not normally seen to co-exist. The first state of having a lot of time is captured in line one in the alliteration of the two words, "...stand still..." Lines three and four bring out the absurdity of the persona's position in that while his/her skull (meaning, his mind) enjoys scheming and dreaming, time to achieve and actualize these schemes is running out. The metaphor of a skull is effective in developing paradox in that it captures the inability of the mind to read the signs of the times (read think). Thus, it is appropriate for the persona to refer to it as a skull because it is dead, by virtue of not doing its work. The word "skull" also captures the idea of death which might close in on the persona any time. The words "scheme" and "dream" suggest that some major projects could be in the offing, yet their fulfillment is put to great doubt by line four: "Yet it will not be long before its hurried pace is gone".

The deceptiveness of the mind is captured in line one where the persona talks of "...shrill whistles..." of his/her mind. The use of the metaphor of a whistle alludes to wooing whereby young men, for example, are known to whistle to girls as a way of enticing them. The analogy of wooing captures the theme of deception which is so prevalent in such relationships. In the same way, the mind is deceiving the persona to continue taking his/her time in "standing still" and "listening" without warning him/her that time is quickly dwindling. There is sharp contrast between the mind's "standing still" to listen and the time "fluttering by" as it emphasizes the inability of the mind to perceive that time has a hurried pace. The quick passage of time is suggested by the word "flutter" which in sound symbolism indicates quick movement.

Lines six and seven introduce paradox where he /she says that: "Even though so much pain and death abounds..." (Ibid.). Here, we have juxtaposition of very antithetical entities in that while

there is a lot of pain and death which are seen as negative situations, yet we have life and laughter. Laughter and life epitomize comfort, satisfaction and fulfillment. The presentation of the two opposing states as co-existing realistically portrays the absurdity of life whereby the ups and downs of life present a balanced opposition. The fact that the persona's state has abundance of both emotions (laughter and pain) represents a bizarre kind of balance, which can only be seen as absurd.

### **3.7 Nurturing One's Talent**

Every human being is endowed with some kind of talent. However, developing this talent is the sole responsibility of each individual. The road to this discovery is however rough due to distractions especially from peers. In **"A SHAKE (A) SPEARE JOKE"** ("Heartbeats" 8), Kapkirwok employs semantic absurdities to highlight what appears like his own experience, when nurturing his talent of writing amidst distraction by peers.

The poem is written in three quatrains. The persona who is a first person narrator seems to refer to the poet himself because it alludes to writing. One of the most outstanding elements of semantic oddities that the poet uses is that of an eye-catching title, derived from the name of the famous Elizabethan writer, William Shakespeare. The title is clearly ambiguous in that it seems to refer to Shakespeare – the writer and the act of shaking a spear, which suggests doing something daring. Mention of the name Shakespeare calls to mind the genius of Shakespeare in writing. In the first two lines of the first stanza, the persona introduces the conflict in the poem: "They all said I could Shake (a) speare/What could I say if they were sincere?" By this, the persona is alluding to the skill of writing for which Shakespeare was renowned. This helps the

reader know that “they” attested to his/her writing ability. The second line reveals the persona’s distrust of them when he/she says “...if they were sincere?”

The second stanza further develops the theme of mockery. Lines five and six give us a hint of the persona’s doubt of their sincerity: “I could tell by the roar of laughter/Of my friends that day and the day after”. Their laughter causes the persona to feel that their words are not sincere. Line ten is paradoxical, meaning, to allow Shakespeare to stir or challenge him/her into writing. The persona’s mention of: “Or allow the Spear to shake me...” alludes to the idea of playing with words which is basically what writing is about. A spear symbolizes writing in that a spear resembles a pen or pencil. The last two lines voice the persona’s quest to be able to write or possibly challenge Shakespeare. He/she hopes that if he/she does so, that will for sure silence his/her detractors. The subject that this poem addresses is an important one because the issue of demeaning others is a common social problem especially among peers. The message of the poem is very useful especially to young people, who have to contend with discouragement from their friends in their endeavour to chart their courses in life.

### **3.8 Nature**

For the world to run normally, the various elements of nature would have to work in harmony. Though human beings take the normal operation of nature for granted, a lapse in this harmony would throw the entire universe into disarray. Kap-kirwok gives us a glimpse of such a scenario in the poem: “**I DREAMT THAT...**” (“Monologues” 15). The poet utilises semantic absurdities to illustrate how elements of nature work together to portray different moods. The events in the poem are seen through a first person narrator, who is nonetheless withdrawn and lets the events

narrate themselves without much interruption. The poem is in the form of two stanzas each of seven lines. The first stanza deals with part of the dream where every natural element or operation comes to a standstill. The second stanza presents the resumption of the normal order of things but with a certain level of violence and forcefulness.

In the first five lines of the first stanza, the persona presents different natural elements that cease to operate normally. We find the wind stopping to blow, the sun stopping to shine, rivers stopping their flow, birds stopping to sing and all living things stopping to listen. This turn of events is quite unique because it makes the day abnormal, due to the change from the normal pattern. Lines six and seven capture the absurdity of the situation where the persona uses an oxymoron: “A loud silence asks a question:/Whyy, whyyyy, whyyyyyyyyy?”(15). The fact that a “loud silence” is the one questioning why there’s change in the normal running of the processes of nature is clearly a case of semantic incongruity. The reason for this is that usually when one is asking a question, one would have to be audible for the respondent to be able to respond. In this case, it is clearly odd for the persona to state that a “loud silence” asked a question/or that the question was asked in “loud silence”. This is the poet’s way of foregrounding the abnormal situation and the questions that this abnormal situation is likely to elicit. In line seven, the poet employs lexical deviation to capture this abnormality by neologising graphologically: “Whyy, whyyyy, whyyyyyyyyy?” The odd way of writing the word “why” with additional letters clearly captures the abnormality of the situation.

The second stanza presents a different scenario and this change in mood is marked by use of the word “then” in the first line of the second stanza. Here, we notice that the wind begins to flow,

the sun starts shining, rivers start to flow, birds start to sing and all living things resume their patterns of operation with a greater forcefulness than normal. The wind is “rushing”, not just blowing; the sun is “shooting out” rays rather than just shining. All living things on their part are “shouting out”. The echo of the answer that was shouted in line twelve is said to eat “all sounds and spread like cancer”. Most of the images used in stanza two carry with them some tension, some destructive characteristics. The elements of nature cease to be benevolent and instead assume malevolent qualities. Line twelve makes use of paradox where we are told that “All living things shouted out a silent answer”.

The poet uses personification to bring out the paradox of this scenario in that a shout can never be silent as the persona alleges. This answer is also seen to be malevolent in that its echo is “eating all sounds” and is also seen to “spread like cancer”. All these negative images are meant to capture the scenario that takes root when elements of nature “rebel” or fail to operate normally. This clearly shows that what is so good and friendly, can turn out to be destructive and malevolent.

Line fourteen is a refrain of some kind to answer the question that was asked in line seven. The absurdity of it is that the answer is not given in full. This kind of answer makes the poem to end on an anticlimax with the words: “It said, because, becauseee, becauseeeeee” (15). In this answer, the poet intimates that there is nothing that happens without a cause. This is reminiscent of the destruction of natural ecosystems that took place in Kenya towards the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty first century. This was occasioned by the indiscriminate felling of trees, and the negative effects are all too evident in the frequent

droughts and such occurrences as the drying up of water bodies. The poet is telling us that there is always a root cause to what happens, be it good or bad. Thus, he suggests that we reflect on our actions and try to dig out the causes especially for the bad happenings in our socio-economic milieu.

### **3.9 Race Relations**

Since time immemorial, maintaining cordial relationships among people of different races has proved a major world challenge. Racial discrimination has often brought untold misery to many people in the world. The most disturbing fact is that racism is founded on lies and misconceptions among people of different races. In **“THE MEANING OF RACISM”** (“Heartbeats” 43), Kap-kirwok dissects the age-old monster of racism, laying bare its deceptiveness using semantic incongruities. Like in the previous poem, he employs elements of nature to pass his message.

The poem comprises four quatrains. One of the devices that the poet uses to bring out semantic incongruities is that of personification. Racism is portrayed as challenging various elements of nature about their exclusive qualities and portraying itself as the one in possession of those excellencies. In the first stanza, racism is personified in that it is “looking” and “saying” in the first two lines. It is portrayed as challenging the sky about its height – which as it is well known, is the sky’s exclusive natural characteristic. Ironically, we find racism claiming the supremacy of the sky (in terms of height). In line four, we find racism stamping its supremacy of height over the sky with the challenge – “No matter how hard you try”. In stanza two, (lines five - eight) racism again challenges the sea on the sea’s exclusive right to depth – “But deeper I will always be”. In all these instances, we find it absurd for racism to claim rights that do not belong to it.

In stanza three, racism again challenges the sun about its exclusive right to brightness. In line eleven, racism claims this right to brightness with a subtle threat. “No matter how bright you shine”. Stanza four is outrightly paradoxical where the persona launches into some kind of polemics against racism with the stark claim that: “Racism in truth is a lie”. Here the persona is delivering his/her verdict on racism. He/she uncovers racism’s hidden nature as opposed to the claim by racism that it is the truth. Lines fifteen and sixteen enhance paradox where the persona says: “No matter how false the lie/Untruths will always be the truth”. The strength of the poem lies in stanza four where the poet powerfully employs paradox to counter racism’s lies. In this poem, Kap-kirwok is teaming up with the many right-minded people in condemning racism for what it is. In a web article entitled: “**RACISM**”, Ayn Rand defines Racism as:

...the notion of ascribing moral, social or political significance to a man’s genetic lineage...which means, in practice, that a man is to be judged, not by his own character and actions, but by the characters and actions of a collective of ancestors (Rand 1963).

In what appears like his verdict on racism, Rand (in the same article) sums it up as “...a doctrine of, by and for brutes”. Rand’s argument is in perfect agreement with that of this poem, that racism is nothing more than a fallacy.

### **3.10 Global Issues**

As well as addressing issues that focus on Africa, Kap-kirwok does not lose sight of global issues. In fact global issues seem to be of great concern to Kap-kirwok. Using his tool of semantic absurdities, he highlights some of these issues in the poem “**-ISATION IS THE SAVIOUR**” (“Monologues” 47). The poem deals with global slogans or keywords which have become popular in the twenty first century. The title of the poem is a form of lexical deviation

with the poet utilizing neologism to coin a new word – “Isation”. In this terse and compressed poem, Kap-kirwok employs semantic absurdities to question some of the catchwords which the West has popularized as the keys to development and economic emancipation. In his exploration of these policies, he reveals that they are in fact baits to keep the world under the control of the West. This ottava rima (eight-line poem) is the shortest poem that we have handled so far. The poem comprises one stanza of medium length lines each of which is alternated with a one - word line. The one-word line foregrounds the big “-isation” terminologies which are reputed to be the answer to the problems of today’s world. The events in the poem are told through a unique, collective first person narrator, the “we” who is a member/are members of the society he/she /they is/are commenting about.

In line one, the persona asserts that everyone should be open to ‘liberalisation’. This is a term that has gained wide usage in the twenty first century to refer to opening up to new ways, methods and ideas as opposed to being closed. This is especially so in the area of trade. Line three introduces the second “-isation” idea in: “And embrace with our poverty/Democratisation”. By employing the phrase, “...with our poverty”, the poet introduces paradox in the line. This is a way of satirizing democracy in that it is not even able to solve one of the most basic of world’s problems – poverty. In that case, it is like the “we” are being encouraged to learn to live with both poverty and democracy, which is the height of absurdity.

Lines five and six recommend ‘globalisation’ as the “saviour” from ignorance. Globalisation refers to a new world order where due to the rapid technological growth, goods and information

move very fast across the world, making it something of a 'global village'. Thus, the world has become 'very small'.

Lines seven and eight are outrightly paradoxical in that they talk of the "we" being freed by colonisation. This is the height of absurdity because colonisation is a form of slavery, where a region is under the control of a foreign power. For the persona to state that colonisation will bring freedom is to be outrightly ironical because in the literal sense, it is the direct opposite. All in all, the poet appears to use semantic absurdities to satirize the application of big-sounding foreign words and systems which may not work in the socio-cultural milieu of the "we". The poet is recommending that each society be able to look for solutions that are appropriate to its specific problems. By using the term "saviour", which has Christian connotations, the persona satirizes the use of foreign principles. This is in making the policies appear like we cannot do without them, just like the Biblical belief that says it is impossible to enter heaven without passing through the 'Saviour'.

The next poem, "**THE MEANING OF DEMOCRACY**" ("Monologues" 46), deals with a theme that has been touched on in the previous poem. It explores the much popularized system of government – 'democracy', revealing its true nature. The theme of this poem, as alluded to in the previous one, is the deceptiveness of democracy.

The poem is made up of four triplets. Events in the poem are told through the first person's narrative voice. The persona compares democracy to various establishments in his/her community namely: a beauty salon, a public pub and a place of worship; showing each of their

individual deceptive characteristics. In the first line of the first stanza, the persona refers to democracy using the simile of a beauty salon. This is significant because a salon is generally regarded as a place where one's looks are worked on in order to look presentable. The next two lines present the irony of the beauty salon in that while it purports to make one look beautiful and presentable, it only works on the outside, leaving the inside (which is the most important) undone. Inner beauty is more important than outer beauty in that it has to do with the right attitude and virtue of character, and therefore working on the inner is much more useful than on the outside. The analogy of a beauty salon with reference to democracy is paradoxical. It points to Kap-kirwok's view of the superficial usefulness of democracy, whereby it only offers surface solutions, without tackling the real problems that ail society. The other paradoxical face of democracy is that it hides the evils that lie inside it, just like the way a salon hides 'evils' such as wrinkles and white hair in a person. Angira seems to advance a similar view towards democracy in his poem entitled: **"OBBLIGATO FROM THE PUBLIC GALLERY"**.

The public has no belief  
in democracy:  
It has mocked his expectations (81).

In this excerpt, Angira joins Kap-kirwok in discrediting democracy as a system of government. Angira goes on to explain that the public's disillusionment is caused by the failure of democracy to fulfill its expectations.

In the second stanza of **"THE MEANING OF DEMOCRACY"**, the poet uses a simile to compare democracy to a place of worship, where one goes for spiritual retouch. The persona presents the conflict between what should be and what is in line six thus: "But discover that like all deals there is a catch." This shows the paradox of the place of worship which is presented as

having some ‘fine print’ which the worshipper only gets to know of after getting in. This simile of a place of worship alludes to aspects of exploitativeness and suggests that it (the place of worship) is not just out to dish out doses of spiritual ‘manna’, but is indeed out to exploit the worshippers for what it can extort from them. In this case, democracy which prides itself as the solution to the problems of many nations is portrayed as being absurd. This is because it is self-edifying rather than edifying the nations that buy its well-marketed tenets. Here again, Kap-kirwok uses a simile to develop paradox.

The third simile used to describe democracy (in the third stanza) compares it to a public pub where one goes to have some refreshment, but which later turns out to be deadly if too much of it is taken. A public pub at first looks attractive but later turns out to be counterproductive. This simile is used to develop the paradox of democracy, which is painted as being good but which when used in excess can kill. The poet is alluding to the propensity of democracy to regenerate into anarchy if too much of it is given. The poet implies that even democracy has to have limits, otherwise too much of it can prove counterproductive, as people justify their wrongdoing in the name of their democratic right. This is truly a case of semantic absurdity.

Stanza four reiterates the persona’s assertion that democracy is hypocritical; therefore each of the three similes (a beauty salon, a place of worship and a public pub) is relevant. The idea of democracy being hypocritical is paradoxical in that we think of democracy as a solution and not as a problem. The persona, in line twelve delivers his/her verdict on democracy in these words: “And too often seems only fit for the most crazy”. In this verdict, we find the paradox of democracy, which is famed the world over as the most effective system of government. This is

often reiterated in its definition as the government of the people, for the people and by the people. The poet employs semantic incongruities to drive home this fact by using images that sound rather ironical or contradictory. The three structures to which he/she compares democracy look positive and beneficial to their 'consumers' at face value but have some hidden weaknesses. Indeed the three: a beauty salon, a place of worship and a public pub, all have to do with retouch, replenishment, rejuvenation and re-energization. In this case, the poet paints powerful images that demonstrate that it is only after digging deeper that you discover the woes and muck that lie below the surface beauty and alleged value. In this way, these similes compare very effectively with democracy which is said to be the best but which has its fair share of woes. The three similes allude to the deceptiveness of democracy which promises heaven but can only deliver something midway between hell and heaven. This is a very enlightening poem as it opens the reader's eyes to the weaknesses of 'ready made' solutions. The poem warns the society against being too trusting as it puts one at the risk of getting disillusioned.

Although Kap-kirwok does not delve much into explaining what he thinks is wrong with democracy (except mention of hypocrisy), Christiano's essay entitled "Democracy" gives us hints of some of its shortcomings. In the essay, Christiano refers to Plato's argument (Republic Book VI) that democracy is inferior to such forms of government as monarchy and aristocracy because it tends to undermine the expertise necessary to properly governed societies. He further refers to Plato's argument that democracy allows those who are experts at winning elections and nothing else to dominate democratic politics. Christiano also refers to Hobbes (1651 Chap.xix) where it is argued that democracy is inferior to monarchy as it fosters destabilizing dissension

among subjects. From the above argument, we may conclude that the poet is aware of these weaknesses and wishes to warn the society against adopting every other popularized policy.

### **3.11 Urbanization and Materialism**

To many people, urbanization and materialism are necessary evils. This means that they have their good and bad sides. The poem: **“HONG KONG”** (“Monologues” 39) deals with urbanization and the vanity of endless ambition. The persona in the poem is an independent observer who adopts the third person’s narrative voice. The poem comprises three stanzas where the first two are terza rimas (three-line stanza) and the third is a sestet. The poet mixes both short and long lines where in most cases a stanza opens with a short line and subsequent lines get longer gradually. In the first stanza, the poet introduces a striking feature of the city:

“Skyscrapers in surreal sky/Fingers of ambition stretched skyward” (Ibid.).

In line two, the persona uses a striking metaphor, where he/she talks of “fingers of ambition...” to refer to skyscrapers which stretch like fingers in the sky. This suggests great height that makes the skyscrapers look like fingers. The word “ambition” indicates that the skyscrapers are products of great effort to put up very high buildings. This is motivated by the desire to show off, and also for the purpose of beating previous records (as far as height is concerned). This connotes loss of the human touch as people struggle for material enrichment by maximizing on small spaces. This untrammelled ambition makes the buildings stand “awkwardly” amidst the rest of the landscape.

In stanza two, (lines four - six) the skyscrapers are personified in a more direct way with the use of such words as “fingers” and “kids”. The stanza also shows how mechanical the skyscrapers

are: “A mass of sky-pointing fingers/Concrete kids begging for more from God/Goaded God for more, though they already have a lot” (Ibid.). Reference to the buildings as ‘a mass’ of sky-pointing fingers and “concrete” kids brings out the lifeless and mechanical nature of those behind the construction of the buildings. It is also worth noting how everything has been made mechanical, including the “kids”. Line six points to the insatiable nature of those responsible for construction of the buildings – possibly alluding to the capitalistic system that is interested in amassing more and more. The persona uses a rather absurd metaphor in stating that the fingers or kids look like they are begging God for more. This is in reference to fingers outstretched into the sky. The fact that the fingers and concrete kids are begging God for more, and they already have a lot, points to the greed that usually accompanies most ventures of this nature. The outstretched fingers suggest greed as human beings continue to ask God for more not for their use, but for pride and endless competition.

The gradual lengthening of the lines epitomizes increase in the quest for material wealth. The first two stanzas comprise run-on lines and this is significant as it captures the unstoppable quest to amass material wealth. The metaphor of fingers is further developed in stanza three where in line seven, the fingers have graduated from fingers in stanza one to “crowded fingers”. This suggests increase in the number of buildings due to increased urbanization and industrialization. Through this metaphor, the poet aptly captures the appearance of the city of Hong Kong, which is reputed to have the largest number of skyscrapers in the world. The poet uses metaphors like fingers and kids in a new way to show the absurdity of urbanization. There is sharp contrast between the ground which is crowded with fingers (line seven) and the open sky space in line eight which the buildings seem to be craving for. In stanza three, a mood of urgency and tension

is created as the fingers “scream” with the calls in the second line. This no doubt alludes to increase in the level of greed: “Crowded fingers silently scream: /“Run, run, up into the open sky space/Down below, there is no space in any place” (Ibid.).

“Crowded fingers silently scream” in the first line of stanza three is rather oxymoronic in that one cannot scream while silent. This means that the buildings are “crying” out because they are also victims of man’s vain quest to amass more and more. This is an example of Kap-kirwok’s use of personification to create absurdity. The first three lines of stanza three create a mood of urgency and unrest, as buildings compete for space. This is in sharp contrast with the mood in the next three lines which is one of calm mockery as suggested by: “The gods up on the brooding hills /Look down at the fingers with bemused smiles/As concrete and glass stretch out in miles and miles” (Ibid.). This creates the impression of a situation in which the building of skyscrapers has taken a rather abnormal pace, as if there is a spirit of possession propelling them on. It is as if man is trying to overtake nature which is epitomized by the hills, as the buildings run into the sky. The persona paints a rather satirical picture as “the gods up on the brooding hills” mock man’s effort to be equal or higher than them. The sky is normally taken to be the abode of gods or God and encroaching on their/His abode is tantamount to blasphemy. That the hills are said to be “brooding” means that they are in deep thought. This is a case in which Kap-kirwok has used personification to create semantic incongruity.

The idea Kap-kirwok is trying to drive home is that by constructing such high buildings, man is trying to challenge nature (hills) and God or the supreme being(s). The folly of man’s action is portrayed in line eleven where the gods are said to look at man’s action with “...bemused smiles”

which shows that they are actually mocking man. This suggests that man is not likely to succeed in his quest to be like God. This idea is reminiscent of the Biblical story where men tried to build the tower of Babel so that they could reach God (Gen 11:4-5). Their efforts were thwarted when God threw upon them a spirit of confusion. The idea of concrete and glass stretching out in miles and miles in the sky points to the absurdity of man in his modernization attempts. This is like interfering both with the laws of nature and also those of God.

### **3.12 Conclusion**

In conclusion, we can say that throughout the seventeen poems we have analysed, Kap-kirwok is portrayed as a master craftsman who uses his unique tool of semantic oddities to speak to the society. From our analysis, it is quite clear that he uses this device not just for embellishing his poetry but more so as a tool to tackle the challenges of the day. Through semantic absurdities, he has praised, sympathized with, castigated, warned, dialogued with, cried with and also laughed with the society. Throughout, we see elements of semantic incongruities being used as a scalpel to dissect the society so as to address the many pertinent issues in it. Like a surgeon, the poet cuts open and squeezes out pus from societal boils, fixes parts together all in a bid to bring healing to the society. All this is done in a fresh way, through such devices as oxymoron, ambiguity, metaphors, similes, figures of speech, personification as well as paradox. Ultimately, we have a package of not only beautifully crafted poetry, but also one which is pregnant with messages for the society. In the next chapter, we focus on findings, conclusion and recommendations for further study.

## 4.0 CHAPTER FOUR

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 4.1 Introduction

This study set out to do a stylistic analysis of Kap-kirwok's poetry as well as find out his social vision for Africa. The study comprises an analysis of thirty poems selected from his two poetry collections. The selection of the thirty poems was based on the assumption that they represent a cross-section of his poetry in the two collections in terms of style and themes. Thus, it is our hope that they provide a glimpse into his corpus. Though seemingly uncomplicated, Kap-kirwok's poetry involves a subtle use of language. A major strength of his poetry is that it makes very novel use of language in that he takes words that we use in our normal everyday communication and puts new life into them so that they have a fresh meaning. Nancy Mburu, in a newspaper book review of Heartbeats of the Mind sums up his poetry this way: "This simple-to-read-and understand assortment of poems literally breathes fresh air into the world of verse writing" (Mburu 25). Our analysis entailed trying to separate the strands as we tried to dig out the meaning of words that have been used in a new way.

Our study focused on two stylistic aspects namely: semantic oddities and phonological manipulation. Our choice of the two stylistic aspects was guided by our belief that the widespread use of the two devices by the poet indicates that they were key vehicles of communication in his writing. The two theories that we employed were very useful as they enabled us to penetrate the poems. The stylistics theory was especially useful in enabling us to harness words or put them under the microscope of language. This in turn helped us to generate and decipher meanings that lay below the surface. The sociological literary theory on its part

enabled us to arrive at the social vision of the writer. Through the two theories, we were able to come up with interesting shades of meaning that a casual reading of the poetry would not have availed to us.

Chapter One was a background chapter which involved mapping out what the study would entail. Chapter Two dealt with semantic oddities and Kap-kirwok's social vision for Africa. Under this, we focused on three stylistic aspects namely: paradox, ambiguity and oxymoron. Here, we found out that the poet uses these features to shed light on pertinent issues in a way that is full of novelty and versatility. This is one feature that distinguishes the poet's writing prowess in that he is able to take the normal everyday words and inject new life into them.

The focus of chapter Three was phonological manipulation and Kap-kirwok's social vision for Africa. Among the stylistic features dealt with here are: rhyme, alliteration, assonance, consonance, ideophones, onomatopoeia, rhythm and to a very small extent, elision. By manipulating these features either singly or in combination, the poet has been able to clothe his ideas with images and symbols that help bring out his social vision for Africa. Like the bard in the traditional society who had his/her lesson coated with sugary language, Kap-kirwok adorns his ideas and words with beautiful sounds features like rhyme and alliteration. The use of such features makes his poetry to be seen as credible works of art which can be used to teach. The musical element in the poems greatly enhances the aesthetic value of his poetry thus fulfilling the role of the ancient bard as outlined by Ngara (1982). In a classroom situation, the poems can be very useful in enlivening a language lesson as well as in inculcating moral lessons. This is a very outstanding feature of his poetry.

## 4.2 Summary of the findings of the study

The research has been a daunting task. Both time and availability of funds posed major limitations to the study but the beauty of the language and a desire to get to the bottom of this erstwhile unexplored world of treasure kept us going. The study was nevertheless successful in that we were able to achieve our objectives. We were able to identify many examples of both semantic oddities and cases where the poet had used sound gymnastics. We managed to analyse many of them but we cannot claim to have exhausted everything. We also tried to establish the purpose for which the poet chose to use the two devices as his communicative tools. Finally we tried to establish the poet's social vision for Africa. Through this analysis, we were able to come up with a lot of findings some of which are discussed below.

Through our analysis of sound aspects, we were able to make several observations concerning the significance of their use by the poet. One of these is that Kap-kirwok's manipulation of sound aspects has greatly added aesthetic value to his poetry. This has been achieved through infusing a musical pattern to his poetry. In addition, attaching sound aspects to various words has been a useful building block in creating images and symbols. Through these figures of speech, the poet has been able to highlight issues of importance in society. For instance, by using rhyme or alliteration in a poem, the poet draws attention to certain words that are loaded with meaning. This is seen in the images and symbols they call to mind. Through these, the poet has very successfully articulated issues that pertain to Africa in particular and the world in general.

Another observation we made was that the device of semantic incongruity has been used purposively. In many of the instances, Kap-kirwok uses words in a way that is both unique and

odd. In a poem like, “**SUNSET IN THE MORNING**”, we find that the title itself is odd because the sun does not usually set in the morning. By using ordinary words such as the ones in this title in a unique way, the poet draws attention to them. He again uses them to create images and symbols to highlight his ideas. This lends fresh breath to these everyday words enabling them to give impact to his message. This coupled by the simple and accessible language lends a quality of novelty to his poetry. Kap-kirwok’s ability to manipulate language despite the fact that he is not a scholar of language or literature, points to an artist of great skill and potential.

Kap-kirwok’s poetry addresses people of all walks of life; from the vegetable vendor to the high and mighty in the corridors of power. It also addresses a wide spectrum of social concerns ranging from love, life, urbanization, death, hope, despair, political mismanagement, injustices to racism. It also addresses global issues such as life in cosmopolitan cities like Hong Kong, Mumbai and even Washington D.C. As far as ‘the person’ is concerned, it addresses matters of the mind, body and even the soul – thus it is holistic. His poetry would therefore provide a good corpus for anybody interested in taking a study in poetry.

As for Kap-kirwok’s social vision for Africa, we find that this is ingrained in a number of poems, some of which mention Africa explicitly and others that allude to the African situation. Through these poems, we deduce that the poet has a special concern and vision for the continent. Kap-kirwok seems to envisage an Africa of plenty and self-sufficiency, an Africa that can exploit her God-given resources to meet all her needs rather than spread out her hands to borrow. Moreover, he seems to see an Africa that can enjoy good governance and justice and one which can be free

from the tripartite plague of disease, poverty and ignorance. Indeed, his poetry seems to be in agreement with Amateshe (1979) where he says:

I have examined critics who though paying due respect to the poetry of the Negritude Tradition, feel that the time for Africa to glorify its past is long gone. There is now an urgent need for African poets to face the existing social and economic reality as genuinely as possible (vi).

Kap-kirwok's poetry seems to be like an answer to the cry sounded by the critic referred to above. Far from glorifying Africa and its past, he goes out of his way to address the issues of the day without a measure of flattery or euphemism. As far as Africa's failings are concerned (especially those which are seen as self-inflicted), he calls a spade a spade. In his poetry, Kap-kirwok confronts Africa head-on. It is like he is telling Africa: "Yes you are beautiful thanks to your deep, dark colour. Yes you are a land of rich dances and laughter, but look! What are you doing to yourself? Why are you a beggar? Why your hand is always outstretched for doles of aid? Is it because you do not have resources? Is it not because you would not listen to those who would warn you?" It is like the poet is calling upon Africa to awake from her sleep. Nowhere is this idea better captured than in this excerpt of the poem, "ARISE AND WALK" by Rui de Noronha in (Dickinson 1989):

You sleep, and the world marches on, land of darkness  
 You sleep and the world rolls on, the world pursuing  
 On the high side of a hemisphere walks progress  
 And you sleep on the other, long dreams renewing (Dickinson 1989).

### 4.3 Conclusion

Our analysis of how Kap-kirwok has manipulated sounds in his communication clearly demonstrates that sounds are powerful tools that a creative writer can exploit to shed light on issues of social importance. It is possible for a literary writer to exploit the simple linguistic and sound resources available to him/her to come up with new and unique meanings to address issues

of the day. As for the poet's communicative effectiveness, it has emerged that he is highly successful in his use of his chosen style. The beauty and versatility of Kap-kirwok's poetry lies in his ability to use the simple, everyday words in a new and fresh way. The simplicity of his language makes his work accessible to a large readership which is a welcome relief from the complex brand of poetry that is common on the literary scene. This disproves the myth that poetry is essentially a complex subject. His effectiveness in communication proves that even people who do not have a rich literary background can write poetry. It is our hope that our analysis of the poems has contributed a step towards unearthing the immense treasures hidden in Kap-kirwok's poetry.

#### **4.4 Recommendation for Further Study**

As a recommendation, scholars interested in Kap-kirwok's poetry can focus on lexical absurdity in his poetry. Alternatively, a researcher could analyse semantic incongruities and/or phonological gymnastics of the poems in the collections that we did not analyse. It is our belief that this study is a mere groundbreaking act, a mere scratch on the surface of what we believe to be a vast world of treasure. This being the first comprehensive critique of Kap-kirwok's poetry (as far as we have established), it is our hope that the findings of the study will act as an eye-opener and inspiration to other scholars and lovers of poetry to delve deeper and find out what more lies below the surface.

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**APPENDIX****1. THE MOB KILLED HIM**

The whips screamed out pain and sin,  
 Blood blurted out of a bleeding skin,  
 Cruel rocks rained off a cracked head,  
 “Kill him, kill him” bayed the mad herd.

The man died dead, the mob slunk away.  
 All knew what they did but not why.  
 Some wondered: we killed him, he is no more:  
 But will God, one day not settle his score?

(Kap-kirwok, “Heartbeats” 54)

**2. A SMOKER’S BATTLE**

This small, slim and round stick,  
 Smooth and nice to my touch;  
 Softly killing me - I can vouch,  
 Yet it is what makes me tick.

Can’t do without you, however hard I try  
 ‘Cause you are now a part of me-it seems.  
 A-Part-Of-Me, if you know what I imply;  
 A friendly enemy that does fit what it deems.

My friend, my enemy, my friendly enemy,  
 Each time I hate you, I love you, you hear me?  
 Every time is my last time to commit this crime,  
 But then the last time with you is every time!

I long for the day I will be in the right mood,  
 To quit my love – hate affair with you for good.  
 It can be done, yes, it is easy to say;  
 But, dear God, when will I quit, which day?

(Kap-kirwok, “Heartbeats” 48)

### **3. THE SEESAW**

Today their peace resolve is stronger, so it seems;  
 Because after a quarrel, it always seems so.  
 And yet they both know secretly the truth...  
 Next time the resolve will disappear, quietly.

The quarrel always returns not as a one-time stranger  
 But as a permanent stranger who loves to return!  
 And so they live life on a resolve-quarrel seesaw,  
 As if the seesaw is part of their life’s resolve.

(Kap-kirwok, “Heartbeats” 39)

**4. I ONLY CRY TEARS OF JOY**

When sorrow throws its vile blow,  
And everyone's tears freely flow;  
And, though screams of grief feel my ears,  
I urge my tear glands in vain to shed tears.

When pain preys on my sweet thrill,  
And the ache is such that it could kill;  
And, though I may wince and in my heart cry,  
Tears forsake me and my eyes remain dry.

But when cheer and joy make merry,  
And friends toast champagne and sherry;  
When victory leaps sky high , and honour to enjoy,  
Then only do I bath my cheeks...with tears of joy.

(Kap-kirwok, "Monologues" 19)

**5. SUNSET IN THE MORNING**

"My eyes are closed wide, wide open  
I see the smile on the sun's face

Today it is so bright

The wind's so kind

O! I want so much to live today

So much that I could die right away.

“My ears hate to see the morning sunset

Evil water overflows in my ear cups

The throb is so faint

The pain so quaint

O! Age mates, cry for me today

Tell me this day is not yet my day

“So sick I know I am dying each day

But dear God, aid me so I may kill AIDS

I will finish school

I know am no fool

O God! I am going to die from this pain.

How I wish to train the doctor to be my brain!

“Why are the crowds laughing at me today?

You old people staring at me up there.

Give me some peace

Let me blink please!

O my mother my river cloud, hold me tight

I aam flowing into thhe briiigggtt nnnningghhht!”

(Kap-kirwok, “Heartbeats” 36)

## **6. TEARS AND CHEERS FOR AFRICA**

Tears flow wildly amid rich dance and laughter

Tummies yell and yearn for bread and butter.

Sorrow soars like a vulture above this womb of a mankind.

Menacing clouds cast shadows over this graveyard of a kind.

Ignorance mocks yesterday’s literacy in hieroglyphics

And stands triumphant over the prostrate body of astrophysics.

African unity! O! Unity abounds in a million ethnic collections

But disunity’s fruit is sweeter still for its people living as nations.

Africa, it is true too, is a land of time and honey

In fact one day it might export time for money!

Africa, a paradox; a black box lost in a maze

Africa, a question mark in empty space.

And now, let's toast to the sick health of Africa  
 All raise your glasses and clink two tears for Africa!

(Kap-kirwok, "Monologues" 44)

## **7. WE DID NOT BELIEVE THE SEER**

We did not believe the seer

The seer who foretold the snake

The snake that crawled its way from the sea

The sea from where the wind blew kisses of death.

We did not believe the seer

Who foretold the coming of the pale ones

Pale ones that carried walking sticks that spat fire

Fire that shattered lives of many from a great distance.

We did not believe the seer

Who saw the sowing of poisonous seeds

Seeds that caused father and son to fight

The fight that persists over the meaning of meaning.

We did not believe our own seer

"You are too old and senile," we told him

And now we reap the bitter fruit of our unbelief

As we reel, blow after blow, from them that he foretold.

(Kap-kirwok, "Monologues" 44)

### **8. YES I AM A BEGGAR...**

Yes I am a beggar

But I have no problem at all:

Except that my bowl shines less brighter

Than the minister's briefcase carrying a dole.

Yes, I am a beggar

But I am not complaining:

True , my clothes may be called tatter

But, cheer up our roads are better attired when it's raining.

Yes, I am a beggar

But I have no trouble really:

Though today the jigger in my ear is bigger

Tomorrow , to insults of "dog", I will be deafer mercifully.

Yes, I am a beggar

But just like our rich nation,

If every year our minister strives to beg better,

I too, work on my skill to obtain my daily ration

(Kap-kirwok, "Monologues" 44)

**9. MASTERS OF IGNORANT WISDOM.**

They are masters of ignorant wisdom,

Or in truth worse!

Their grip on the reins of power is firm,

Or so they judge.

Oblivious to the echoes of history, they prance;

While we all sleepwalk.

Meanwhile the sun rises less brighter with rays of rage;

Yet no change is seen.

We pray to dear God to expel their ignorant wisdom

And grant brief reprieve.

Meanwhile the land lies ruined but patient in silent beauty;

Abiding all the rubbish on it.

For how long will sunrise get dimmer and sunset redder

Before true wisdom prevails?

For how long will the oppressed sleep in daylight

Before their eyes can see?

(Kap-kirwok, "Heartbeats" 40)

**10 .TODAY WHILE I AM HERE**

Today while I am here,  
 My senses are pilgrims  
 On a journey far and near,  
 Searching for truth in dreams.

Today while I am here,  
 My mind is the African bee:  
 Dishing out sweet pains without fear,  
 And teaching death how to dodge me!

Today while I am here,  
 I'll discover the secrets of my heart,  
 And relearn the meaning of "dear"  
 As my heart journeys without a chart.

(Kap-kirwok, "Monologues" 3)

**11. A SHAKE (A) SPEARE JOKE**

They all said I could Shake (a) spear  
 What could I say if they were sincere?  
 The trouble is I know for sure  
 That for my vanity, they thought it was a cure.

‘I could tell by the roar of laughter  
 Of my friends that day and the day after  
 It must have tickled them to imagine later  
 How anyone but themselves could write better.

Yet all I needed was to Shake (a) speare  
 Or allow the Spear to shake me - if I didn’t fear  
 Is the day to Shake this speare anywhere near  
 ‘Cause if it is, I know the laughter will certainly clear.

(Kap-kirwok, “Heartbeats” 8)

## **12. THE MEANING OF RACISM**

Racism is looking at the sky  
 And saying “high you may be  
 But higher I will always be  
 No matter how hard you try”.

Racism is looking at the sea  
 And saying “deep you may be  
 But deeper I will always be  
 No matter how you see”.

Racism is looking at the sun  
 And saying “bright you may be  
 But brighter I will always be  
 No matter how bright you shine”.

Racism, in truth, is a lie  
 That says “I am the truth  
 No matter how false the lie  
 Untruths will always be the truth”.

(Kap-kirwok, “Heartbeats” 43)

### **13. THE MEANING OF DEMOCRACY**

Democracy, some say is like a beauty salon:  
 When we go in our outsides are done,  
 But the insides are left undone.

Other say it is like a place of worship:  
 You enter for mercy and spiritual retouch,  
 But discover that, like all deals, there is a catch.

Some disagree; they say it is like any public pub:  
 You go in ignorant of peril to have your fill,  
 But fail to see that too much ale will kill.

I agree with all, for each has its truth.

Democracy does come clothed in hypocrisy

And too often seems only fit for the most crazy.

(Kap-kirwok, "Monologues" 46)

#### **14. THE COMING STORM**

In the pained rumble

of every empty stomach,

--after days of vain foraging--

the storm gathers.

In the bitter tear

That sneaks down a sad cheek,

--needless grief having intruded--

the storm gathers.

In every sad teardrop

That departs every wretched eye,

--hope having lost the battle of life—

the storm gathers.

In every glazed glare  
 Of a drugged street child,  
 --a desperate spirit in a battle for survival--  
     the storm gathers.

In every sweet giggle  
 That echoes across the savanna,  
 --joy having briefly defied sorry--  
     the storm gathers.

In every self-satisfied belch  
 That issues from a contented throat  
 -- evidence of life lived to the full? --  
     the storm gathers.

But rejoice, dear brother  
 For in the eye of every storm  
 Lies calm waiting to be born  
     And silence to enjoy.

(Kap-kirwok, "Monologues" 49)

## **15. MUMBAI.. THE TOOT ORCHESTRA**

Boats rock lazily in the quay

Smoke chokes the sky making it look hazy  
 But though the sun's stare is dull and hazy  
 It is enough to make the water shimmer in the bay.

People swarm in massive waves  
 Cars dodge people as people dodge people  
 That cars and people cannot collide is a riddle  
 I wonder, wasn't life better when men lived in caves?

And O! the hooting of cars!  
 The city is a real Toot Orchestra  
 Horns jostle to be heard...triii, truuu, traaa  
 After a while it begins to sound like a kind of jazz.

Amidst this dance of life  
 Beauty and distaste freely mingle.  
 Acrid smells submit to sweet scents in a trickle  
 A thousand gods cheer as human dreams are buried alive.

(Kap-kirwok, "Monologues" 37)

## **16. A NEON WINDOW IN DAMSTRAAT**

From my street window  
 Under Damstraat's neon glow

I watch the traffic  
A flow of eye traffic  
A stream of peeps pass by  
Some are shy and appear sly  
Some sneaky but with graphic desire  
Some bereft of courage yet full of fire  
Lust and thirst  
Always the first  
Then disgust and guilt  
Once the cup is filled  
Ebbs and flows...  
Comes and goes...  
It surely never ceases to amaze  
To see men live life as if in a daze  
My street window  
Is also a window  
Into the hearts and minds  
Of men and women of all kinds  
When into their hearts I try to peer  
What I see inside, I shudder in fear.

(Kap-kirwok, "Monologues" 40)

**17. FULL DISCLOSURE**

We get into situations

They become our stations

We protest and regret

It turns out to be too late

Won't happen next time, we say

And wait yet for that day

Another day comes next

Again we look for a pretext

“I was denied full disclosure”

We whine in defensive posture

We gripe until we have no more drive

All the time we forget that this is life

There is nothing like full disclosure

For it is not possible to be sure

Not in this life and not in the next

I say “next life” only half in jest

(Kap-kirwok, “Heartbeats” 49)

**18. WHEN...**

...a headache splits my head

I usually take a light broom of soft feathers

And gather the painlets from all corners of my mind

Into a heap of throblets and expel them through my ears.

...anger burns within me

I usually take a hose pipe with a fine spray-head

And flood the blood in me with water from the sea

And thus quench the fire in my blood until it is dead.

...worry crowds me at every turn

I usually follow the trail of that charlatan

Through treacherous pathways to its promised pain

Then, having weighed its sting, dismiss it with disdain.

...sadness hits my mind with a hammer fist

I usually look up in the clouds on a clear day

And up there, see lions melt into a sea of mist

As winds of fury blow my sadness away.

...sweet desire smoulders within

I know not to whom to turn

Nor anywhere to which to run

Except to my maker with a prayer: save me from sin.

(Kap-kirwok, "Monologues" 18)

### **19. TINT OF MY SPIRIT, MEASURE OF MY HEART**

Black is what your eye can see;

As black as black can ever be.

But who can tell me the tint

Of the feelings of my spirit?

My penury is what arrests your attention;

Being so evident and needing no mention.

But do you know the measure of my heart

Wherein lies a wealth of a different sort?

(Kap-kirwok, "Heartbeats" 38)

### **20. INNOCENCE IN SMILING DAYLIGHT**

Intolerance and ignorance strutted side by side.

Nearby, pride and prejudice jostled for equal space:

A white monitor lizard, a proud peacock in a human face;

A silent, steely strut and a head nod most loud and assured.

Simplicity and naiveté nudged each other gently.

Virtue and curiosity courted common sense in vain:

A sheep, utterly ignorant, unaware of the coming pain;

A wolf, stalking its prey, waits patiently, veiled so cleverly.

Finally intolerance and pride crack a sharp whip.

At first only the sound of wind could hear the sound of pain:

Then the pain hit me and left a stubborn black stain;

That's how in smiling daylight, my innocence was made to strip.

(Kap-kirwok, "Monologues" 26)

## **21. HOPE'S... DREAMS ADRIFT**

Bits and pieces of thought

Flicker on and off... aloft.

Now dim, now dark, now bright:

Fragile flutters like fireflies in a dark night.

Scraps and shreds of dreams

Coast and float about... in teams.

Shattered laughter and sweet cries,

Drift about like wounded eagles in windy skies.

Relics and ruins of faith,  
 Litter my mind... my heart  
 In all their width and breadth.  
 The soul is homeless and the spirit is sad.

(Kap-kirwok, "Heartbeats" 52)

## 22. P'KWITAI SAID...

"The mystery of creation puzzles my mind.

And O, the secrets of the body none can find.

I hear the wind's wise voice: life is a privilege not a right.

Thus, woe unto me if this privilege I abuse with might.

My creator has the secret to life, for only He has a mission.

In prayer and supplication, I will seek from Him my vision."

Yet a few days later, he found himself in a rude bind.

In blinding reality he found out life was far from kind.

Life had taken an abrupt nasty turn on the road

The smile had gone from the face of his dear God.

(Kap-kirwok, "Monologues" 23)

**23. KENYAN O KENYAN**

O Kenyan

How great thy patience

You ache in blissfully patience

As those in political power rape your pride

And yet

Driving on any crowded road

Like a rare gift from an evil god

Your impatience is displayed for all to deride

(Kap-kirwok, "Monologues" 39)

**24. SPIDER'S PATIENCE**

I once sat one afternoon

Beside a row of adult corn

And watched the spider

As it spread its web wider.

When the web was ready

The spider, its senses steady

Sat in the middle to wait

I could not see any bait.

I sat and watched  
And watched and watched  
The sun could not wait  
And soon had to set.

As I quit the waiting game  
My restraint finally tame  
I wondered from whence  
The spider got its patience.  
(Kap-kirwok, "Heartbeats" 3)

## **25. WHAT IS WHAT?**

I hear two noises,  
Two noisy voices.

One says think right,  
Each day and night.

Another says feel good,  
As this is the right mood.

If I think right,  
Will I feel right?  
If I think wrong  
Will I feel wrong?

Now which is true?  
Honest, I have no clue.

Opposites, they say, are good,  
And as necessary as good food.

Opposites make the world balance good,  
Just as it takes two in tango to dance.

If this is so I have one query to pose:  
It is about good and evil of course.

If good and evil are two sides of a coin,  
Should evil deeds cause us to complain?

(Kap-kirwok, "Monologues" 8)

## **26. I WILL CAGE A WILD THOUGHT**

I will erect a barrier around my mind

I will hide inside my mental cocoon  
But unlike a butterfly, I will not emerge soon  
My cocoon will be a firm flaming fortress  
A sure and secure refuge in this burning madness  
Therein my sanity will endure weather of every kind

I will not with my eye remember  
Nor with my mind see pleasure  
Except sweet memories to treasure  
I will pay no heed to the prayers of my mind  
That way I will not get myself into a bind  
I will send my wild thoughts to exile in Pemba

(Kap-kirwok, "Monologues" 11)

## **27. SO MUCH OF LESS TIME**

I stand still and listen to the shrill whistles of my mind.  
Time flutters by and I know this skull is one of a kind,  
Always dreaming and scheming assuming life will go on;  
Yet it will not be long before its hurried pace is gone.  
I look around and notice the ground on which I stand.  
Even though so much pain and death abounds on this land,  
Life and laughter in fair share flow like water from the tap.  
Dear God, permit me to partake of this before my time is up.

**28. HONG KONG**

Skyscrapers in a surreal sky

Fingers of ambition stretched skyward

Between the sea and the hills they stand awkward

A mass of sky-pointing fingers

Concrete kids begging for more from God

Goaded God for more, though they already have a lot

Crowded fingers silently scream:

“Run, run, up into the open sky space

Down below, there is no space in any place”.

The gods up on the brooding hills

Look down at the fingers with bemused smiles

As concrete and glass stretch out in miles and miles.

(Kap-kirwok, “Monologues” 39)

**29. -ISATION IS THE SAVIOUR!**

We should all be open to

Liberalisation,

And embrace with our poverty

Democratisation,

And seek salvation from ignorance in

Globalisation,  
So that we may all be freed by  
Colonization!

### **30. I DREAMT THAT...**

One day the wind stood still,  
The sun stopped shining,  
Rivers stopped flowing,  
Birds stopped singing,  
All living things stopped to listen,  
Aloud silence asked a question:  
Why whyyyy whyyyyyyyy?  
  
Then the wind began to rush about again,  
The sun started shooting out rays,  
Rivers began to flow as always,  
Birds sang again like all days ,  
All living things shouted out a silent answer,  
Its echo ate all sounds and spread like cancer:  
It said, "Because, Becauseee, becauseeeeee."