

**THE WORLDINGS OF RUGANDA'S PLAYS**

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## DECLARATION

This thesis is my own original work and it has not been submitted for award of a degree in any other university.

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## **DEDICATION**

This work is dedicated to my wife, Risper Cheruto Odali and our children Sandra, Keith, Hazel and Laura; my parents Charles Mugarizi Odali and the late Rispah Idagiza Mugarizi, for showing me the light of education, and to my friend and mentor, the late Professor Francis Davis Imbuga.

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## ABSTRACT

This study was a discursive interrogation of Ruganda's six published plays: *The Burdens* (1972), *Black Mamba* (1973), *Covenant with Death* (1973), *The Floods* (1980), *Music without Tears* (1982) and *Echoes of Silence* (1986), from a semiotic perspective. It focused on four aspects: 1) the location of the plays' events and action within spatio-temporal contexts of the dramatic world, 2) investigation of the perceptual effects that are created out of the use of the mechanical techniques of role-play and projection, 3) investigation of the signification of non-verbal codes of communication used in the plays, and, 4) investigation of how the use of various forms of speech build the meta-narratives and conflicts of the plays. The main objective of the study was to establish how the use of these elements makes Ruganda's drama comprehensible and intelligible within the virtual reality of the dramatic world. It enquired into the dramatic contexts of the plays in terms of spatial location of action from the mimetic time sense of "here-and-now" in relation to the characters' experience and their future projections within the time locus of "then" or "elsewhen" and spatial sense of "elsewhere". The study was guided by Keir Elam's (1980) postulation of the semiotics of drama and theatre that elucidates the ordering of the dramatic world in relation to the world of reality. The theory emphasizes how cognizance of the various levels of worlds influences perception and inference of meaning. This theory aided in the abstraction of different worlds created by characters resulting from the deployment of the techniques of role-play, projection and aural and visual symbolism. Thus, when the characters play other characters as opposed to who they are, they display attitudinal constructions of the other characters that they enact or impersonate. This creates a different plane of perception of the enacted character. In addition, the study appropriated John Austin's (1962) and John Searle's (1969) Speech Act Theory to interrogate how the playwright variegates his dramatic speech for aesthetic effect. The study establishes that Ruganda uses both mimetic and diegetic forms of speech in his plays for different purposes. The former is used to construct the first level action of the plays, while the latter constructs the enveloping action. Dialogue, monologue and narration are used as distinct speech forms to establish the contemporaneity of the dramatic action and point at the time of occurrence. The study concludes that Ruganda creates various contexts by use of technique, symbolism and variegated speech forms that either distance or collapse the world of reality and the dramatic worlds of his plays.

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## DEFINITION OF TERMS

**Characters in absentia** are characters that do not appear on stage. They are either referentially defined by other characters that talk about them, or they are impersonated through role-play, or their presence is designated indexically by some signifying code. For instance, a platoon of soldiers may be indicated by the sound of marching boots. In performance, such characters do not appear physically on stage.

**Dramatic action** refers to any action within the world of drama whether physical, verbal or mental that propels the development of plot forward. This includes physical action like fights, movement, lifting stuff, pocketing, laughing, sitting, sleeping, and so on, as well as verbal actions like quarreling, shouting, promising, swearing, vowing, narrating, etc. The acts performed through speech constitute what John Austin (1962) and John Searle (1969) call Speech Acts.

**Dramatis personae** means the beings that actively participate in the events of the drama. They are the carriers of the action of the play. These constitute the active characters who are enacted by actors during performance of the play.

**Spatio-temporal** refers to the realization of the elements of space and time both in reality and in the imaginary mimetic world of drama. Dramatic events are designed to happen in discernible geographical locations and within identifiable time loci. The design of the visual elements of a performance is done in consideration of the physical environment as described by the author relative to historical epoch and the ephemerality of time.

**Speech acts** are verbal events that take effect in performance in an action reaction format. For instance, one character utters an insult and another character gets offended and cries.

**Worldings** is not a conventional English word. It has been coined specifically in this study from the root word world to refer to the *ad infinitum* possibilities of inferring perceptual worlds in drama depending on the criteria one uses to establish such worlds. For instance, when characters role-play and impersonate other characters, they create another world within the mimetic dramatic world. When they dream, we interpret their experience from the world of dreams paying cognizance to the arbitrary nature of such subconscious worlds. If a character closes himself or herself in and does not open to other characters, such a character can be said to have receded into his or her private world.

## CHAPTER ONE

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Background to the Study

This study was an intrinsic reading of John Ruganda's (1942 – 2007) plays from a semiotic perspective, with the aim of interrogating how the playwright engages the human condition through a hierarchical layering of spatio-temporal, aural, visual and linguistic elements of his drama. Many critics of Ruganda's drama have tended to draw one to one parallels between the playwright's socio-historical reality and the events of the dramatic world of his plays (Obi Obyerodhiambo 1990, Francis Imbuga 1991, Joshua Kyalo 1992, Solomon Waliula 2003, Carolyn Sambai 2011 & 2012, Jerry Mutinda Muia 2013, Margaret Serabidde 2014), thereby relegating the text, which should be the core of the discourse under analysis, to the periphery. This situation is not accidental but rather part of a trend resulting from the African critics' conscious engagement with what the first crop of African literary scholars (Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Ezekiel Mphahlele, Abiola Irele, Ngugi wa Thiong'o) propounded as the function of the African writer. These pioneer literary scholars expected the African artist to deal with the burning issues of society (Frantz Fanon 1963, Achebe 1965 & 1978, Irele 1977). The critic, therefore, has had to dig out the relevance of African literature to society in order to demonstrate his understanding of the situation or circumstance that has fashioned the literature. Thus, African culture and historical experience, particularly colonial and neo-colonial, have found their place at the centre of the African critic's enterprise as subjects of focus. Chinweizu, Onwuchekwa Jemie and Ihechukwu Madubuike (1980, p. 65) lament this tendency towards mere explication of themes and "obscurities of texts" at the expense of exploring the craft of the literary works.

Apart from this obsession with the African cause, there was also a general failure by European critics to appreciate African literature's articulation of African content in foreign languages – English, French and Portuguese – and a general feeling among African scholars that only critics with vast experience and understanding of the African situation could critique African literature (Achebe 1975, wa Thiong'o 1981, Biodun Jeyifo 1990, Christopher Miller 1990, Olakunle George 2003). The need to reassert the dignity of the black person and his culture, which colonialism and Christianity had denigrated and negated; condemnation of colonialism and its attendant ills; the need to prove to the rest of the world that the African oral tradition constitutes part of world literature with a legitimate aesthetic to be appreciated and deciphered from an African perspective and the urgency to speak against imperialism in the post-colonial era, thus, were the focal points for the African critic. Essentially, this criticism was a reaction to a historical experience in which the African writer was looked down on by the European critic as incapable of literary ingenuity and as inferior to the European counterpart. Achebe (1975) aptly captures this experience in his essay, "Colonial Criticism", in which he cites two European critics, Honor Tracy and Iris Andreski, who dismiss his first novel, *Things Fall Apart*, as lacking in insight on the African situation; meaning that Achebe was ungrateful for the civilization that the colonial administration had brought to Africa and this is what is reflected in his novel.

Jeyifo (in Olaniyan and Quayson Eds. 2007, p. 434) observes that African literature has been "under-theorized or characterized by the assumption that it is an untheorizable discursive space ontologically charged with the mysteries that supposedly lie at the heart of the nature of things". Jeyifo's main concern is the polarization of African literary criticism into studies of the nature of African literature, and who should or should not interpret African literature. Essentially, this is

a question of opinion on literature, a definition, not a criticism of literature. It is a demarcation of who belongs and who does not, an assertion of inclusion and exclusion.

Olakunle George (in Olaniyan, T. and Quayson, A. Eds. 2007, p. 441) quotes Landeg White lamenting about the nature of African criticism as paying “inadequate attention to the material conditions of the literary work.” This condition, he further explains, results from the inadequacy of new criticism in England and America to address the special needs of emerging literary works from Africa, whose primary role was to mitigate the literary and cultural worth of African literature. Looking at this scenario, it is apparent that African writers have been largely assessed on the basis of how well they articulate the truth of the African reality and less on the basis of the aesthetic ingenuity of their works. The writers have mainly been critiqued on the grounds how much they are committed to the African cause or the plight of their communities. Critics have equally been adjudged on how well they extrapolate the authors’ commitment to the burning issues of the day and how well they display knowledge of the African situation.

This trend in the criticism of African literature has trained focus on the historical process and its influence on content, and tended to exclude concern for artistic merit. This apparently anomalous situation ought to be corrected for two reasons: one, history is important in literary criticism insofar as it illuminates what inspires the writer and to the extent that it forms the backdrop against which socio-historical interpretation is founded; two, African writers and critics have made their point of placing African literature on the global map and there is need now to explore this literature like any other literature with its own aesthetic merit.

The predominantly socio-historical orientation of African criticism seems to suggest that for one to make meaning from African literature, one has to always fall back to history. Yet, people have read literary texts and made meaning out of them without having to dig into the historical background of the author or the circumstances that inspired the writing. Rene Wellek and Austin Warren (1956) highlight the deficiency of this socio-historical reading of literary works:

Though the extrinsic study may merely attempt to interpret literature in the light of its social context and its antecedents, in most cases it becomes a 'causal' explanation, professing to account for literature, to explain it, and finally to reduce it to its origins. (p. 73)

Although Wellek and Warren here obviously emphasize the formalist approach to interpretation of literature, which in itself is not fault free, the socio-historical approach that has dominated criticism of African literature tends to individualize rather than universalize reading, thereby narrowing the scope of exploration for meaning to causality. The approach looks for possible parallels to the circumstances of reality in literary discourse and in effect renders the criticism deterministic, ensuring that whatever reading that is done of a literary text confirms the utilitarian objectives of the author.

Whereas literature aims at illuminating deficiencies of the society from which and for which it is written, meaningful literary interpretation transcends history and culture, collapsing the boundaries of the immediate social circumstance to project the larger human condition. That is why African readers find meaning in Sophocles' *King Oedipus*. This is enabled by the intrinsic reading of the story of Oedipus and the rationalization of the events of his literary world which are then projected onto the larger social human phenomena. In this way, what was originally a Greek myth is universalized to find meaning in other cultures.

Criticism of Ruganda's drama has mainly been confined to its relation to the historical situation and the ideologies of the East African region. Yet, Ruganda's plays have enjoyed readership and performance beyond the continent (*The Floods* was performed in Yugoslavia in 1979). The question is, if Ruganda's plays have been enjoyed beyond the East African region how can one explain their ability to appeal to the outside audience? In addition, Ruganda's role in the development of African drama and theatre is not confined to his native country Uganda. He was instrumental in the development of theatre in Kenya and also taught drama and theatre at the University of the North in South Africa. His being one of the founding members of free traveling theatre groups at Makerere University and the University of Nairobi has had a great impact on the history of theatre in East Africa.

Apart from Ruganda's plays enjoying audience and readership beyond the East African region, the fact that literary texts are polysemic and hence complex to interpret means that no one approach can exhaustively bring out the multiple layers of embedded meanings. Again, generically, the dramatic text is multi-medial making its interpretation multi-focal and even more complex. Keir Elam (1980) argues that the very fact that drama exists both as a literary text and performance exerts pressure on the interpretation of each of the two forms. Yet, a cursory reading of the existing critiques on Ruganda's drama reveals very little focus on the centrality of performance to the dramatic text (Obyerodhiambo 1990, Imbuga 1991, Kyalo 1992, Waliaula 2003, Sambai 2011 & 2012, Jerry Muia 2013, Margaret Serabidde 2014). This glaring lack of cognizance of Ruganda's plays as texts of potential performance and aesthetic constructs needs to be addressed because plays are actually written to be performed and are artifacts; not straight segments of reality. It is important that investigation into Ruganda's use of dramatic and linguistic techniques, with the notion of the stage in

mind, be examined as this lends new perspective to the interpretation and understanding of his drama.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

This study interrogated the structural elements of space and time, technique, aural and visual codes and language use in six published plays of John Ruganda: *The Burdens* (1972), *Black Mamba* (1973), *Covenant with Death* (1973), *The Floods* (1980), *Music without Tears* (1982) and *Echoes of Silence* (1986). It aimed at establishing how the use of these elements makes Ruganda's drama intelligible within the virtual reality of the dramatic world and the significance they bear on the interpretation of meaning. It enquired into the dramatic contexts of the six plays in terms of spatial location of action with the knowledge that drama is a mimetic genre of performance. The notion of dramatic events within spatio-temporal loci of their fictive worlds aims at reordering these events in order to construct the narratives of the plays for better comprehension. The study investigated how the deployment of theatrical techniques relating to the notion of space and time (including flashback, reminiscence, projection and role-play), and the use of non-verbal codes of communication (scenery, furniture, props, costumes, character physiology, stage business and background sound) impacts on the construction of the worlds of the narratives and the effect they have on perception of meaning. Finally, it also explored the nature of Ruganda's dramatic speech in its various forms of use comprising dialogue, monologue and narration, and the resultant effect the specific forms have on the building of the narratives, development of conflict and processing of meaning. Essentially the study investigated the elements of semiosis of Ruganda's plays. The concern here was to establish how structured dialogue combines with the perceptual physical dramatic world to convey meaning.

### **1.3 Objectives of the Study**

The general objective of the study was to abstract the elements of semiosis that the playwright uses to construct the narratives of his plays and establish how they influence the inference of meaning. The specific objectives are to:

- 1.3.1 construct the structural elements of semiosis that make Ruganda's drama coherent and intelligible, and to evaluate the communicative effects that result from the use of these semiological elements.
- 1.3.2 interrogate the significance of use of non-verbal dramatic codes and assess their contribution to the process of signification.
- 1.3.3 investigate linguistic patterns that manifest and establish their effectiveness of use in developing dramatic action and interpretation of meaning.

### **1.4 Research Questions**

This research was guided by the following three questions:

- 1.4.1 what structural patterns relating to narrative construction manifest in Ruganda's plays and how do they affect the nature of the narratives and their comprehension?
- 1.4.2 what effect do these patterns have on the construction of meaning and messages in relation to other non-verbal codes of communication used in the plays?
- 1.4.3 what linguistic patterns are discernible in each of the plays and, which ones cut across the plays, and how significant are they in the determination of style and meaning of the playwright?

### **1.5 Assumptions**

The broad assumption of this research was that meaning in drama consists in the structures and codes embedded within its world that are identifiable from their

frequency of recurrence or their dominance through foregrounding. The following specific assumptions guided the study:

1.5.1 The foundation of any inference in drama lies in the social and dialogic interaction, across space and time, of the figures within the world of the drama in the context created for them by the playwright.

1.5.2 The generation of meaning in drama begins with a close assessment of the events of the dramatic world, within a spatio-temporal frame, for consistency or peculiarity of the relationship of the events to each other.

1.5.3 The nature and form of dramatic speech influences the construction of the narrative and the meaning that ensues from such discourse.

## **1.6 Justification and Significance of the Study**

Ruganda is a renowned East African dramatist whose drama ought to be studied both extensively and intensively for comprehensive understanding of its meaning. By adopting a different approach to the prevalent studies, this study contributes to the existing body of readings and interpretation on Ruganda's plays and, at the same time, opens vistas for further criticism of other dramatists from this approach. A semiotic reading of the plays provides the much needed alternative insight due to its broad approach. Mikhail Bakhtin (in Lodge and Wood Eds. 2000) argues that literary language is both dialogic and social. This implies that no single approach to the reading of a literary text can be comprehensive and exhaustive enough.

Considering that Ruganda's drama has been mainly critiqued extrinsically, it is vital to also carry out intrinsic reading in order to broaden the scope of understanding. Critics of Ruganda's plays have majorly been concerned with the exploration of external causal elements of his plays while paying little attention to the nexus of

technical elements and the complexity of his dramatic discourse. Whereas these earlier studies should be appreciated in their own right, their overly skewed orientation towards investigating the socio-historical concerns that inform the writer tends to occlude other aspects of artistic interest. It is this apparent anomaly that this study sought to address.

The significance of this study, therefore, consists in its alternative re-reading of Ruganda's plays with a view to provoking other critics to pursue a similar path, in order to broaden the interpretation of not only this writer's plays, but also other African playwrights. In this way, the study contributes in a significant way to the existing body of criticism on East African drama as an alternative reading.

### **1. 7 Scope and Delimitation**

This study delimited itself to six published plays of John Ruganda, a Ugandan writer. Ruganda has written a wide corpus of literary works that includes plays, a collection of short stories, poetry and literary criticism. The study, however, delimited itself to only his six published plays, namely *The Burdens* (1972), *Black Mamba* [and] *Covenant with Death* (1973), *The Floods* (1980), *Music without Tears* (1982) (re-published as *Shreds of Tenderness* (2001)), and *Echoes of Silence* (1986). Thus, while Obyerodhiambo (1990), Imbuga (1991), Jerry Muia (2013) and Margaret Serabidde cite other plays by Ruganda namely, "The State of Zombie", "The Illegitimate", "Pyrrhic Victory", "The Glutton," and "End of the Endless" these were not included in this study because they are unpublished hence not readily available. Also not included in this study are Ruganda's critique of Francis Imbuga's plays, *Telling the Truth Laughingly, the Politics of Francis Imbuga's Drama* (1992) as well as his anthology of short stories, *Igereka and other African Narratives* (2002). Furthermore, it is noteworthy to mention that even in the above-indicated works under study, the

researcher delimited himself to only those materials that were deemed relevant to the study.

### **1.8.0 Review of Related Literature**

#### **1.8.1 Criticism on African Drama**

As noted earlier, African literature has largely been assessed on account of how committed the writer is. African drama is not an exception. David Kerr (1995) explores how colonial and Christian legacies have impacted on African theatrical performances, influencing both the content and mode of the theatre. He observes that pre-colonial performances were closely tied to ritual and other cultural celebrations. With the coming of Christianity and colonialism, African cultural practices were negated, denigrated and replaced with Western civilization in order to homogenize the colony with the imperialist. It is this denigration that gave birth to the strong sentiments expressed by pioneer black critics, whose main objective was to reaffirm African culture, identity and dignity. These critics also aimed at encouraging black writers to articulate issues in an indigeneous aesthetic that captures and portrays the African worldview. However, both the writers and critics suffered a paradox of the language in which to communicate to the world. They had been schooled and educated on Western models and it would take conscious effort and awakening for the artist and critic alike to actualize this awareness. Kerr further notes of earlier Nigerian drama:

Most of the plays performed by the black Lagos elites were in English, and based firmly on colonial models. They were intended to elevate the status of the audiences to the same level as that of the whites. That the African elites absorbed some of these values can be seen by the efforts of the Ibadan Choral Society, which, according to its secretary in 1886, was ‘undertaken with the objective of introducing habits of civilization into our midst’. (1995, p. 22)

It is this sense of inferiority apparent in the above example by the group of Ibadan artists that pioneer black African critics sought to correct. At the centre of this whole enterprise of articulating the African world are the questions of language and convention. Kerr opines:

Whether it is in the arena of formal institutionalized drama, or in the people's own informal performances, a cross-fertilization of ideas has taken place through which a mode of committed popular theatre with an African identity has begun to emerge. It is a theatre which, like some forms of indigeneous ritual performance, blurs the distinction between art and reality, or, to put it perhaps more accurately, between metaphor and metonymy. But, whereas the pre-colonial theatre often served to validate existing norms, the post colonial popular theatre, at its most radical, challenges the values and structures of the new state hegemonies. (1995, p. 254)

It is this challenging spirit that critics wanted to observe in African drama. African dramatist were, therefore, bent on crafting a new aesthetic to address the new post-independence situation. Talking about East Africa, Tololwa Marti Mollel in an article titled, "African Theatre and The Colonial Legacy: Review of the East African Scene" published on-line in the *African e-Journal Project* by the Michigan State University Library observes:

However, in their struggle to create a modern African theatre to replace this colonial legacy they reject, most African artists and critics recognize the dilemma they seem to be caught up in: how can authentically African drama and theatre be made from the imported colonial theatre that was intended, first of all, to entertain colonial agents resident in Africa and, secondly, to alienate Africans being trained to run their countries on behalf of the colonialists? Many progressive individuals are of the view that African cultural and artistic traditions hold the key to this pressing question. In a movement to towards an authentic African theatre, attempts to throw off the colonial straitjacket have started with a close inside study of pre-colonial modes of theatre, and cultural forms embodying theatrically relevant phenomena such as ritual, ceremony, dance, song, storytelling, dramatic enactment, etc and have culminated in creative works that aim social and cultural relevance. (nd, p. 20)

It is this rebellion from colonial ties that the playwright was expected to exhibit in his art. At the moment, one may argue that the point has been made and the cause heeded by African writers. What needs to be investigated now is the efficacy of this new aesthetic that should be interrogated not only on the basis of its origin (this has also been explored abundantly by critics looking for commitment of the author) but also with regard to its manifestation and effectiveness of deployment. The origin of the hybrid model and its relation to the reality of colonial and neo-colonial history in Africa has received enough attention. There is need, therefore, to shift focus to the intrinsic value of this new aesthetic. Partly, this is what this study aimed at doing.

Alain Ricard (2001), in an effort at profiling African literature across the whole continent, cites language and history as the elements that give the East African dramatist identity. In chronicling the growth of East African drama, he traces the events that inspire the playwrights and revisits the issue of the language that the writer should use. Ricard hails Ebrahim Hussein of Tanzania for having developed a Swahili aesthetic that distinguishes his drama. However, Ricard's focus is on the historical development of African literature in a broad panoramic view of thematic concerns, linguistic type, historical circumstances, translation, colonial legacy, etc. As such, he does not dwell much on establishing how Hussein's Swahili aesthetic works for the plays. Citing the Maji Maji rebellion of Tanzania and the protracted burial court case involving the late Kenyan lawyer S. M. Otieno's burial as the events that inspired the writing of two of Hussein's plays – *Kinjekitile* (1969) and *Kwenye Ukingo wa Thim* (1988) respectively, Ricard observes that historical reality influences creativity. He agrees with Mollel who also contends, "...theatre is a strongly cultural phenomenon; every culture spawns its own specific brand of theatre with a specific content expressed through specific forms, artistic traditions, and aesthetics." (p. 22)

However, whereas the two scholars demonstrate understanding of the distinction between the world of reality that informs the writer and the dramatic world of imagination, they do not dwell on this point because their concern is with the external exigencies that inspire the creation and assign identity to drama. Ricard says of Hussein's *Mashetani* (1971) that, "In this ambitious and successful work, possession becomes the metaphor for Westernization, thus allowing dramatic discourse to operate in reality as well as in an imaginary world." (p. 73) It is this distinction that most critics of Ruganda's plays have not taken cognizance of.

Like Kerr, Ricard revisits the dilemma of language for the African writer. In reviewing Ngugi wa Thiong'o's postulations on the choice of language in his three plays: *The Black Hermit*, *This Time Tomorrow* and *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*, he observes the paradoxical situation that Ngugi finds himself entrapped, writing in English while aspiring to articulate the ethos, pathos and worldview of the Kenyan commonman. Ngugi's consciousness of European literature for the European and his aspiration to write an African literature for the African – which consciousness he expects to see in other writers as well – is captured in his contention that:

The colonial student was assaulted by European literatures of principally three kinds and in principally three ways:

There was first the good European literature, the product of the best and the most sensitive minds of European culture: Aeschylus, Sophocles, Montaigne, Rabelais, Cervantes, Shakespeare, Goethe, Balzac, Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Thomas Mann, Ibsen, Yeats, Whitman, Faulkner, to mention a few. These, may I repeat, represent the best and the most refined tradition in European culture and thought. But of necessity their definition of social reality was rooted in their European history, race, culture, and class. When they talked of human conflicts and tensions, when they talked of the human condition and human anguish, they were talking of these tensions and anguish as expressed and emerging in the European experience of history. When they talked about man they meant the European man, just as when Americans fought for independence on the basis of the inalienable rights of man, they obviously meant the Anglo-Saxon White Protestant, not the black man.

(1981, p. 15)

It is this awareness of the difference in the worldviews and experiences between Europe and Africa, coupled with the attempt by the imperialist to destroy the culture and decimate the history of the colony that made the likes of Ngugi to advocate for commitment of both the African writer and critic. Ricard concludes by noting that it is the contradiction of learning from a European model and writing in a foreign language about indigenous issues that led Ngugi to shift to writing in Gikuyu. As can be seen, Ricard's interest is with the socio-cultural circumstance of the writer. His main concern is how well a writer writing in a foreign language captures and articulates the worldview and circumstances that inform his work.

Kerr commenting on Ngugi's language dilemma and how the state reacted to his stance observes, "Sometimes those challenges have taken on a clearly confrontational form, as with Kamirithu, but in nations with a more open tradition of dialogue the state reaction has been less repressive." (1995, p. 254) Kerr is referring here to the violent reaction that Ngugi's play written in Gikuyu, *Ngahika Ndeenda* (1982) (translated into English as *I Will Marry When I Want*) received leading to his detention and consequent exile. This did not only happen to Ngugi. Many African playwrights fled into exile following their dramatic engagements that aimed to speak to power in the post-independence era. Some of the playwrights who fled their countries include Wole Soyinka of Nigeria, John Ruganda and Austin Bukenya of Uganda, Micere Mugo and Ngugi wa Miiri of Kenya. This bespeaks the commitment with which black writers and critics were concerned. However, today the situation has since changed and there is relatively more democratic space. There is need, therefore, to expand the perspective of criticism in this more democratized times to pay much attention to aesthetics of African drama and move away from concentrating on explication of themes and relevance to society.

In the case of the East African playwrights, emerging from a history of immediate post-independence, it was imperative to articulate the anxieties of the populace; the fear of forgetting the cause of the struggle for independence and the threat of acculturation following western education and Christian indoctrination. This explains the linguistic paradigm in Hussein's plays and the paradox in Ngugi's conscious attempt to counter this fear. The critic equally sharing this history, would be looking for the playwright's commitment to the burning issues of the day, as it were. It is time to move on now.

In conclusion, we can say that whereas Ngugi, Mollel, Kerr and Ricard are justified in their use of the socio-historical context in giving their views of African drama, the approach cannot be prescribed as the only perspective for literary analysis. Many more approaches will yield inferences that are equally valid, bearing in mind that literature is polysemic.

### **1.8.2 Criticism on Ruganda's Drama**

Many studies on Ruganda's drama exist, mainly for postgraduate degree awards. These include Obi Obyerodhiambo (1990), Francis Imbuga (1991), Joshua Kyalo (1992), Solomon Waliaula (2003), Carolyn Sambai (2011 & 2012), Jerry Muia (2013) and Margaret Serabidde (2014). These studies are fairly extensive and rigorous in their analysis of various aspects of Ruganda's plays, especially style and themes, which they transpose onto the socio-political circumstance of Uganda and Kenya, the two countries in which the playwright spent a substantial part of his life and wrote from. Obyerodhiambo (1990), Imbuga (1991), Kyalo (1992), Sambai (2011 & 2012) and Serabidde (2014) extrapolate meaning from Ruganda's drama by exploring the stylistic devices that the playwright uses and link their effectiveness of use to socio-political thematic concerns. They then go further to draw links between

the textual material and the reality of Ruganda's world. Obyerodhiambo (p. 1) argues that Ruganda's "creative style is dominated by use of symbols, for the portrayal and analysis of the social and political themes" (sic). He further claims that:

[Ruganda] professes a humanistic approach to life, which permeates his creative works. He tries to understand society, human behaviour. In his work, he paints a picture of hope despite such realities. He tries "to show what people can do for themselves, how they can share and live happily with others, without exploiting their neighbours" (sic). (pp. 179-180)

Such an argument clearly lays emphasis on extraneous study of the society that the writer "writes for". This removes focus from the dramatic text *per se* and places it within the jurisdiction of socio-historical considerations, thereby orienting the study towards socio-psychoanalytic framing. Imbuga concurs with Obyerodhiambo when he contends:

I have treated Ruganda's plays as part of the social history of both Kenya and Uganda where they are grounded, each expressing its own history in a special way, with its own special rules. The primary aim of this dissertation is, then, to trace the influence of the East African social reality on Ruganda's drama and to examine some of the strategies and techniques of dramatic presentation which he has used in order to effectively communicate his ideas to his readers or audience. (1991, p. 14)

Even in his attempt to analyse technique, Imbuga draws a nexus between the use of the elements of style and Ruganda's social reality. He draws a parallel between the symbolism he establishes between Wamala and the leper who marries Nyenje the chief's daughter in the narrative that Tinka tells Kaija and Obote the former Ugandan president. This is in consonance with his view that Ruganda's drama is part of the social history of the East African region. This view stems from Imbuga's conviction of the nature of drama that:

Since drama is a corporate art shaped as much by the expectations of audiences as the creative talents of actors, it has traditionally been seen as an art that helps to express 'collective consciousness', or one that

helps build the myths and archetypes of a people. It is expected therefore that Ruganda's plays must express that collective consciousness of his own people and times. (p. 6)

This kind of thinking is founded on the Marxism that informed the social thought of Africa in the 1970s and early 1980s. It marginalizes the individual and looks at humans as a community of social beings whose thought patterns and behaviour are shaped by the homogeneous circumstances of their existence. Yet, communities are made of, first and foremost, individual beings with idiosyncrasies that define their individuality. The quest of the individual to survive or better his or her circumstance before looking out to the larger community is a truism that cannot be ignored in the plight of human existence. Nevertheless, Imbuga's frame of collective consciousness can be traced to the thinking of the nineteenth century French sociologist Emile Durkheim. According to Durkheim, the individual separated from society and only came back to it out of economic necessity and self interest (in Morrison Ed. 2004, p. 121). Durkheim further argues that this individualistic tendency "threatened the cohesion of social institutions and obscured the authoritative nature of group life" (p. 121). It can be argued that people only get to understand society if and when they understand the contingencies that drive individual behaviour. This does not necessarily mean that the individual is autonomous. Cognizance is taken of the fact that there are certain forces that shape and fashion individual behaviour, which if closely observed may reveal common patterns of reaction and adjustment. Hence, the denominator to understanding a community is the individual, and likewise, for one to interpret the community of dramatic representation one has to focus squarely on individual character behaviour and its adjustment to the exigencies of the dramatic world before making generalizations. The notion of "collective consciousness" in Imbuga's study presupposes the existence of well structured social institutions that are

equally well established and which provide a rigid code of conduct for the specific society resulting in an expected collective behaviour. Deviation from this collective code of conduct would, therefore, in reality and literary terms form the basis of conflict. Morrison says:

Durkheim used the term [common conscience or collective conscience] to refer to a body of beliefs, practices and collective sentiments which are held in common by all members of a society. (p. 131)

In the case of East Africa, there is absence of or a total dysfunction of these social institutions or codes. Hence, one cannot talk of a collective consciousness as such. Common codes and institutions would be requisite in the creation of social homogeneity among all members of society. This is lacking in the East Africa that Ruganda depicts.

Imbuga further says, "Ruganda appropriates historical facts and uses them to create a literature that is immediately relevant to his audience" (1991, p. 49). This suggests that the playwright has a moral duty, emanating from awareness of his collective responsibility, to give his readership or audience that which is appropriate or palatable to their expectation. Everything the individual does is done with the awareness and aim of the collective good of the society. However, the reality of the East Africa that Imbuga writes about is full of absurd contradictions of this assumed dictum of collectiveness. Indeed, in elucidating further Durkheim's idea of collective conscience Morrison says:

It [collective conscience] reaches throughout the entire collective space of society and is diffused throughout its physical or geographic boundaries. It creates common conditions of existence, functions to correct successive generations to each other, and acts to define individual relations to each other and to society in the form of binding obligations. (2004, pp. 131 – 132)

Imbuga's notion of "collective consciousness" and Durkheim's "collective conscience" are different. Quite obviously, Imbuga's thrust of argument is socio-historically grounded. However, like Obyerodhiambo, he does not clearly define the concept that undergirds his argument, thereby making it difficult to understand what he means. What is obvious is the fact that the two are informed by the socio-historical circumstances that inspired Ruganda and the belief that drama should inform the society for which it is created. Indeed, Obyerodhiambo asserts, "... early political history is significant in the interpretation of Ruganda's plays" (1990, p. 27). He then proceeds to tie the symbolism he explores in his thesis to the historical process and situation of Uganda. Whereas this may be plausible, we are bound to question the position of the dramatic text that is being interrogated.

Like his predecessor, Imbuga believes that Ruganda's plays are wrought out of subtle "observations" and are "comments on politicians and political situations in Africa" (1991, pp. 23 – 24). He then proceeds to draw analogies between the textual dramatic world of Ruganda's plays and Uganda's history. He parallels Amin's political takeover in Uganda to Wamala's situation in *The Burdens*. Imbuga draws many more such analogies between the textual world and history. He writes:

*The Floods* is a dramatization of the helplessness of the victims of the inhuman atrocities and injustice of Idi Amin's military regime, after the eventual dictator took over power from Milton Obote. (p. 37)

Whereas this second observation is true insofar as the playwright makes direct reference to institutions of Amin's regime, for example, the State Research Bureau (SRB), it is important to realize that appropriation of reality into the literary world is accompanied by embellishment of the imaginary. Imbuga's parallelism cuts across two contexts – textual and socio-historical. Its focus is on the societal germ that

inspired the writing of the drama. The approach does not put the discourse of the text at the centre; instead it illuminates the society that has given birth to this kind of drama. The approach draws a connection between the real world and the world of fiction and does not distinguish between the two. The reality of the world of drama is virtual and not actual and it is not equitable to the reality of the world of actuality. Imbuga is aware of this since he agrees with Harry Levin (1958), whom he quotes: “literature”, of which drama is a part, is a “refraction” rather than a “reflection” of life. Yet, Imbuga, like Obyerodhiambo, writes about Ruganda’s drama as if it is a direct mirror of society, when he agrees with Obyerodhiambo who parallels Matama's barrenness in *Covenant with Death* to the lack of fulfillment of the people's [Ugandans'] expectation of their government after political independence from colonialism.

This view, once again, makes Obyerodhiambo's criticism deterministic – he proceeds from his knowledge of history or society then moves into the text to look for parallels that would confirm his pre-conceived notions. Further, he does not give credence to his argument through close textual analysis and evidence. For instance, he claims:

In Ruganda's recent work an increasingly critical view of the sociopolitical realities in Africa is apparent. His earlier works are social commentaries e.g. *Covenant with Death* and *Black Mamba*. The later ones are political, forexample, criticizing the inability of the intellectual elite to react positively to political events, despite being the most suited to do so, the development of a political-cum-economic elite in an alliance with the intellectual elite, the social position of women and other related issues (sic). (1990, p. 18)

These remarks show a critic's endeavour to prove how the social reality of the playwright has influenced his authorship. Whereas this is important in explaining the relationship between society and art, it blinds the critic to the basic elements of art –

that is, the dramatic discourse and its aesthetic framing of communication. Obyerodhiambo's interpretation remains thematic, not giving any insight into the details of how the dramatic or aesthetic reveals the message. This is what forms the gap in his reading of Ruganda's drama.

Imbuga, unlike Obyerodhiambo, goes a step further to analyze the inter-character relationships that form the basis of his interpretation. On the theme of "Domestic Strife and Tension," which he identifies in the plays, he posits:

An examination of the interpersonal relationships in Ruganda's plays ultimately illuminates the social forces at work in the society with which the plays are concerned.

The first signs of these family-centered anxieties in Ruganda's plays can be seen from relationships between the husband and wife characters in the plays. These characters are never at peace with each other. In their search for personal freedom, they physically assault each other and subvert each other's efforts to make their marriages work. (1991, pp. 78 – 79)

This discernment of estrangement between characters that under normal circumstances are expected to coexist but who turn out to be strange bedfellows in Ruganda's drama forms the basis of various conflicts. But other than identifying these conflicts, Imbuga does not explore how they manifest. This is where there is need to investigate further this recurrent phenomenon of estrangement to determine how it shapes the dramatic relationships and the resultant conflict. Conflict in drama is easily detected in the manner of speech or physical action of characters. The contradiction in presentation and representation of character within given circumstances in the text is what arouses the audience's or reader's curiosity to pay closer attention to the plight of the character. In this regard, therefore, speech mannerism and physical action become central in revealing meaning.

In addition, while Imbuga (p. 131) emphasizes visual elements that help to reinforce the theme of poverty in *The Burdens*, it can be argued that dialogue is a more obvious marker of such social conflict. Furthermore, it is not only important to mention the visual symbols that carry meaning but also to show how they do this. Yet, despite showing awareness of the centrality of dialogue as a marker of conflict, Imbuga does not interrogate the nature of Ruganda's use of speech. He says:

...the real cause of tension in the Wamala family is Tinka's disrespect for her husband because of his inability to contribute to the family kitty due to his lack of a job. Even when Wamala manages to contribute a little something, as is the case with the bed he buys for Kaija, Tinka still despises him and subjects him to extreme ridicule. (p. 132)

Spite is an aspect of human behaviour that is easily detectable through speech. Speech, therefore, becomes central to inferring conflict and meaning in Ruganda's drama. Both Obyerodiambo and Imbuga ignore verbal language and focus on other aspects of style and interpret meaning from intuitive reading rather than investigation of linguistic nuances that yield meaning. As a result, there is need to re-examine Ruganda's drama intrinsically in order to accord it broader interpretation.

Kyalo (1992) is a comparative study involving three of Ruganda's and four of Imbuga's plays. Like his predecessors, Kyalo focuses on explicating style and thematic concerns and ties these to the prevailing socio-political conditions of East Africa. Though he proposes to engage in a linguistic inquiry by stating:

...emphasis is placed on the linguistic discourse of the texts and the inherent ideas and attitudes in them. The stylistic insight focuses on the choice of linguistic aspects proper, as well as the paralinguistic elements. (sic) ( p. 8)

He falls short of doing what he proposes. Instead, in his pursuit of the author's vision he partly adopts an ideological approach with a sociological framing that ends up

derailing his intention to engage with the plays' discourse. Indeed, from the onset of his dissertation Kyalo posits:

The East African dramatist engages in constant dialogue with his environment. His artistic genius is propelled by the social and political realities that govern his surroundings. It is these socio-political forces that influence and shape his creative conscious. Thus, drama in this region is used as a mode of expressing the artist's conception of the East African society in space and time. (p. 1)

With this thesis statement, Kyalo delves into pursuing "thematic concerns of the East African playwright [that] are prompted by his artistic calling to address himself to the problems, aspirations and the collective will of his people" (p. 1). It is clear, therefore, that the researcher's focus is not on the dramatic aesthetics, but on the utilitarian function of the East African dramatist. This view is vindicated when he further contends:

This study is guided by the firm belief that, any committed art is inseparable from political and social realities in its function. It is on this basis that a contrast of the socio-political ideas transmitted by the two dramatists, and how these affect their dramatic mode of presentation, form the bulk of our analysis. Their use of drama as a vehicle for evaluating their society, and their vision of the same, are significant to us. (p. 4)

His study is thus not intrinsic. It is more concerned with the externalities that have given birth to the playwrights' work rather than the ingenuity of the works themselves. It is premised on the belief that the East African playwright is "tied to contemporary ideas" (p. 7). This means for one to comprehend or interpret East African drama, one has to be very conversant with the prevailing realities. These realities, therefore, form the basis of criticism for Kyalo's study. It is this lack of proper focus on the dramatic text as the object or subject of analysis and interpretation that warrants a different approach to the reading of Ruganda's plays.

Kyalo acknowledges this lack of focus on the dramatic text when he says:

... most of the critics of East African drama have mainly concentrated on its sociological aspects. Most of these critical works are dominated by the thematic concerns of the East African playwright. There has been a tendency to either totally neglect, or marginally pay attention to the stylistic elements of East African drama. (p. 12)

However, even after making this acknowledgement, he goes on to pursue the influence of politics, moral and social issues of the region on the playwrights' writing. Indeed, Kyalo like his predecessors adopts a sociological approach in his study that does not distinguish between textual and historical contexts. While exploring what he calls "The Travelling Disease" in Chapter Two of his thesis, which he explains as the hunger for power, he says that Odie "is a product of Amin's brutal decade-old regime in Uganda" (p. 66). In this case, the study collapses the boundaries of fiction and historical reality because Odie is a fictive character in *Music without Tears* while Idi Amin is a historical figure. The latter ruled Uganda between 1972 and 1986 as president. There is need to make the distinction between these contexts clear so that when parallel is made between the two, it is easy to differentiate fact from imagination and in so doing, enable the reader/audience to infer the author's intended meaning clearly.

Waliaula (2003) is an ideological study of Uganda's drama investigating patriarchal construction of gender in the plays. The study, however, alludes to important aspects of the structure of the plays' dramatic worlds, which it does not delve into, that are worth serious consideration. The use of the technique of economy, particularly of character and space, (which he observes but does not interrogate) opens up new avenues of looking at the communication process in the plays. Through the use of such strategies as role-play, flashback, reminiscence, and narration

Ruganda makes the audience/reader see the events of his plays through the constructed perceptual worlds of the few characters.

The construction of other worlds, other than those inhabited by the *dramatis personae*, is an element of form that recurs in all of Ruganda's plays. Waliaula (2003) articulates clearly the importance of form in Ruganda's plays when he observes:

Each play comprises of (sic) very few characters and the action in the plot of the play is relatively brief. Most of the details of the plot and characterization are filled in through flashbacks, reminiscences, role-play, and storytelling. Moreover, the elements which are meant to improve on the stage effect like costumes, props, the backdrop, decor, and so on are used modestly. Ruganda's dramatic technique may be attributed to his orientation to drama, which is theatre. As a seasoned director he has most likely scripted his plays with their theatricality in mind. Furthermore, this economy helps to focus all the dramatic action on the verbal action of the characters on stage. It is this that highlights the character anxiety, tension and conflict, which are significant in his (re)presentation of gender relations in his plays (sic) (pp. 2-3)

Such use of dramatic technique implies different levels of context, perception and interpretation, which must be taken cognizance of during the process of inferring meaning. Waliaula, in addition, recognizes the centrality of verbal action as the *tour de force* of Ruganda's drama, and categorizes it as consisting in the elements of accusation, confession, quarrel, reconciliation, persuasion, confrontation and blackmail (pp. 27, 28 & 29). These are aspects of verbal action which should be interrogated on how they drive the plot of the plays forward and influence signification. However, Waliaula does not focus on the analysis of these important elements of communication. He also acknowledges the significance of technique in Ruganda's plays in creating the enveloping action of the dramas' meta-narratives, but, again, he does not dwell on the exploration of how these elements are employed, nor does he investigate how they effect communication. Consequently, this study explores

such elements (technique and verbal action) of Ruganda's authorship in order to reach a more comprehensive and incisive interpretation of his plays.

Sambai (2011) is another thematic study of Ruganda's two plays, *The Burdens* and *The Floods*, focusing on the representation of violence. Originally an MA thesis that is later published, the study also adopts a socio-historical context and a psychoanalytical frame, linking the violence in the plays to the tumultuous reigns of dictatorship that characterized Uganda after independence. Sambai parallels the domestic violence in *The Burdens* to the political violence of the state that wants to assert its authority. She takes the family that is engulfed in strife in this play to be a microcosmic representation of the state and its ambition to exert power on its subjects. The study goes ahead to draw a direct link between the reality of Idi Amin's despotic rule and the events in *The Floods*:

This study examines the brutality and repression that characterized Idi Amin's regime as represented in *The Floods*. The play is replete with violence which reflects the ruthlessness and inhumanity of that regime. At the centre of the discussion is the fact that violence was used by the state as a powerful tool to demonstrate power. This violence was directed towards imagined or real enemies who dared contest the state's power. The state that should protect its citizens is portrayed as having exposed its people to violence in order to show its power. This study therefore pays keen attention to the representation of violence and forms of violence in the two plays which are concerned with violence. (p. 16)

Sambai goes on to theorize on the manifestation of various forms of violence and their meaning, looking at the physical violations of the human body and the signification of these violations. Her focus is thus a psychoanalytic understanding of brutality and human exertion of power over fellow humans as a demonstration of control. However, the fact that she makes history her starting point, again makes her study deterministic, just like the other forementioned scholars. Sambai (2011) once again avoids making

the drama text the centre of investigation, creating a gap that needs to be addressed. This is partly what this study sought to stem.

Sambai (2012) pursues further her socio-political and psychoanalytical postulation of violence and tyrannical rule in a paper titled, “The Politics of Dead Bodies in John Ruganda’s *The Floods*”, which is published on-line in the journal, *Research in Humanities and Social Sciences*. In the paper, she interrogates the concept of vilolation, generalizing on how the dead bodies of common people vis-avis those of prominent people are disposed of in the play. She concludes that the corpses of common people that litter the streets, the jungle and the lake in the play engender the absurdity of the tyrannical regime’s quest to demonstrate power over its citizenry. Like in her dissertation, Sambai makes a one to one equation of both textual and historical contexts. She equates Boss’ murderuous reign in *The Floods* to Idi Amin’s despotic rule of Uganda. The dead bodies that are not properly disposed of come back to haunt the leaders, showing the precariousness of their power. She concludes by saying, “The resolution to use dead bodies makes a better presentation of the sorry state of affairs of Uganda under Amin’s regime” (p. 10).

Jerry Muia (2013) attempts a stylistic study of *Shreds of Tenderness* from a linguistic point of view. However, the background to this study is, again, anchored on the “socio-political realities” that have shaped the drama (p. 3). Muia proposes to interrogate the element of sound but he only does so scantily when he cites the use of repetition. Largely, he deals with tropes that include metaphor, simile, sarcasm, personification and hyperbole. He also deals with other aspects of language that include ambiguity, use of jargon (big words/technical words), taboo words, slang, neologism, grammatical deviation, code switching and allusion. However, Muia’s concern is with the linguistic function of the elements he isolates and he does not go

beyond identifying them and attempting to assign meaning to each one of them. In essence, he does not attempt to generalize on the efficacy of these elements in the process of generating the playwright's messages. There is need to interrogate how such structures of language combine and function to bring out the intended meaning.

Margaret Serabidde (2014) is another postgraduate dissertation on Ruganda's plays investigating how the writer employs style to build themes. Specifically the study focuses on the use of figurative language, role-play, folkloric transpositions and satire. The researcher identifies stylistic features in the plays across their historical setting and explores how the author uses these elements to bring out thematic concerns. She then compares the deployment of style across the six plays under investigation on a diachronic scale. Thus, she looks at the historical circumstances and how they influence the playwright's choice of style. Serabidde once more moves from the socio-historical context to nature of the text. Her interrogation of style and theme as the two central issues of her study push her to history, which resides in the playwright's real world.

Arising from the foregoing review of literature, there is need to focus on specific aesthetic aspects of Ruganda's drama in order to accord it a more intrinsic investigation that would reveal more his craftsmanship and how this impacts on meaning. This study, therefore, focused on four aspects of Ruganda's plays: 1) the location of the plays' events and action within spatio-temporal contexts of the dramatic world, 2) investigation of the perceptual effects that are created out of the use the mechanical techniques of role-play and projection, 3) interrogation of non-verbal codes of communication used in the plays for their signification, 4) investigation of how use of various forms of speech build the meta-narratives and conflicts of the plays.

## **1.9.0 Conceptual Framework**

### **1.9.1 Drama as a Multi-medial Text**

There are various ways of looking at drama and many scholars have defined the genre differently. Generally, drama can be defined either from a literary or performative point of view. In this study, drama is perceived both as a genre of performance and a literary text. Generically, drama is not only dialogic in its form and use of language, it is also multi-medial – affecting all the five senses of human perception and borrowing from a number of other genres of art (genres of performance including song, dance, mime and poetry; visual art and architecture) to complete its world. Manfred Pfister (1988) propounds that drama makes use of the oral, aural and visual media in its communication process. He further argues that dramatic texts have the ability to stimulate the channels of all the five senses of human perception, thereby producing communicative effects. These effects manifest clearly in performance.

At the same time, though generically its conversational form distinguishes drama, dramatic speech is not monolithically dialogue. Dramatic speech is often punctuated by monologues, narration, rhetoric, verse and song; thereby variegating the very medium that defines it. From Pfister's notion, therefore, it is very clear that the language of drama goes beyond the verbal form and that though superficially it is supposed to be conversational, this is not always the case. Conversation or dialogue presupposes the existence of at least two participants, the speaker and the listener; but in drama, the use of techniques like soliloquy, aside and the dream motif go against such belief. In soliloquy, for example, a character dialogues with the self while in an aside, the character speaks to an 'unanswering' audience, or simply speaks his/her inner feelings aloud.

Furthermore, Milly Barranger (1990) argues that a drama text is potentially active. She says when a dramatic text is read, it must be “seen” and “heard” in the mind. One can add, it should be “felt” in the mind's eye, ear and soul. What this means, therefore, is that the drama text in its written form is a potential performance waiting to be actualized on stage. The dramatic text, therefore, has to be read with this understanding in mind. The study took cognizance of these aspects of multi-mediality of drama and approached the analysis of Ruganda’s plays with the awareness of the complexity that arises therefrom.

### **1.9.2 Drama as a Plural Text**

Keir Elam (1980) contends that both the written text and performance exert constraints on each other in their reading (a performance is read as the audience attempts to reconstruct from memory the ephemeral actions of the stage into a meaningful narrative while anticipating what is yet to follow) resulting in an inter-textual relationship that is intricate and complex. He says:

The written [dramatic] text is determined by its very need for stage contextualization and indicates throughout its allegiance to the physical conditions of performance, above all to the actor's body and its ability to materialize discourse within the space of the stage. (p 209)

The thesis of Elam's argument is clearly that plays are written for performance and not passive reading – that the performer is guided by the environment that the playwright creates in the dramatic world – hence the need not to lose sight of the performance element of the dramatic text when reading. Pfister asserts, "A play read affects the mind like a play acted ... [but for this to happen the reader has] to bring the numerous explicit and implicit signs and signals inherent in the literary text to life in his imagination" (p. 13). Furthermore, Barranger (1990, p. 432) says that language in the

theatre is "multifaceted and written to be spoken and not read" – meaning that even when we read drama we must do so actively, projecting the dialogue into a performance situation:

The words of drama must have potential for action, gesture, feelings, sound and aliveness. The actor fills the character's words, actions, gestures and intentions with a living presence. (p. 433)

Thus, any sensitive reader of drama is an active reader trying to capture the nuances of pitch, accent, tenor and tone, which express mood and emotion, as embedded in the literary dramatic text. When one reads drama, one is engaged in the enterprise of recreating events, actions and dialogue as the author presents them through the script. The reader ought to take the dialogue of the dramatic text from the perspective of an on-going conversation, whose basic unit is the utterance. Hence, in this case, the corpus of dramatic analysis as far as verbal language is concerned should be the written lines of speech, which are potential utterances, without of course, losing sight of the surrounding circumstances. This phenomenon of verbal action is best looked at from John Austin (1962) Speech Act Theory. The notion of drama as performance informed the reading and abstraction of possible meaning from the plays, particularly from a pragmatic sense. Considering Elam's contention, Mikhail Bakhtin's idea of the plural text fitted in perfectly well with the nature of the dramatic text. Bakhtin sees a literary work presenting multiple voices and social speech types and advances five notions to qualify his idea. He talks of the dialogism of the literary text by which he means the relation of every utterance to other utterances in a text; and heteroglossia referring to the diversity of individual languages under given contexts. Bakhtin uses the term heterophonia to refer to the diversity of individual voices; heterology meaning the diversity of discursive types; and heteromodality to refer to the diversity

of genres and modes (in Holoquist Ed. 1981). Bakhtin's notions are vital in that they help to conceptualize the complexity of dramatic discourse.

As already mentioned the speech of a dramatic text is not monolithic. The playwright creates characters that become his voices, articulating his or her message(s) and intention(s) in various voices in the drama. It is also important to note that dramatic characters do not have a disposition of their own; they are creations of the author and they are used as mouthpieces. Characters may carry the author's message directly through the speech attributed to them or they may do it indirectly through their actions.

In other instances, there are moments when we feel that the author's voice comes through certain utterances of a given character. This is commonly referred to as authorial intrusion. And, finally, as the audience passes ethical judgement on characters and their actions it adds its voice to the play's message of condemnation or approval by this very act. This last voice, is actually a societal one because questions of ethics or morality are not the concern of a single individual, they are cardinally entrenched in the society and form the basis of acceptable or unacceptable behaviour. To this extent, therefore, dramatic discourse becomes multi-vocal. This study took cognizance of the various roles played by the characters and the voices they carried in their different roles. These roles and voices revealed intention of the character, author or reader/audience, which was projected onto the inference of meaning. Looked at from these various angles, thus, the drama text becomes a complex of planes of communication, and by extension interpretation, each of which should be taken into consideration for comprehensive exploration of meaning.

### **1.9.3 Drama and Semiotics**

This study adopted a semiotic theoretical framework because it accorded the researcher elbowroom to navigate the complexity of the dramatic text. Three works were essential in adapting the theoretical framework: Austin (1962), Elam (1980) and Pfister (1988). Austin (1962) provided the foundation of interrogating Ruganda's dramatic speech as verbal action. The Speech Act Theory propounded by Austin in this work was applied to the analysis of the plays' dialogue. It helped to establish implicative meanings embedded in the discourse. Short (in Carter and Simpson, Eds. 1989) says it is the cumulative layers of dialogue ascribed to different characters in a drama text that build up into the larger story. What is generally referred to as dialogue is not homogeneous. It exhibits varieties of forms that cannot be described as dialogue. All these different aspects of speech, together with other codes constitute the semiotic signs of drama.

Elam (1980) analyzes and elucidates elements of dramatic and theatrical semiosis. The theory helped to isolate and define the different elements of semiosis from the plays and provided the framework through which they were interrogated. It also propounded the relationship between the world of reality and the virtual world(s) of drama. It also put into perspective the relationship between drama as performance and drama as a written text and helped the study to discern various dramatic worlds in Ruganda's plays. These worlds consist mainly in the conceptualization of the notions of time, space and theatrical technique. This was enabled by way of conceptualizing the various events of the plays in relation to spatial and temporal aspects. This facilitated generalizations that led to inference of meaning.

We agree with Elam's definition of semiotics as "a science dedicated to the study of the production of meaning in society" (1980, p. 1) and Roland Barthes' postulation that:

Semiology ... aims to take in any system of signs, whatever their substance and limits; images, gestures, musical sounds, objects, and the complex associations of all these, which form the content of ritual, convention or public entertainment: these constitute, if not languages, at least systems of signification. (1964, p. 1)

In this sense, therefore, semiotics lent itself easily to the purpose of this study since the investigation covered both verbal and non-verbal codes of communication.

Austin's (1962) Speech Act Theory stipulates that when people speak they perform verbal acts; acts such as making vows, promises, allegations, asking questions, and so on. Exploring Austin's theory, John Searle (1969) says:

Speaking a language is performing speech acts, acts such as making statements, giving commands, asking questions, making promises, and so on; all communication involves speech acts. (p.16)

And, Elam (1980) posits further that a speech event consists of one or more speech acts that are anchored on a common reference or topic within a given context. He contends:

The speech event is, in its own right, the chief form of interaction in the drama. The dialogic exchange, that is, does not merely refer deictically to the dramatic action but directly constitutes it. The proairetic [physical action in the theatre] dynamic of the play is earned, above all, by the intersubjective force of discourse. (p. 157)

It is true as Elam says that the basic unit of drama should be the utterance within the textual context under which it is produced. Elam's postulation, therefore, partly formed the frame from which the analysis of Ruganda's dramatic speech was carried out.

Elam's argument is actually a rider on what Austin (1962) and Searle (1969) stipulate in the Speech Act Theory, with regard to illocution. These two propound the idea that an illocutionary act commits a speaker to a target audience or recipient of an utterance; and a perlocutionary act is a reaction, whether mental, attitudinal or physical, in the recipient of an utterance. In other words, when something is said it is

intended to produce some reaction in the recipient or listener of the utterance. In this way, therefore, speech acts become the *tour de force* of dramatic discourse, especially with regard to discerning inter-character conflict or simply, the intention of characters. As Searle further argues:

The unit of communication is not, as has generally been supposed, the symbol, word or sentence, or even the token of the symbol, word or sentence... but rather the production or issuance of the symbol or word or sentence in the performance of the speech act.  
(1969, p. 16)

The emphasizes here is that speech communicates only when it is considered under the context in which it is produced. For the dramatic text, the quality of potential performance accords the justification for looking at the text as a series of speech acts. This is true considering that dramatic speech is intentionally structured to produce dramatic action and to develop the plot of the drama.

In addition, the study benefited from Levinson's (1983) clarification of Grice's (1975) ideas on speech practice. It appropriated the Cooperative Principle that explains the pragmatic rules and principles, to which interlocutors subscribe. According to Grice, speakers have to cooperate with each other for effective communication to take place. This principle is underlain by four maxims: the maxims of quality, quantity, relevance and manner (in Levinson, 1983, pp. 101 – 102). Grice believes that these maxims help to define how people behave in a conversation situation.

The maxim of quality stipulates that a speaker makes his or her contribution true and have adequate evidence to support it. The maxim of quantity requires a speaker to make the contribution informative as the conversational exchange demands

and should not make the contribution more informative than necessary. The maxim of relevance demands the speaker be relevant. Lastly, the maxim of manner requires the speaker to be perspicuous, that is, the speaker avoids obscurity and ambiguity, is brief and orderly (pp. 101-102). A breach of any of the above maxims implies a conflict of sorts. This is what Grice refers to as conversational implicature. Conversational implicatures convey embedded meaning. Drama by its very nature thrives on conversational implicatures. Nuances of conflict or harmony come through assessment of the possible meanings that a reader or audience can deduce from the dialogic interaction of the dramatic world. Grice's Cooperation Principle is essential to study of drama for two reasons. One, it helps to focus squarely on the dialogic relations that obtain in the dramatic speech. Two, it helps to direct attention on spheres of conflict within the speech.

Finally, Robert Scholes' (1982) and Terry Eagleton's (1983) perceptions on the social nature of human language guided the ethical judgement of reading Ruganda's plays. Scholes says that, "All human utterances are enabled and limited by systems and codes that are shared by all who make such utterances" (p. v). Eagleton adds that:

The meaning of language is a social matter: there is a real sense in which language belongs to my society before it belongs to me. All interpretation is situational, shaped and constrained by historically relative criteria of a particular culture: there is no possibility of knowing the literary text as it is – (p. 71)

Scholes' and Eagleton's perceptions bring to the fore the importance of cultural systems and codes that govern language use. The systems and codes form part of shared knowledge that interlocutors should possess in order to communicate

effectively, and indicate the level of decorum or etiquette that pertains during a conversation.

Ideally, this knowledge is what informs the basis of establishing character roles, relationships and conflict. The knowledge of how language behaves in social situations ties dramatic interpretation to the cultural codes that fundamentally govern its usage. This is what Wardhaugh (1986) refers to as the ethical proposition. He says ethical propositions are value laden in such a way that they propose what society in general expects an individual to conform to or observe.

The analysis of drama, hence, has to proceed from ones understanding of the rules that govern such interaction and the individual idiosyncrasies that the author accords each speaker in the dramatic world. This is the theoretical knowledge that informed this study.

### **1.10 Dramatic Text as Context for Criticism**

Drama, like any other form of literary art, is constructed of segments that constitute the whole. However, although these segments may be construed easily through the demarcation of dramatic texts into episodes, scenes and acts, in some cases they are narrated or enacted as part of a character's experience. In yet other instances, they are imagined as part of the characters aspirations, fear or fantasy. At times, parts of a play are rendered as part of the characters' subconsciousness in dreams. According to Elam (1980), these segments create strands of worlds that differ from, first, the world of human reality (W0), and second, the world of the drama (W1) that is defined by the mimetic present "here-and-now" time locus that is realized through performance of the dramatic script on stage. Elam argues that, "Dramatic worlds are revealed through the persons, actions and statements, which make them up; and not through external commentary" (p. 12). Elam's emphasis is on the centrality of the text

in the analysis of the representational nature of the dramatic world, which has to be reconstructed and activated through performance for meaning. At the same time, the segments that make up drama are not always snugly fitted into place chronologically. Often times, they are structured in such a way that though they hinge on each other, they are only brought into focus at the appropriate moment so that they create a sense of discovery through the aspect of suspense. This phenomenon of the dramatic text demands that the reader constructs the larger narrative of the play by re-ordering the parts into meaningful logical patterns. This demand puts pressure on the audience/reader's memory to construct a logically flowing narrative. It is the reader's ability to string together the segments into a meaningful whole that enables him or her to comprehend what the drama is all about.

Cleante Brooks in an essay titled, "Irony as a Principle of Structure", observes:

. . . the elements of a poem are related to each other, not as blossoms juxtaposed in a bouquet, but as the blossoms are related to the other parts of a growing plant. The beauty of the poem is the flowering of the whole plant, and needs the stalk, the leaf, and the hidden roots. (In Donald Keeseey Ed. 1998, p. 81)

Although, Brooks here refers to the organic structure of poetry, his metaphor of the flowering plant can aptly apply to the nature of the dramatic narrative as well, particularly from the perception of drama as a structured and polysemic art form. Elam further argues that while watching a performance "the text is characterized by the discontinuity of its various levels" (1980, p. 45). He posits that:

The drama is usually considered as a 'given', offered to the spectator as a ready-structured whole through the mediation of the performance. The reality of the process is altogether different. The spectator is called upon not only to employ a specific dramatic competence (supplementing his theatrical competence and involving knowledge of the generic and structural principles of the drama) but also to work hard and continuously at piecing together into a coherent structure the

partial and scattered bits of dramatic information that he receives from different sources. The effective construction of the dramatic world and its events is the result of the spectator's ability to impose order upon a dramatic content whose expression is in fact discontinuous and incomplete. (pp. 98 – 99)

It is the awareness of this disjointed and incomplete nature of the text as described by Elam that imposes pressure on the audience/reader to reconstruct the dramatic world – in terms of time, environment, character, physical action and speech – in order to make it comprehensible. One has to, first and foremost, establish a thread that orders the whole text by means of reconstructing the sub-strands that manifest at various levels in the world of the drama of a given play, before moving to interpretation, which in most cases consists in the deciphering of the conformities or contradictions inherent in the discourse and action. It is only after such re-ordering that one can attain a cohesive and consistent generalization on a given drama text or a part of it.

Barry (1970) argues that the dramatic patterns that form dramatic discourse have to be strung together by way of intelligent correlation. One has to keep referring to past episodes and “history” of characters, in order to explain the present circumstances and anticipate what is yet to come, for one to make sense of the play. This cross-referencing of patterns or segments coalesces into the larger narrative of the play by way of intellectual reflection. Anthony Kerby (1991) refers to this reconstruction and reflection as *emplotment*. He posits:

Narrative *emplotment* appears to yield a form of understanding of human experience, both individual and collective, that is not directly amenable to other forms of exposition or analysis. It is generally acknowledged, for example, that our understanding of other cultures and persons is primarily gained from, and in the form of, narratives and stories about and by those people. (p. 13)

Kerby's idea of narrative *emplotment* equally applies to drama. The main thrust of argument here is that human experience and behaviour are better understood when

looked at as a series of narrative constructs. This implies that everything that humans do can best be interpreted and analyzed as narratives. Hence the stories that authors create, whether oral or written, are an interpretation and model of human actions and behaviour. In drama characters are interpreted by means of inference of their speech, physical action and general business ascribed to them. In the same way, human personality is understood or judged through critical analysis of a person's general deeds and mannerism, in accordance with the norms of society.

At the same time, people make conclusions from current events by relating them to other past events. This kind of enterprise of constructing, analyzing and interpreting events in daily life proceeds from a basic premise of trying to establish an order that yields intelligible guesses at the meaning of occurrences. This is what Kerby means by emplotment. Hayden White, in the same vein, adds:

. . . far from being one code among many that a culture may utilize for endowing experience with meaning, narrative is a metacode, a human universal on the basis of which transcultural messages about the nature of a shared reality can be transmitted. (In Rice and Waugh Eds. 2001, p. 265)

Following both Kerby's and White's positions it follows that the various narratives, which characters recount or reveal through enactment, coagulate into the meta-narrative of the play. Drama in its generic form is modeled along human action. It is inspired by the reality of human experience. In interpreting drama, therefore, the process of its reconstruction parallels emplotment of daily life. Indeed, Kerby asserts that "it is in and through various forms of narrative emplotment that lives – and thereby our very selves – attain meaning" (4).

At the same time, it is important to note that the dramatic world is that of make-believe (hypothetically actual), hence counterfactual (Elam 1980). Access to the

dramatic world is in relation to the world of actuality. This is true to the extent of the details that the author includes in the dramatic script (which are recognizable to the audience/reader). However, in extreme cases such as in avant-garde drama, where some of the events or details may sound outlandish, bizarre or simply abstract, the rule may not apply. Otherwise the events of the dramatic world are usually seen to be taking place in the “present time” of “here-and-now”, and they are not described in terms of how they are but rather, they are rendered in their state of being (*in media res*) (p. 111).

Put differently, the dramatic world bears semblance to the human world in its conceptual and ephemeral nature. However, where there is a radical deviation from what is familiar in the world of actuality calls the reader/audience to try and guess the implication of this deviation; by way of assigning connotative meaning to that which is unfamiliar. This is the criteria that was used in demarcating segments of plays and inquiring into the significance of their deviance. Thus, in this regard, defamiliarization becomes partly the context in which dramatic meaning is extrapolated. In this, study signals of defamiliarization form the core of foregrounded actions that were investigated.

### **1.11 Methodology**

This was a qualitative discursive library and on-line research involving analysis and interpretation of Ruganda’s six published plays: *The Burdens* (1972), *Black Mamba* (1973), *Covenant with Death* (1973), *The Floods* (1980), *Music without Tears* (1982) (republished as *Shreds of Tenderness* 2001) and *Echoes of Silence* (1986). These plays constitute the playwright’s extant works, which have been studied extensively both for postgraduate degree awards and in the general academia. A substantial quantity of the criticism on these plays reveals a skewedness of approach

that favours a socio-historical contextualization of the studies. This observation raises the question of an alternative re-reading of the works particularly bearing in mind that no one approach to interpretation of literary works is sufficient.

The study involved both primary and secondary reading of the texts to establish, one, the gap in scholarship, two, new insights into the reading of the writer's works. Intrinsic primary reading of the selected texts was done with the aim of establishing any peculiarities of structure and signification that could help define the playwright's style and determine any influence on the processing of meaning that result from the use of these elements. The reading focused on interrogating the generic structural elements that are responsible for the construction of dramatic texts either in their literary form or in performance. These elements include time, space, theatrical technique, aural and visual codes, and dramatic speech. The study subjected each of the plays to interrogation of how the manifestation of deployment of the aforementioned elements affects, first, the abstraction of the narratives of the plays; and second, the perception of dramatic action and the eventual interpretation of meanings. The point of departure for the study was the awareness of drama as a genre conventionally defined by its mimetic nature. During performance, this mimetic quality of drama gives it an ephemerality that determines how events in the dramatic world are perceived. In other words, drama reveals itself to the reader/audience as the characters interact physically and through reflexive referentiality in time and space. In performance the actor(s) give(s) credence to this mimetic quality of drama while in literary form, the reader has to project this mentally and collate the segments of information that are provided piecemeal into a full narrative.

To be able to carry out analysis and interpretation, the study borrowed greatly from Elam (1980)'s postulation of the idea of hierarchical layering of the worlds of reality and drama in relation to spatio-temporal location of the occurrences. Elam

(1980)'s postulation of the notions of space and time in semiotics helped to focus on the textual contexts of the dramatic worlds. First, he defines the world of actuality, which he designates as the zero tier world (W0) that is characterized by factuality and posits that it is the starting point for comprehending the fictive dramatic world that is modelled around the former. Second, he describes the mimetic world of drama that is fictive, hence not real, as an imaginary world and designates this as the first tier world (W1). Then he distinguishes the hierarchies that may arise out the characters' actions and creations of other worlds within the dramatic world in which they exist as they reflect on past or future events as second tier worlds (W2). These second tier worlds are *ad infinitum* as they are perceptually described by any criteria that defines their manifestation in the drama. The events of the plays are, therefore, looked at in relation to whether or not they occur within the immediate mimetic world time locus of the present (W1) or they are deigetically recounted as part of the past, or they are imagined yet to happen events of the future (W2). In the last instance, the action is projected as anticipated or wishful conjuration. If the events belong to the immediate mimetic dramatic world, then they constitute the present circumstance of the characters. If they are recounted as characters' remembrance of what occurred in the past then they are treated as part of the causal events of the current plight. However, when they are conjured up as future happenings, then they are only speculative projections of the characters' anxieties, aspirations or fears, hence emotional. In other cases, the events are given as mental aberrations of dreams or hallucinations. This distinction of the spatio-temporal loci of dramatic action and events has perceptual implications on the physical structure of the plays, and it influences the nature of their narratives and eventually impacts on interpretation of meaning. The reading of the plays was thus done in this frame of reconstructing and decoding the narratives while paying attention to time and spatial contexts of the dramatic action.

One of the ways in which plays indicate change in time and geographical location is through the use of techniques such as flashback, projection, role-play or dream motif. Flashback has the effect of transporting the audience back in time and space of a past occurrence. Projection and role-play, on the other hand, simulate events through enactment or mental conjuration. The dream motif is used to indicate the fuzzy subconscious mental world of the dreaming character. The use of these techniques in the plays results in structural composition that dictates how plot and narrative are framed. This study, therefore, investigated the occurrence and use of such techniques with the intention of establishing the leverage that they accord the playwright both in terms of aesthetics and in influencing communication. Pfister (1988)'s postulation of how plays are segmented into episodes, scenes and acts and how techniques such as aside and soliloquy orient the audience's perception of dramatic action was adopted in interrogating the use of role-play, projection and dreams as structural techniques of narrative construction in the plays.

Apart from inquiring into the notions of space and time, the study also interrogated the use of non-verbal aural and visual codes from each of the plays for dramatic signification. This, again, was guided by Elam (1980)'s elucidation of the concept of semiotic signification through the three categories of signs, which are icons, indices and symbols. Icons are signs, which bear one to one semblance with the thing or concept that they signify. For instance, a photographic portrait bears direct semblance with the photographed object. Indices are signs that bear characteristics of close association. For example, the relationship between dark clouds and imminent rain. Symbols are arbitrary socially accepted associations between the sign and the object or concept being signified. For instance, the association of the dove with peace. In drama, non-verbal background sound carries indexical meaning, pointing at mood, invisible presence or indicating extent of geographical space. Incidences of

background sound in the plays were scrutinized for their signification and impact on the structure of the plays.

Visual codes that embellish the stage environment in the form of scenery, props, furniture or costumes bear symbolic or metonymic signification. These elements were thus interrogated for their significance in the specific plays in which they occur. Even physiological character dispositions, as described by the playwright, were explored for possible signification. These aural and visual aspects of the theatre form part of the physical environment and cultural milieu in which the characters interact.

As far as speech is concerned, the study considered the various forms of language employed by the playwright including dialogue, monologue and narrative, with a view to establish manifestations of deviation from or conformity to conventional usage. Although it is generally assumed that dramatic speech is conversational, this is not always the case. Dramatic dialogue is punctuated with other forms of speech forms, like narration and monologue. Deviation or recurrence in idiom foregrounds the linguistic category in use and calls attention to itself. The analysis of speech in this study, therefore, took recognition of the assumed mimetic conventionality and its nature as the point of departure. In its active voice form, it is possible to detect nuances of a character's attitude and intention. This enables the audience/reader to infer sentiments such as spite, condescension, hatred, love, pity, etc from characters and relate them to other characters for interpretation and generalization of meaning. Thus, where a monologue or narration occurs, the critic has to interrogate its import. In other instances, a character may just recount a past event or retell a story to another character or group. Occurrences of such forms of speech were interrogated for influence on contextual meaning within the scene and the overall drama.

Before embarking on analysis of the various aspects of the plays, the study carried out secondary reading of criticism on African drama in general and Ruganda's drama in particular, in a bid to establish existent trends and practices, and to locate the gap that needed to be filled. As already observed, there exists a general bias in the body of criticism leaning heavily towards socio-historical, ideological and psychoanalytical interpretation of African drama in general and Ruganda's drama in particular. Besides, most of the studies do not pay much attention to the distinction between historical and textual contexts in their approach to criticism. Because of this, more attention has been paid to extrinsic elements of the drama at the expense of discourse as the corpus of analysis and interpretation. This study, therefore, deviated from this trend. It focused intrinsically on specific structural and symbolic elements of the texts, which were interrogated for their impact on the form and perception of meaning of the plays.

### **1.12 Conclusion**

From the foregoing, it is evident that the skewed nature of the existing criticism on Ruganda's drama necessitated a re-reading of his drama to broaden the perspective of interpretation and understanding of the plays' content. It is for this reason, emanating from the literature review, that an alternative approach focusing on form and structure and how these impact on the interpretation of meaning was legitimized. In the next chapter, therefore, the elements of space and time as defining elements of context of Ruganda's plays.

## CHAPTER TWO

### 2.0 THE SPATIO-TEMPORAL WORLDS OF RUGANDA'S PLAYS

#### 2.1 Introduction

The elements of space and time are crucial in locating dramatic events in geographical and historical perspectives. Whereas the events of drama belong to the fictive world, their perception and interpretation is analogous to the realization of happenings in the human world. The reader or audience expects the events of the dramatic world to be ordered in a similar manner to those of the world of reality. In the case where this assumption does not hold, then the reader or audience has to seek interpretation why the writer deviates from this dictum.

Elam (1980) argues that the world of drama is constructed relative to the world of actuality, which the writer, performer and spectator of drama inhabit. He says the dramatic world “is a spatio-temporal elsewhere represented as though actually present for the audience” but it is counterfactual, not real or factual (p. 99). The interpretation of the dramatic world, therefore, is based on the conventionality of the world of actuality. The access of the world of drama is from the position of the world of actuality. Elam further says, “The spectator assumes that the represented world, unless otherwise indicated, will obey the logical and physical laws of his own world” (p.104). The spectator, it is assumed, enjoys a shared semantic and cultural context with the *dramatis personae* of the dramatic world. This obtains because the semantic and cultural interactions that are observed in the dramatic world are modeled on the events of the world of actuality. Guido Ferraro (2010) in an article titled, “Analogical Associations in the Frame of a “Neoclassical” Semiotic Theory,” (p, 72) posits that in trying to make meaning out of life, we rely on chains of events known as scripts for analogical understanding. He goes on to claim, “events are linked together in a

sequence, this allows us to go back logically, passing from a link in the chain to another ...” (p. 72). He equates this link to a syntagmatic chain in semiotics and contends that, “the form of the chain allows to both go upstream, from the effect to the cause ... or go downstream from the cause to the effect....” (p, 72). It is this link that bends backwards to put events in a time perspective that helps the audience/reader to correlate and comprehend the fragmented occurrences of the world of drama. Both Elam and Ferraro agree on the ordering or re-ordering of the worlds (the former referring to the dramatic and the latter to the human world, and both cross-referencing) for comprehension of meaning. This ordering aims at creating narratives that make comprehension of both life and drama possible. It is this element of cross-referencing that is responsible for the construction or reconstruction of narratives in drama.

Ideally, the spectator of a dramatic performance or reader of a text expects to construct the story as the events of the drama unfold in a mimetic manner. However, some events are only referentially designated rather than mimetically enacted. Such events could have “happened” in a character’s past, and are therefore, only recounted or reported by the character, or they are imagined that they will happen in the future, therefore, only speculated upon. In other instances, the past or imaginary events are cinematically replayed or role-played by the character(s) relating the occurrence. Such phenomena in a dramatic text result in a variance in the notions of time and space whereby there is a sense of “reality” (but not factuality) and/or fantasy in the world of drama to which cognizance should be paid when explicating meaning. This awareness, which is expected of the audience/reader, enables him or her to locate dramatic events in a time and geographical loci that helps to process meaning from the correct context.

However, whereas the spectator can access the world of drama, the *dramatis personae* cannot access the world of actuality because they do not possess the concrete independence and intellectual disposition that the reader/audience possesses. It is this intellectual disposition, coupled with the cultural awareness and socialization of the audience/reader, that enables him to fill in the gaps that exist in the segmented world of drama in order to make the same world complete and comprehensible. In addition, the *dramatis persona* does not again possess the socio-cultural existence and disposition that the audience/reader has, hence cannot access the world of the performer and spectator. This distinction between the two worlds compels the reader/audience to be aware of any hierarchies of worlds that the *dramatis personae* may create in their own world for their own purposes. For instance, the *dramatis personae* may role-play a situation in their own world, creating another level of mimesis. This cognizance of the hierarchical worlds of drama has to be recognized and perceived from the standpoint of the world of concrete reality as the starting point for intelligible interpretation. (Elam, 1980)

The world of human reality is made sense of by a social and cultural awareness that enables the process of encoding and decoding messages to take place between the originator and recipient of the message. Characters are taken to be cultural constructs whose acts are interpreted according to the laws of social decorum and human ethics, shared in a triadic relationship that exists among the playwright, performer and audience/reader of drama. Since art is understood to be imitation, then, essentially characters are projections from the world of actuality. The world of drama is thus assumed to exist before the spectator during performance (it exists *in media res* as the performer gives life to it). It comes into being in performance and as this happens, its 'history' and social milieu are established. The actor shares with the audience the

character's spatio-temporal circumstance by enacting, describing, recounting or referring to the conditions and events of this world.

In print, the reader has to project the actions of the character into life and be alive to the enactments, references and recounts of events that the character makes. By way of enacting and referring to their world, characters construct their own world. Elam contends, "Dramatic worlds, then, are revealed through the persons, actions and statements which make them up..." (1980, p.112). The audience is largely shown this world by the actor through a process of ostention. Elam calls this element of constructing the dramatic world by reference the principle of reflexivity.

As the actors (incarnating the *dramatis personae* on stage) interact and construct the "here and now" world of the play, they often times refer to some past "experience" or imagine future events, just like the world of actuality. Actors express the fears, fantasies, convictions, wishes, or beliefs of the characters. As the characters remember their past and speculate on the future, they create other worlds that ultimately when coalesced together with the acts of mimesis constitute the larger dramatic world of the play. As this reflection on the past occurs, a time notion of "then" and spatial notion of "there" are created. The realization of the current action in a spatial location of "here" and a time locus of "now" is sometimes predicated on this notion of "there" and "then" framing on stage. This historical notion of space and time of the events of drama forms the background against which dramatic representation, and by extension interpretation, take place.

Further, when the characters present to the audience/reader their imagination of the future or wishful thinking, the time locus shifts to "elsewhen" and the geographical space, since it is not concrete, is an imaginary "elsewhere". Searle says during performance, a play is presented as a "pretended state of affairs" (1975, p. 328). When the *dramatis personae* present yet to happen events, they create yet

another level of ostention, which though not intended to be shared, is shared with the audience. The audience in this case enjoys the privilege of eavesdropping on the presentation of the characters.

This realization of different contexts occasioned by the awareness of time and space within a text of drama is a cardinal logical element of constructing narrative. It results in layers of dramatic worlds that are perceived through direct enactment by actors on stage, reminiscence by characters (through narration or reference) or projection and by deployment of techniques of time and space. This chapter explores this spatio-temporal hierarchical world creation in Ruganda's drama.

### **2.2.0 Looking over the Shoulder: The Lost Worlds of Ruganda's Characters**

In Ruganda's plays, characters keep looking back at their past in order to rationalize their present and conjure up their future. His plays operate in a flux of different worlds, which are defined referentially in spatio-temporal terms by the characters from their experience or imagination – they are aware of their past from “their experience” but they can only imagine “the future” basing on their “past” and “present”. This definition of dramatic worlds is made apparent through reminiscences, retrospection, flashback, role-play, dreams and trances. The use of these technical elements of theatrical strategy demonstrate the characters' knowledge or conjuration of the other worlds. The reconstruction of the past and projection of the future by the characters is an attempt to come to terms with their current plight.

The characters reconstruct images of their past life or of other characters in absentia through imaginative role-play. The images created by this technique turn out in fact to be the role-playing characters' attitudinal perceptions and (re)construction of the past or future and absent characters. These constructions are underpinned by the characters' individual idiosyncrasies. The character constructs, since they are not real,

create subtlety in the discourse of the drama by elevating it to higher levels of infinite fictive possibility rather than definite actuality. The images created by the role-playing characters are based on ‘memory’ and ‘speculation’, within the dramatic world. In most cases the role-play is a mask of emotions held towards the characters being portrayed. The “reality” of Ruganda’s dramatic world, therefore, becomes twice removed from the reality of his historical, factual world. This makes interpretation of meaning indeterminate and polysemically complex.

The predication of Ruganda's plays in the “history” of their characters opens them up and places the events in larger frames of long-running sagas. Their narratives, therefore, go back in time into the past lives of the characters, prompting the audience/reader to understand them from these pasts. Elam explains this phenomenon of reflexivity to mean that the dramatic world is defined and specified by means of references made to it by the *dramatis personae* that exist in it. In Ruganda's case, the characters define and explain their present by sometimes directly recounting episodes in their past life. This act of referentiality makes the audience to understand the root cause of their predicaments. Largely, the characters’ suffering and realization of their plight are presented as a kind of lesson learnt from the past but rather too late. The characters are presented as trapped in their situations, either due to ignorance, sheer inaction or fate. The following section explores the aspect of spatio-temporal context of dramatic action of the plays in relation to the characters’ explanation of their present from their past perspective.

### **2.2.1 Wamala and Tinka's Glorious Past in *The Burdens***

*The Burdens* is the tragic story of Wamala, a man who rises to prominence by chance of political expediency only to be brought down by his overreaching ambition. A former tutor, Wamala rises to become a principal of a college and on the dawn of independence, he is appointed to cabinet. It is while serving as minister in government

that he fancies that he can become president and plots with some foreigners to overthrow the government. He is uncovered by the incumbent regime and jailed. When the play opens Wamala is living in a slum after he has served two years of jail and has been paroled by the head of state. At this juncture, Wamala is too disgraced and ashamed to face those whom he fraternized with in high society and, at the same time, he cannot fit in the slum. He has to come to terms with slum life, a reality that he finds too hard to bear. Feeling a debased man, Wamala has hibernated into the Republic Bar where he can be tolerated by fellow habitu e drunks.

To begin with, Wamala's physical translocation from the high-end residential section of the city to the lowly dwelling in the slums is not only an indicator of his plummeted socio-economic fortunes, but also an extreme transposition of his world. Wamala has to adjust from the world of plentitude and power to the new world of penury, disobedience and subservience. As the author describes him in the introductory note to the play:

He [Wamala] has been stripped of everything, everything except his wife and two children – his co-actors who are also his audience. No more ministerial laughs and confident gait. Orders are given, but this time not taken. The feel of power is now an irritating memory for Wamala and his family. (Ruganda, 1972, p. v)

It is particularly the last bit of the author's description that captures well Wamala and Tinka's current plight. They have been up there in a world where they commanded business persons and beauticians to come to their house but now they have to hustle and jostle among the lowly, the riff-raff of society, whom they despised while in high society. There are no more parties and VIP treatment for the couple. Thus having descended from the pedestal of privileged life of largesse, the couple has

to adjust to the new world of deprivation and beggary. This is what they find most frustrating. Unable to come to terms with the new plight, Tinka plainly moans:

**Tinka:** We suffer. Wamala. It is difficult for us especially after such a past.

**Wamala:** (*dreamily*) Oh the glorious past...

**Tinka:** At least with you and the children it's okay. You have your drink and women to turn to. Kaija was very young then. He doesn't remember much. Kake was not born yet. But *me, I'm* one huge lump of pain and suffering. (p. 37)

The constant nostalgic glances by both characters are what make them frustrated as they regret the glorious past that has faded away.

To understand the frustration one has to put the current world of the Wamala's in perspective. This past world has to be interrogated more closely in order to understand why the couple keeps craving for it. Right from the onset of their relationship, the two protagonists are never honest with each other. Wamala alleges that Tinka seduces him when she realizes that he is destined for a bright future. On her part, Tinka does not rebut this allegation but justifies it by claiming, "In a way ... every woman does," (p. 39) meaning that every married woman seduces her man. Looked at from this angle, there is an apparent hidden agenda in Tinka's angling in Wamala's way for a relationship. She was looking for a way of getting into high society and saw a climbing ladder in Wamala through his political ambition.

On his part, Wamala is a happy-go-lucky fellow and an opportunist who sees a chance in politics on the dawn of independence and when Tinka presents herself, he ropes her into his scheme. As he confesses, he capitalizes on Tinka's naivety and her father's generosity, coupled with his party's conflict with the Catholic Church, to achieve his political ambition. He brags:

**Wamala:** Boy, I gave them what they deserved. Their most trusted nun, the only daughter of an eminent Catholic chief. Ha ha, it was a political masterpiece. And in your spiritual dusk, my dear was my political dawn and their defeat. The way I chewed the host would have made a bone bleed. (pp. 40 -41)

From the confessions by both characters it is clear that their past life is wrought with dishonesty and individualism. However, it is not only the two who are dishonest. Among the crowd that attends the couple's wedding reception party includes university dons who profess humanism but partake of the illicit bounties of political avarice. This means that Wamala and Tinka's world is that of deception and pretense. Everyone grabs whatever opportunity that comes his or her way. What the couple does not realize is that the allure of such life blinds them to the elements of communality and humanity, which define a civilized society. It is the selfishness of this world that makes Tinka to throw out the "... insidious upsurge of relatives and friends" (p. 42) and Wamala to condescendingly treat the common person, who, ironically are his voters. This attitude to life in their newfound world of opulence puts them in a social class of people who are robbed of their humanity. Indeed, in their role-play of Wamala's impending meeting with Kanagonago, it is clear how well the two understand the mannerisms of this class. Tinka, acting as Kanagonago, treats Wamala, who acts as the common person, with so much spite and contempt that are unfounded. Like Wamala during his days in office, Kanagonago looks down on the common person because the tycoon possesses the instruments of power and control. These instruments are money, political goodwill and the gun. These are the instruments that define the world of authority from which Wamala has fallen.

It is ironical, therefore, for Wamala and Tinka to expect the common people they now live among to simply embrace and welcome them into their fold. The suffering and bitterness that Tinka bemoans is a dose her own medicine. She does not

care for the common person while she is in high society, so why should they care for her? Socially Wamala suffers the biggest brunt of this fall in life. He is the one who was minister and he is rejected by both the outside world and in his own home:

**Wamala:** ... The world outside is hell let loose. It's ruthless. It breaks one. Everyone orders you to walk with your tail limp between your thighs. They don't want you to raise your head. They want you to know that your life is in their hands. (*He sees a cobweb, gets it and goes to dress her*) They can break it like a dry stick, if they choose to. And they always do because it gives them the feel of power. They want you to know they are now on top, sitting on your head. And you beneath their buttocks, suffocating. So when a man comes home from this hell, this crowd full of power-hungry bastards with twitching hands – hands eager to grab and get rich quickly – a man wants sympathy and sweetness, tender care and kindness. Not silent curses. (pp. 35 – 36)

This feelings of frustration by the two characters is the cause of estrangement, creating a new world for them in their relationship. Tinka has no friends to herself except her customers who come for her illicit brew and leave as soon as they have had their share. She is too proud to reach down to the slum women. As such, she has only her family to fall back to. But, Wamala has receded into alcohol and prostitution, leaving her with only Kaija, their son. Perhaps, because she wants to win Kaija to her side, she keeps poisoning him with tales against his father.

Tinka's pride despite the change in social status cannot allow her to mingle in the slums. This pushes her into a world of loneliness. The sense of humaneness that the two feel is lacking in their new world is what they had opportunity to inculcate in society but they failed. Formerly a nun, Tinka escapes the spiritual life of celibacy, self-denial and willing servanthood to humanity prescribed by the church and opts for the illusive worldly life of affluence. On the other hand, Wamala fails to demonstrate selfless leadership while holding political office and is overtaken by selfish ambition

that brings him down. Each of the characters' dreams is thus shattered in their individual ambitious pursuit of the illusory life of ostentation and power.

The tragic flaw in the two protagonists' life is their inability to see and acknowledge their contribution to their own plight. Instead, they blame each other for their individual and family suffering. Wamala sees Tinka as the "burden" he has to live with like a millstone around his neck, while Tinka sees him as a worthless man who is responsible for the dwindling of the family's fortunes leading them to poverty. The lack of acknowledgement of culpability is what fires their frustration and estrangement. The constant wish to go back to the previous world, which is almost impossible, aggravates the sense of frustration. This leads to the constant physical confrontations that culminate in Tinka stabbing Wamala to death. This act of sending Wamala to the other world of the dead marks a new beginning for the remaining members of the family. Tinka is destined for prison, which spells for her a new world and beginning while the children head for an orphanage. They have to adjust to another life, without parents, in a new environment. Wamala's death and Tinka's imprisonment mark the end of an era. The family disintegrates, though there is some indefinite glimmer of hope in the children who have been hopefully saved from the world of domestic violence and general family strife.

Looked at from a different angle, what plays out as a simple family feud can be paralleled to the world of irresponsible political leadership that ends up not only destroying itself, but also other members of the society. Indeed, Wamala's plight can simply be summed up as the fate of a politician whose overreaching ambition destroys. His cry that it is the Yankees and their dollars that cheat him into attempting to overthrow the government cannot exonerate him. It is a cry of the bitter grapes that he does not get. Had he succeeded with the help of the same Yankees, he would not

be any better than the leaders he attempts to depose and now condemns. In essence, the Yankees are part and parcel of the political class he has been a part of and wishes to go back to. This is a class that perpetrates neo-colonialism and imperialism to the detriment of the citizens. In response to Wamala's rhetorical question, "But why can't these Yankee bastards leave us alone?" (p. 43) Tinka summarizes the hypocrisy of the political elite:

**Tinka:** Because we don't want them to. As long as they are around we can always stuff our pockets and blame it on them. They don't mind it provided we nurture their indispensability complex.  
(p. 43)

It is his ilk who do not want to disentangle themselves from the Yankees. Having failed in his quest, he now sees the bad side of the Yankees. It is this kind of pretense that underpins the hypocritical political world in which he has played.

It is obvious that Wamala's coup plot is not in any way motivated by the moral obligation to rid his country of bad governance. Rather it is propelled by the selfish ambition of every political elite's desire to ascend to the highest office in the land. All he wants is to get a feel of the presidency and control the country's resources. Having failed, he now turns round purporting to be a crusader of anti-imperialism or anti-neo-colonialism. This new humanist cry is pretentious and it is a desperate attempt to find relevance in a society that does not recognize him. Lacking respect both in society and at home, Wamala now wants to find relevance in activism. Wamala, therefore, lives in a world where he is both socially and domestically emasculated.

Wamala has discovered how painful it is to live without authority in this unfamiliar new world. The only way he can exert his authority is by resorting to brute force. His awakening to the plight of the common people, therefore, comes as a form

of baptism of fire. Unfortunately, it comes rather late in the day. Wamala cannot be trusted to genuinely champion the rights of these people. This is true considering how he behaves when he anticipates selling his innovative ideas of double headed matches and slogans to Kanagonago. His main concern is to restore his family back to the lost good life, if he succeeds. He tells Tinka of a big mansion and limousine awaiting the family. These are yardsticks of acceptance into the class and world from which Wamala has fallen and wishes to go back.

Ironically, as long as Wamala is penniless, he will remain subordinate to the authority of people like Kanagonago who possess both economic and socio-political power, even if they are not half as educated he is. He has lost his clout and his quest to regain it remains only a delusion. Those in the position of power have entrenched themselves and will go to any lengths to guard the position jealously. The lack of power to call the shots both at home and out there is what underlies Wamala's frustration. It is not surprising, therefore, Kaija takes the liberty to sell the traditional regalia to which he so much attaches sentimental feelings of authority. This sparks the fight with Tinka that prompts her to kill him in the night. That it is Kaija who sells the regalia to pay his school fees and Nyakake's medication is a symbolic act of transference of responsibility and authority. The death of the head of the family thus symbolizes the end of a regime headed by a selfish leader.

From the foregoing discussion, it is clear that the dramatic events of *The Burdens* are underpinned by past experiences. The inability of the protagonists to adjust to their present reality and their entrapment in their past life leads to their self-destruction. There is a sense of inversion in which Wamala and Tinka's past social crimes of selfishness and individualism are redressed when they find themselves living in the slums. When they fail to adjust to the reality of their social statuses

because of feelings of guilt and frustration, their pent up emotions implode in the tragic end of their lives. The past thus catches up with them.

### **2.2.2 Berewa's Squandered Bounty in *Black Mamba***

*Black Mamba* is a weird story of a man, Berewa, who blackmails his wife, Namuddu, into sleeping with Professor Coarx, his boss, for money. Berewa claims to have been impoverished after what his father bequeaths him is squandered by his wife and her people. He is a disgruntled man seeking to regain what he has lost from his wife. He, therefore, seeks to recoup his bounty using what God has given him, a beautiful wife, to hook riches from his lascivious master. However, things do not work very well for him. A snake, a black mamba, invades the professor's bedroom prompting Namuddu to burst into the living room in her night dress while Professor Coarx is entertaining a newly appointed colleague, Catherine, and one of his students, Odiambo. This exposes and embarrasses the professor as a pretentious amorous man and scuttles Berewa's ride to riches.

The drama opens with an argument between Berewa and Namuddu over how to spend the first one hundred shillings that she has earned from the adulterous enterprise. It is in the course of the altercation that Berewa reminds Namuddu of the loss she has occasioned on the family leading them to live in a state of deprivation and servitude. For Berewa, where his father left them is what has become Paradise lost in this current time where he has to scrounge to make ends meet. This argument parallels the Wamala-Tinka relationship in *The Burdens*, where each of the characters sees the other as the cause of their family's suffering. However, in *Black Mamba*, Berewa lays blame squarely on his wife, Namuddu, and her close relatives on whom he claims to have spent part of his wealth. Berewa's action of forcing his wife into adultery is thus an attempt at reparation of the sins that Namuddu apparently committed. As for Namuddu, though it looks unnatural that she should accept her husband's indecent

proposal, she is driven by a naive feeling of remorse for the loss she occasions, though inadvertently. In addition, once Namuddu joins her husband in the city, she develops a conscious desire for fine things – fine dresses, earrings and good shoes, which she sees other women possessing. It is Berewa's observation of his wife's fancies that makes her an easy prey and tool for his scheme.

Berewa's wily nature and unscrupulous hunt for wealth is sanctioned by his present urban society that is not only materialistic, but also decadent. The hunt for money and material items is the yardstick for success and distinction in this society. It does not matter how one gets wealth. What matters is that one is rich, and consequently respectable. Money and flashy clothes are the hallmarks of success. They make one to be called a “somebody.” The end justifies the means in this hunt for material things. What underlies this cut-throat rat race for money and wealth is a silent societal approval that Berewa has come to understand very well. As he puts it, after Namuddu has done her assignment well, everybody will be pointing at them saying, "There goes Berewa and his sweet Namuddu. What a lot of money they have got! What a nice house they've built! And what expensive clothes they wear." (1973, p. 14)

This is a new kind of life to which both Berewa and Namuddu have to adjust. Both have lived in the village where there is a sense of communality and humanity. These two aspects of African socialism are lacking in the urban world to which the couple has to adjust. Humanity, which is grounded in the African tradition of communality, has no room among city people. Berewa has long discarded this kind of village life, and is trying to wean his wife from it as well. The urban world is new and estranging to Namuddu; it is a world in which immorality is the norm, particularly if it justifies the end. Namuddu has to shed off her naivety and learn to be streetwise, even if it means losing her self-esteem to sleep with her husband's boss. All Berewa wants

from her is riches. With this kind of attitude towards life, it is not surprising that the rich prostitute, Namatta, becomes the model of success not only for Berewa, but for Namuddu as well. While Berewa envies her husband for the money that "only the devil can count" (p. 12), Namuddu aspires to dress and look like her, "high-heeled shoes, a necklace, ear-rings and a handbag"(p. 8).

It is this individualistic perception of life that makes Namuddu's brother to disregard all that Berewa has done for him and ignore him in his new impoverished state. Everybody thinks of themselves and there is no room for thinking about other people. The village life of being one's brother's keeper that Berewa is initially socialized in does not hold for people who live in town where decadence and immorality are pervasive. The generosity and sense of community on which village life is premised is the paradise lost for the city people. Berewa's father bequeathed him some wealth, to give him a head start in life. Berewa shares this bounty with his relations hoping that his gesture will be appreciated and reciprocated. He, however, gets a rude shock from his brother-in-law who does not regard him as somebody. The lifestyle of compassion and minding the other that is part the village ethos has no room in the urban world. Thus, Berewa's aggressive and unscrupulous hunt for riches is undergirded by this realization and acceptance of lack of humanity. Indeed, he declares to Namuddu:

**Berewa...** Poverty hooked us, we must hook riches. That's the fashion these days. Many families have become prosperous that way. No reason why we shouldn't. (pp. 11 - 12)

In her naivety, Namuddu still believes that one can become rich without necessarily degenerating into prostitution. However, as she begins to sensitively adjust to her relationship with Professor Coarx, she becomes a changed woman. In the end, the fact that her effort fails, shows the author's condemnation of the new world of immorality.

What Namuddu does not understand is that the man she is made to consort with and hold in high esteem and she takes to be kind, is also perverted. The only difference is that Professor Coarx's kind of perversion is Eurocentric. Being a married man, the professor has not enjoyed the bliss that is assumed to come with marriage. So having landed in an African city he expects to vent his frustration in the wild where every black girl wants to sleep with a Caucasian man. That is why he thinks Namuddu is one of those girls who patronize the Gardenia, a passion resort, to sell themselves cheaply to whitemen. He tells Namuddu, "It's amazing the passion all of you have for mean pretences. One exactly like the other, tactiful, probing, always pushing your case forward. I know that sort of stuff, my dear girl" (p. 27). This shows the professor has a misconceived picture of the African urban woman. Later on, he refers to women as play things that are tossed from one man to another. Besides this, Professor Coarx has created a world of deceit both around Namuddu and himself. He confesses that he has not enjoyed his married life and would like to stay with Namuddu as long as possible because he enjoys her company, but he does not want to show her to his visitors. It is this irony of character that leads Namuddu to believe that he loves her. This builds in Namuddu the dream of a blissful relationship. This dream bursts when the snake scares her and the professor has to protect his image. That is when she realizes the man's true colours. That he had only kept her as an object of sex.

As the play comes to a close, Namuddu displays some transformation. The initially innocent Namuddu can now confront both Professor Coarx and Berewa and tell them off when she feels her rights are trampled on. She has shed off her innocence and has started to assert herself. The new world, however, proves too dangerous and complex for her. When the police appear on the scene threatening to arrest her, she

retracts to seek protection from Berewa, the man she has just been feeling equal to and independent of. This is an indicator that though she has become a little exposed, she is yet to develop the courage and wiliness that will enable her to survive in this challenging urban world of wolves.

What, therefore, underpins the action and events of *Black Mamba* is the understanding that the three protagonists, Berewa, Namuddu and Professor Coarx, have to fully adjust to the challenging and precarious urban life of the city as they try to regain their lost social and economic statuses as defined by the present parameters of the new society. The parameters are money and conspicuous material possessions for Berewa and Namuddu, and decorum for Professor Coarx. In this new world order, it is only the wiliest and fittest that will survive. In Berewa and Namuddu's relationship, the human elements of individualism, selfishness and pervasive materialism are satirized. In Professor Coarx, pretense to integrity and intellectualism are exposed.

### **2.2.3 Spirituality and Fate in *Covenant with Death***

In *Covenant with Death*, Matama, a young lady, is returning home, famished by disease after Duncan, her white boyfriend abandons her when he returns to Europe. Duncan entrusts the ailing Matama to Motomoto to escort her home. Matama, who has been away from home for a long period of time, looks forward to a happy reunion with her parents, oblivious of the fact that they are both dead. When the news of her parents' death is broken to her by an Old Man from her village, who she meets on the way home, she collapses and dies of grief. Her dream of a happy reunion with her parents (or her past village life) is thus ended.

Matama's struggle to find the essence of life is, like the other protagonists of Ruganda's plays, is grounded in her history. However, unlike the other protagonists

who are fully aware of their past, Matama's past is shrouded in secrecy and mystery. Her suffering results from her assertive character and the breaching of a covenant that she is ignorant of, which her father and mother enter into with Kaikara, the goddess of fruition.

Blinded thus with the lack of knowledge of her plight, Matama endeavours to find happiness and fulfillment in life despite her barrenness that makes her the object of spite in the village. It is this perception of womanhood by the villagers that haunts Matama to the extent of deciding to run away. In the village, a woman is not a woman if she does not bear children. Since she cannot give birth, Matama despised in spite of her beauty. Thus Matama is a lesser woman in the worldview of her people. Her womanhood is put to question. Essentially, it is Matama's quest for realization of her womanhood, the desire to procreate that leads to her suffering. In her pursuit of this desire she commits the crime of infidelity against Kaikara's prohibition. Her attempt to circumvent village contempt takes her to the city, where even her relationship with a white man is not acceptable as she is taken to be a mistress. Staying with a white man to whom she is not married is immoral in the eyes of the city people. Matama's relocation from the village to the city to avoid spite does not save her. Fate catches up with her. As punishment, she suffers ill-health, loses her beauty and eventually dies. Her parents also die as punishment for not ensuring her chastity by prohibiting her from having sexual intercourse with mortal man.

Matama blames her tribulations on the unsympathetic men of her village, who she accuses of being unkind to her by looking at her with disdain because of her condition. This forces her to flee with a white man, a stranger. However, as it turns out, her troubles go beyond human ken. Her sanction against sex is by Kaikara, a goddess. Her running away from the village with Duncan, therefore, can be construed as an attempt to circumvent her fate, though unknowingly.

Matama's world in the village is authored, ordained and dictated by both humans and the goddess. Her flight to the city, which is still within the earthly human abode, is an attempt to unwittingly the goddess. Contrary to her belief that men in her village are the cause of her suffering, the goddess authors her problem. The men are only subject to a societal code that dictates perception. If Matama understood her destiny and observed chastity she would have been uplifted above other mortals because she would be oriented towards the spiritual world. She would be revered. The loss of her chastity and her quest for mundane and banal desires rob her of that which she was meant to stand for in life. Matama's lack of understanding of her condition and her people's definition of womanhood are the cause of her frustration:

**Matama:** I was desperately in need of a harvesting season – I saw girls of my age, even my juniors, command more respect from the farmers. I saw them harvest, as though their shambas were teeming with life. I felt as though my inside was made of dead wood. Dead, dry-wood. My very inside was tormented by a deep wound, a wound I could not heal, a wound nobody could heal. It fermented and festered as time went by. The biting dug deeper and deeper as men passed me by – even my father's servants whenever they passed near me, they could hardly look at me. They would walk a few steps off and spit in disgust. (p. 86)

This self-pity causes Matama to reject herself as a woman and leads to her social anguish. She succumbs to societal pressure and sees herself as incomplete and unworthy. This perception of womanhood pushes her into despair and the temptation to commit suicide. She wishes to exit this world of spite and frustration permanently. Motomoto, her escort, who also suffers the same fate of infertility, holds a different opinion. He feels since their fate is similar, they should escape to a secret place where their plight will not be known. It is the other people's expectations that actually define their lives and world. What the two need to do is define their own world and ignore the people who want to hurt them. Motomoto's suggestion that they obliterate the past, move to a new destination and start anew is escapist. Both characters ought to

confront their past and present predicament. They should not run away from it by sheer spatial migration, as the problem will not go away. Theirs is a world created for them partly by forces beyond their control. They have to psychologically confront and accept their condition then lucidly elect how to move forward. Matama needs to understand her past in order for her to come to terms with her pre-ordained reality. Likewise, Motomoto needs to find out the cause of his impotence in order to understand himself. Ideally, what Motomoto is suggesting is that both of them should resign to fate, whatever that fate may be, and move on.

Ironically, such a life is precisely what has caused Matama her suffering. Like Oedipus, in Sophocles' *King Oedipus*, Matama can only alleviate her troubles if she knows who she is. Oedipus is the accursed son of King Laius who is married to his own mother but he does not know. When he learns who he really is, he is humbled by life. Unlike in the past when he carries himself with a hubristic sense of pride, in his state of discovery of his disgraceful past, Oedipus gains patience and equanimity in life. Matama is bound to Kaikara but she does not know. If she had known and tried to keep the covenant then she would not have wasted and lost her life. Thus, Motomoto's suggestion that the two run away to a far off place is tantamount to the proverbial ostrich that buries its head in the sand and hopes that the problem will go away. The both of them need to know their world in order for them to live in it meaningfully.

Matama's predicament is summarized by Banura's father, "The air is purged of wanton affinities, and the inherited debt paid by an unknowing child" (pp. 102 – 103). The ignorance referred to here is what makes her to dismiss the soothsayer she encounters on the way home. She calls his divination mere prattle aimed at scaring her. The disdain she has been treated with in her village makes her to be suspicious of

everyone. Yet if she interrogated the metaphor of the storm that the diviner uses to explain her life's mystery she would see the revelation of her fated existence. The two storms that the Traveller speaks of are obviously Kaikara's wrath against Matama and her parents for breaking the goddess' injunction. It also portends her impending death.

Matama's troubled life can be looked at in the light of human ignorance and imperfection in the face of the supernatural. Unknowingly, Matama abandons the divine and pursues the mundane life of lust and vanity. Her ignorance, hence imperfection, is what makes her a hubristic character, creating a wall around herself that closes out reason. Matama thus lives in a dark world of her own.

Matama's plight parallels the human instincts of struggle and survival. Humanity's inability to fully comprehend destiny and the apparent disorientation in a strange incomprehensible world makes people to wallow stoically through situations that they cannot fathom. Her imperfect life is analogous to the general human imperfection. Matama's fate is intricately tied in the worlds of her parents' quest for a child to guarantee them a progeny, her desire for fulfilment of her womanhood and an arbitrary injunction of a goddess.

#### **2.2.4 Nankya's Mirage of a Better Future and Kyeyune's Lost World in *The Floods***

*The Floods* is the story of Nankya and Bwogo, two protagonists who have grown up together in the same home but live in different sections and come from different backgrounds. Nankya is a daughter of a domestic servant working for the Bwogo's, where she partly spends her childhood. In fact, she is a product of rape, which her mother suffers at the hands of a gang of rogue soldiers. Thus, she has struggled through life to reach where she currently is. She is a lecturer and she is seeking to justify herself as a self-made intellectual, aspiring to cut a niche for herself

in the world of academics. She is also a self-proclaimed champion for human rights for the down trodden and women in particular. Now an aspiring professor, Nankya looks at the government in which Bwogo serves with the critical eye, indicting it for repression. While growing up, her mother always looked upon her to change the status quo in future; to put right the wrongs that those in position of privilege have committed against common people. Nankya thus grows up aspiring to a better life than what she experiences in her childhood.

Bwogo, on the other hand, is a bacon-and-sausage man whose life has not known deprivation. He attends boarding right from primary to high school and even when he does not perform well academically, he is pushed through to a top civil service job. He eventually ends up as the head of the State Research Bureau (SRB), a government intelligence and torture machine used to silence dissenting voices. Bwogo has, therefore, not known any form of struggle in his life.

These two, therefore, hail from and belong to different worlds. Nankya hails from the lowly class while Bwogo belongs to the privileged ruling class. It is against such a background that the love affair between the two sounds strange. The question is, why is Nankya involved with a man whose despicable activities against the citizenry she is fully aware of? What is intriguing in the Nankya-Bwogo relationship is not only the disparity in their backgrounds but the disjunction in their aspirations. Whereas Nankya sets off to put right what she sees as crimes of wanton commission against citizens by the leadership, she ends up only paying lip service to this aspiration. The closest Nankya comes to articulating this aspiration is during the role-play in which it is imagined she has won the JFK prize for literature. However, this is only a fantasy because nowhere in the play does she articulate openly her defence for the common people. In this regard, Nankya is a hypocrite who would like people to

see her as their benefactor when in actual sense she is not. Bwogo attests to this as he mocks her during the role-play. Bwogo also alleges that in her effort to become the best lady academic, she ends up a fraud, who sexually bribes her way to the top. Nankya has, therefore, built a false world of benevolence and importance around herself, which Bwogo sees through easily. Yet, people like Kyeyune look up to her for leadership. Kyeyune thinks she is a “big fish in the pond of learning.” This is the image that Nankya projects to the outside world of common people.

Bwogo, on the other hand, aware of his background and relationship to the head of state, seeks to protect the empire, which partly his father bequeathed him and partly he has amassed. Thus, he will do anything to ensure that he protects himself and others in the system. It is this quest for security, both personal and for the state that makes Bwogo a tyrant. The feeling of insecurity is strongly grounded in a past world of avarice, self-aggrandizement and tyrannical hold on what is fraudulently acquired. Leading a lifestyle of a happy-go-lucky man and compelled by the situation of his office, Bwogo is willing to sacrifice those close to him for self-preservation. Aware of the precariousness of his world, therefore, Bwogo would rather live alone than be committed to Nankya in a matrimonial union. He knows people do not like him and that is why he takes every precaution to shut them out of his world.

Having compromised her professional integrity thus, (she does not refute when Bwogo alleges that she is an academic fraud) Nankya does not have the moral high ground to stand on and drifts consciously towards the world she has always aspired. She is pulled towards the life of affluence and plenty that she could only look at through the holes in the wall that separated her family's residence, a servant's quarter, from the mansion sitting on a twelve-acre plot that is Bwogo's home. Morally, therefore, Nankya is a traitor to her mother's expectations, herself and the society that

she purports to stand for. It is this moral guilt that makes her stick with Bwogo, who is the epitome of the establishment's aggrandizement and tyranny. She is aware she has sinned by association against her moral obligation and personal integrity. In this vein then, she has no ethical justification to point an accusing finger at Bwogo. This is why she does not even dissuade the islanders from boarding the boat of death when she knows well that the evacuation is a sham. All she is concerned with is her personal safety. She does not even try to save her mother who is supposed to board the death boat. Given that she is aware of what is happening and does nothing about it, points to the conclusion that she wants Bwogo to herself. The two are tied together by the cord selfish desires.

Bwogo and Nankya's life is in contrast to Kyeyune's, which is premised on a past of moral ethic, anchored on the notion of a higher power that controls the destiny of humanity. Kyeyune always looks up to Kagooro, god of the sky, for mercy and protection. It is this looking up to a protective power that instils in Kyeyune honesty, respect and regard for other people. This looking up to a supreme power that orders his behaviour elevates Kyeyune morally. For Kyeyune, this is the life and world that prevailed before the coming to power of "the ogre", meaning Boss, the current head of state. Kyeyune sums up life before the coming of Boss thus:

**Kyeyune:** We had our complaints here and there, of course. There were times when the rains failed us or the floods ate up our belongings but all in all we went fishing and tilling the soil for sustenance, confident of tomorrow and the day after. But now we are no better than a drunkard's cockerel – unsure of ourselves any moment. Each dawn is as surprising as it is painful. We welcome dusks with partial sighs of relief and the nights with vigils wrought with wails and squeals of terror. The ogre has turned against its kindred. (p.12)

Life is no longer certain in this new era of despotic tyranny. Boss, whom the people welcome with the hope of a better future, "heralded by fronds and frenzied shouts",

turns out to be the ogre that has no respect for human life and people's property. And, those in his service, like Bwogo and the Headman, are over zealous to do their master's bidding. Either the citizens heed their command or they perish, executed by the very regime that ought to guarantee them security. The current world is characterized by insecurity, hopelessness and uncertainty.

Boss's world order forces new choices on the people: they either side with the regime and parrot its decrees like the Headman and Bwogo, or they oppose it at their own peril like the dead general whose body is fished out of the lake by Kyeyune while on a fishing expedition. Patronage and intimidation, therefore, become the hallmarks of survival in the prevailing order. This explains why Kyeyune, who at the beginning of the play verbally confronts Bwogo, ends up begging him for protection towards the end of the play. Kyeyune's world of respect for other people's property is no more. What currently prevails is the world of survival for the fittest.

This, again, partly explains Nankya's patronage to Bwogo. She is clearly aware of the atrocities that Bwogo and the regime have meted on her people (she tells him as much), but she lacks the courage and resolve to fight these crimes against humanity. She cannot even mobilize the people to agitate for their rights. All she does is to issue empty threats to Bwogo without concrete action. Unlike Kyeyune who at least challenges the Headman and verbally assaults Bwogo at the beginning of the play, Nankya only speaks in the confines of their rendezvous, which as Bwogo reveals has always been their romance hideout. It is, therefore, this lack of resolve in Nankya and Kyeyune's disorientation in the face of threatening death that makes the former a traitor and the latter a victim of the cause of the struggle for emancipation of the people. When the forces of liberation close in on them at the end of the play, all

three are bundled together, to face justice. All three stand accused of acts of commission and omission either directly or by association.

The relationship between Bwogo and Kyeyune epitomizes how political power through coercion destroys the sense of humanity in a people and inculcates an attitude of selfishness that resonates with personal rather than societal survival. Kyeyune is intimidated by Bwogo in the face of threat to his life. On the other hand, the Nankya-Bwogo relationship captures society's failure to take charge of its own destiny by willingly surrendering to tyranny despite knowledge of the attendant injustice. Nankya's complacency, hence, points to the process by which humanity becomes complicit in its own destruction.

#### **2.2.5 Betrayal and Guilt in *Music without Tears***

*Music without Tears* grapples with the estrangement of two step brothers, Odie and Wak, who have led different lives in the past, occasioned by political instability in their country. While Wak, then a lecturer at the university, flees into exile for his dear life and ends up compelled to join the liberation war of his motherland, Odie remains at home and works as a spy for the despicable regime that brutalizes his people. Stella, the only sister to the two men, is caught in the cross-fire between the two brothers as they come face to face again after a long period of separation. This past of an unstable regime forces on the stepbrothers choices that come define their later life.

Wak returns home to an unwelcoming brother, who deep inside harbours an unfounded hatred against him from the past, alleging that his brother's running into exile is a cowardly act that cannot be forgiven. This is the scenario that prevails in the play until Wak candidly narrates to his step-brother and sister the circumstances that surround his going into exile, his life as a refugee and his participation in the guerrilla

war for liberation. During this scene of self-narration and revelation, it turns out that Odie is the one who set up his brother to be picked by the State Research Bureau (SRB). The reason for this is not clear until much later in the play when it becomes apparent that Odie has always carried a childhood hatred for his half-brother, who he believes was the favourite of their father. Odie is the mastermind of his brother's tribulations with the authorities, hoping to eliminate him in the process. Fortunately, Wak manages to sneak and escapes to a neighbouring country. The exile opens up a whole new world of meekness and subservience, which Wak has to endure. When he cannot take it any longer, he goes to the bush to join fellow countrymen to fight for the liberation of his motherland.

While Wak is still in exile, Odie fabricates a radio death announcement and runs an obituary in a daily newspaper to convince the world that his step-brother is dead. Therefore, when Wak, thought to be long dead, resurfaces from exile he not only embarrasses but also becomes a threat to Odie. The embarrassment consists in Odie's exposure as a selfish opportunist, while the threat lies in his feeling of guilt for his treacherous activities against his brother. His neurotic behaviour at the beginning and towards the end of the play stems partly from this guilt and partly from the dementia he suffers from the torture by the SRB agents and the horrendous experience he goes through while working as a spy for the same organization.

Home and exile are portrayed as two worlds that put choices on the two brothers. At home, despite having given in his brother, Odie is brutalized into joining the world of tyranny. He is beaten by the SRB agents before he opts to join and work for them. However, working for the despicable institution is not the only option that a well-meaning person has under the circumstance of repression in the country. One wonders why Odie makes such a choice that leads him into a world of dehumanization. He could run into exile like his brother or simply not agree to be

conscripted into the service of the force. To rationalize this choice, again, one has to fall back to the character's past. The conflict between the two brothers is deeply rooted in a sibling rivalry that goes back to their childhood days. In Odie's perception, their father always had a fancy for Wak and Stella and always looked at him as the black sheep in the family. Thus, when Odie gets enmeshed in student politics and he is expelled from the university, he feels his father's failure to defend him – despite being a member of the university's governing council – and his refusal to give him a second chance to redeem his education is a betrayal of filial trust and love. Odie, therefore, has to eliminate his brother from his world in order to earn his father's favour as the only son. However, what is puzzling is his projection of his frustration on his brother, who has nothing to do with his plight directly. His brother does not wrong him in any way. Logically, one would expect him to direct his hatred at his father rather than his brother. Odie's choice to set up his brother in order to eliminate him and the attempt to dispossess him of a share of the family's wealth while in exile is, in this regard, an act of settling an old grudge. Perhaps the most plausible argument for Odie's action would be that Wak gets his education and consequently a decent job; hence, he does not deserve anything from their late father's estate. But then one wonders why Stella who remains at home with him during the period of upheaval and is raped by a randy soldier should be dispossessed as well.

This overreaching quest for wealth and callous attitude towards his siblings can only be explained in terms a process of dehumanization that turns an individual into a bestial zombie. One cannot logically rationalize Odie's arbitrary and selfish actions. In this one can only conclude that he has been zombified into a xenophobic being. That is why he derives pleasure in torturing insects. Given an opportunity he would enjoy torturing people. Odie, thence, belongs to the class of despots who would eliminate anybody in their way for self-aggrandizement.

Wak's sudden re-appearance destabilizes Odie because his space is intruded. Odie's neurotic tendencies – seen through his obsession with torturing insects – symbolize the failure to reconcile his mind to the harm he has occasioned on innocent people, while working for the SRB. In a way Odie's mental state symbolizes a despot whose past deeds cannot allow him peace. It is a manifestation of the inner turmoil that the inhuman regime subjects both its victims and agents to. Odie has been both a victim and an agent of the tyrannical regime. Before agreeing to be conscripted into the SRB, he is beaten and his skull is cracked. This, in a way is symbolic of the larger society that is both victim and agent of the tyranny of its leadership. The failure to say 'no' by the citizens and the choice of the easier option of playing to the tune of the tyrant is the indictment the author levies against the people who may find themselves in a similar situation like Odie's. Such a society is guilty of being an enemy unto and victim of itself.

Faced with the possibility of capture by the liberation forces, Odie becomes a psychotic who projects his guilt to his brother whom he brands traitor and reactionary. He also wishes aloud that Wak should be shot dead; perhaps so that he can be saved the embarrassment. The question to Odie's accusation and wish is, to who is Wak traitor or to what cause? This fundamental question exposes Odie's fickleness. Indeed, Stella is quick to observe that Odie begins to act strange after Wak's return from exile. Her observation vindicates the conclusion that Odie suffers from a guilt conscience, stemming from his past deeds.

Besides his guilt, Odie's hatred for his brother is founded on a misconception that returnees like Wak enjoy a nice and easy life in exile, provided for by humanitarian agencies, while those who remain at home have to contend with the atrocities of the establishment – terror of guns and brutality of a randy army and SRB – and economic repression. However, underneath this accusation lies Odie's wish to

cleanse himself of his culpability of the ills he commits against Wak and other citizens. Indeed, when Wak reveals to him what he knows of his deeds as an SRB spy, Odie completely breaks down. And, as the play ends, it is obvious that he is either headed to prison or a lunatic asylum. This is a kind of prescription of a new world of rehabilitation or extraction from civil society.

Despite the foregoing argument, one may not indict Odie completely for feigning his brother's death; if his intention is to create the impression that the man considered by the state to be dangerous is no more. He is justified in feigning his brother's death for his personal survival. However, knowing that he is the architect of the lie against his brother, he cannot be exonerated from his criminal deeds. When Wak slips through the torture machine's dragnet, Odie is tortured to reveal his whereabouts. Nevertheless, there is no justification for him to instigate lies of subversion against his brother to the SRB and rush to transfer the family's title deeds into his own name, except for purposes of selfish greed. It is this selfishness that underlines his guilt. Odie's past and present world is that of a villainous character who wishes to appropriate everything to himself.

Wak's world of exile is completely different from Odie's misconception of people living in luxury away from home. It is an account of alienation and suffering; a total contrast to the picture that Odie conjures up – of dollar wielding, sausage and bacon for breakfast exiles. Fear, humiliation, subjugation and consequent self-effacing for survival are the hallmarks of life in exile, according to Wak. Such degradation is what gives him impetus to join the liberation forces in the bush. Of necessity, he has to lose his identity and dignity to be able to appreciate the value of freedom and humanity. Dehumanization in exile is what makes Wak to appreciate the value of belonging to one's country. It injects in him a sense of patriotism that pushes him to go into the bush to join hands in the war to liberate his motherland. Wak suffers the

loss of a respectable career leading to his current condition of economic instability and joblessness so that he understands the meaning of selflessness – fighting for other people. Exile, a world a way from home, becomes a learning space for Wak.

The main conflict of *Music without Tears*, therefore, consists in the inner misunderstanding of intentions between the two step-brothers. Wak is genuine in his return home. He is unwelcome out there, but his brother feels he is an unwelcome guest coming to share in what he does not deserve. Yet ironically, it is Odie who does not deserve what he is denying his brother and he is the one who is a coward. He is the traitor who sells his own brother for material gain and betrays fellow citizens for personal survival as he cannot muster courage to challenge the brutal regime. In essence, the Wak-Odie conflict is a microcosmic representation of the play's larger world. Wak articulates this fact aptly when he remarks:

**Wak:** At least you are honest. You don't hide your animosity behind polite talk. Like the others I have met. Condemning the previous regime and hiding whatever they got out of it. (p. 55)

The society in which the two brothers live is divided between the worlds of those who stay behind to face the "music without tears" and those who run into exile and fight to rid the country of a tyrannical leadership. Again, underneath this societal suspicion and hatred lie feelings of guilt and betrayal. Guilt of avarice at the expense of true patriotism and humanity, like the case of Katalikawe; and betrayal by complicity to a dehumanizing regime, like in the case of Odie. The 'returnees' thus indict the 'stayees' for their complicity and abetting bad governance and they claim a higher moral ground than their brothers and sisters who stay at home. The stayees are indicted for either abetting tyranny or inaction, letting things to happen to them while they do nothing about their situation.

By looking back into the history of the dramatic world, the conflict of *Music without Tears* acquires a new level of understanding. It cannot merely be explained by the current hostility between the two main characters, rather it has to be dug up from the past, moved from the family level and projected to the wider national history of the despotic rule that is about to change. From Wak's plight it can be observed that it is never the freedom fighters who enjoy the fruits of independence. The patriots who risk or sacrifice their lives are never compensated or accepted wholly. They either die out there, or when they come back home, they are treated with a lot of suspicion and disdain – looked at as a danger to the well being of the state.

#### **2.2.6 Silent Suffering in *Echoes of Silence***

*Echoes of Silence* like *The Floods* does not progress in a linear plot format. Wairimu (Wairi in short) and Okoth-Okach (OO) are waiting for Njoroge Njuguna (NN), the husband of the former, with whom OO has an appointment to come. As they wait, they engage in phatic communion, touching on a variety of topics and in the process they narrate their past lives. They discover they are birds of a feather whose aspirations of self-fulfillment in blissful marriage have been shattered. The two have met casually in the theatre in the past and this meeting forms the basis of their misconstrued perception of each other's life. Wairi and OO narrate their respective spouses' characters, revealing perceptions of betrayal and frustration in their marriage and family lives.

Initially, OO believes that Wairi is happily married as the coziness of her house deceptively suggests. However, as Wairi opens up, he discovers that she is one lump of a frustrated woman whose hopes of a consummate marriage are destroyed by a childlessness that leads Njuguna to abandon her. Her first and only pregnancy ends in a stillborn and subsequently she suffers sterility. With this misfortune, her

aspiration to a happy marriage is ended. Her torment is aggravated by Njuguna's permanent absence from home and the constant taunts from his many girlfriends. Wairi, hence, recoils into her world of silent stoic existence.

On the other hand, OO's situation is laid bare by his unsolicited lamentations about his wife's noise and lack of peace in his house. Fortunately for OO his daughter, Tina, is a source of pride and hope, unlike Wairi who has nothing to fall back or look forward to. Both characters have had their dreams of a blissful today and future shattered and they blame their respective spouses for this. Whereas OO blames his frustration on the insatiable taunting voice of Muthoni, for Wairi it is the loneliness and solitude of an empty house. She moans, "The silence is oppressive. No one to talk to in this tomb of broken dreams, this museum of past glories" (Ruganda, 1986, p. 24). She is constantly reminded of her aspirations by the wedding picture and other portraits of her happy past and, even more hurting, the empty baby cot she had bought in anticipation of the baby in her sitting room . She looks back with nostalgia to what was a happy past:

**OO:** (*Like two compatriots in solitude*) But it hasn't always been like this, Surely. You must have shared.

**Wairi:** (*Pained at the memory*) I know, I know, I know. The enviable attention. The unquestioned love. The respect for mama and tata that now he doesn't even bother to think about. Dances, parties, picnics, pictures and praises. (p. 27)

This is the life in a world that Wairi misconstrues would last forever, until the reality of her sterility strikes. The fantasy of a forthcoming baby boy that never is and the sterility that follows are an anticlimax to what had been hitherto a perfect marriage. This is what makes Wairi a bitter woman inside, though on the surface she projects a countenance of happiness. Unlike Tinka in *The Burdens*, Wairi puts on a façade of happiness before people, to hide her suffering. She is a child of two worlds – her true

private world of silent suffering and the public world of bliss that she projects to the outside world. It is this reticent nature of her character that misleads OO to imagine that she is a perfect example a happy wife. What is intriguing in the Wairi-Njuguna relationship is why she cannot break away from this life of solitude and loneliness that she confesses is depressing. She reflects on the possibility of leaving and starting a fresh but she lacks the resolve to do so. Largely Wairi is wary of what the outside world would think about her. This kind of thinking leaves her trapped in a loveless relationship. Indeed, later on when she is advising OO against going to Mirembe Bar to drown his sorrows she cautions him against parading his loneliness to the public:

**Wairi:** Let me finish Double O, let me finish. Lost in this maze of thoughts you do not realize that the juke box has stopped playing and that the loneliness by your side and the silence of the drunks are staring at you and wondering what you are up to. You have been talking to yourself Double O, loud and clear. You have been broadcasting your private sorrows to the world. Now everyone in that bar knows that the Double O they have seen strutting and romping around television screen once in a while, (*Exaggerated compliments*) the Double O that has given them kicks with his ingenious jokes and contagious laughter is a lonely man after all. They have seen the man behind the mask, a troubled man gnawed by some incurable loneliness. They don't like it. It has undermined their hope and confidence. (p. 83)

This fear of public opinion is what haunts Wairi and binds her to Njuguna. As a result, she is entrapped in an abusive relationship that does not have any logical basis – she sacrifices her freedom and happiness at the altar of social appearance; she wants to stick in the institution of marriage, even when she knows it is not fulfilling. Thus, the fear of the public eye that knows her background is what compels Wairi to slave through a relationship that is otherwise hollow. Wairi's plight is a common human trait in which the dichotomy between appearance and reality comes into play. People generally fear what the public would say of their mannerism and behaviour and

therefore put on shows to conceal the truth about their lives. Because of the fear of the outside world, Wairi is trapped in her inner individual world.

OO on the other hand constantly whines about his wife who he says “was born with thunder claps in her mouth”. Again, the question begs, why can he not leave her? The only reason he gives for hanging onto Muthoni is his love for his daughter, Tina. Though his acquaintance with Wairi is not long enough for him to open up to her, OO quickly plunges into telling Wairi about his vitriolic wife. Therefore, while Wairi would rather hide her inner suffering, OO is a loud mouth (like his wife, ironically) trumpeting his tribulations and seeking pity and sympathy from anybody who is willing to listen to him.

OO’s character mirrors the kind of people who cry more than they act to alleviate or redress their plight even when they have the ability to do so. It is true that having picked Muthoni from destitution, she is expected to be supportive rather than denigrating of his efforts to earn a living. Instead, Muthoni turns round and stabs OO in the back for his compassion. Her innocence is lost once she is entrenched as a wife:

**Okoth-Okach...** But the irony of it all was that she was so calm and quiet. Almost undemanding. I said. 'God' Your wonders will never cease. Here is one I can cope with. Here is a jewel. Meek and humble like a lamb. When Tina arrived on the scene and Muthoni realized how fond I was of the little cherub, it was a different story. Thunder and lightning. Perhaps I shouldn't have shown my love for Tina. (p. 48)

The world of happiness that OO was looking forward to in marriage becomes illusory, ironically once the baby comes into the family. Yet, this is the source of happiness for OO. Like Wairi's case, there is no logic in OO sticking with this woman. The only explanation he may give is that he wants to be counted a married man and a father. He wants to be seen as “a complete man” by the public. Once again, here like in Wairi’s case, OO lets his life to be defined by the outside world. His frustration is tied to the

notion of public judgement of manhood, which ironically, he does not display from his whining before Wairi.

It is this unexplainable sticking together and clinging on hopes of past aspirations in marriage that makes the relationships of the two couples absurd. The feelings of betrayal and inner suffering that the protagonists exhibit are self-inflicted by their sheer lack of resolve to redress themselves from their plight of abuse.

What is perplexing is that each of the two characters sees the weakness of the other but not their own. OO accuses Wairi of harbouring repressed emotions of unfulfilled dreams, while Wairi, on the other hand, chides OO to stand up and be a man and stop whining, expecting Muthoni to be subservient and submissive to him. Ironically, Wairi behaves in same way she says OO should not expect Muthoni to behave. She is subservient to Njuguna even though he no longer cares for her. In so doing, Wairi actually exhibits irony of character – asking OO to assert himself while she fails to do so herself. OO on the hand, cannot muster the courage to shut Muthoni down and assert himself in his own house as head of the family. Instead he only wimpers to the outside world.

Like in the other plays already discussed, the contradictions in the characters' traits are grounded in their past; the two protagonists do not anticipate the fallouts in their marriage relationships and when this occurs they are unable to face the reality with the necessary lucidity that can enable them to move on. This state of inaction and feeling of alienation is a microcosmic portrayal of the human nature of the oppressed – lamenting, yet not taking any decisive action. By presenting the circumstances of the protagonists in the play in binary contrast, Ruganda manages to subtly capture the absurdity of the institution of marriage, in which couples are expected to be mutually contented with each other but in most cases this is not the reality. With or without the

fulfillment of begetting children, happiness is not guaranteed and the appearance of it among couples could be deceptive as demonstrated in Wairi's case.

### **2.3 Conclusion**

From the foregoing discussion of Ruganda's treatment of his characters' past and present it is evident that certain patterns emerge that show a nexus between the character's experience and their plight, which establishes their culpability. This connection defines the current plight of the characters as resulting from mistakes of commission or omission of their past, and at the same time expands the dramatic worlds of the plays so that the action is seen in a wider perspective than that of the stage presentation. This extension of spacio-temporal context is also realized through the use of technique and this is dealt with in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER THREE

### 3.0 TECHNIQUE, IMAGERY AND SYMBOLISM IN RUGANDA'S PLAYS

“All that is on stage is a sign” - (Verlustrsky 1940, p. 84)

#### 3.1 Introduction

As mentioned in Chapter Two, Ruganda adopts certain techniques that create different planes of perception that ultimately impact on the interpretation of meaning. Such techniques include role-play, projection, flashback, dream motif and retrospection. In addition, the playwright uses vivid description and parallelism (association of types) to create mental perceptions that paint for the audience or reader character and context (world) of his drama. This enterprise of creating mental perceptions consists in imagery and symbolism and forms part of the communication process in drama, both as text and performance. The contexts created by the use of technique define the circumstance of the drama, thereby pointing to yet different levels of inference that do not necessarily fall within the here-and-now mimetic stage time locus of the plays. Ruganda's plays, therefore, operate in a flux of contexts that reflect character perception and intention. The following section looks at these various levels of perception created by use of technique.

#### 3.2 Projection and Role-Play as Attitudinal Constructions of Perception and Context

Projection in literary studies refers to transference of perception (often of guilt or ill feeling) by a character to another, with the intention of transferring culpability to the other character. This transference implies an intention in deed that redefines a character's world. The character that engages in the act of projection constructs a world of deceit, which is intended to be perceptual. The character intends other

characters to see things in a make-believe perceptual rather than concrete truthful perspective.

Role-play, on the other hand, involves a character impersonating another character other than being what is ascribed to him or her as the *dramatis persona*. Many critics use the terms role-play and play-within-a-play interchangeably. However, the former only refers to a character taking on the role of another character while the latter refers to an incidence where there is a play (script/text) which dramatic characters wish to perform. Both role-play and play-within-a-play create second tier worlds (W2) that have the main dramatic world being presented onstage as their spring board. This can be understood from Elam's (1980) position of the world of factuality as the starting point of interpreting drama. The role-playing characters end up presenting new worlds to which only themselves have knowledge of. Examples of plays that deploy the play-within-a-play technique include Francis Imbuga's *Betrayal in the City*, William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and Bertolt Brecht's *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*.

When a character stops acting himself or herself and acts as another character, he or she is entering or creating another world beyond the initial dramatic world (W1), which should be interpreted at another level, and which should be inferred in relation to other actions of the role-playing character. In other words, role-play creates another possible world in the world of the dramatic text, which the audience/reader is made aware of by dramatic technique. In the presence of other characters, a role-playing character presents another world, different from their own, to which they become spectators, and if they join in presenting it then they are aware of it to be an "other" world, different from theirs. Ruganda's characters often times indulge in role-play as they interact with each other, and sometimes they present situations, which only themselves are privy to in a surrealist fashion.

In surrealistic representation, a character may enter into an entirely different world only he or she can perceive and/or comprehend, completely locking out the other characters. For instance, in *Echoes of Silence*, both Wairi and OO hear noises individually from their past or in their individual minds – though the audience is let to hear the noises as well – in a manner that collapses the wall between the concrete reality of the audience and the fictive world of the play and its imagination. In other instances, like in *The Burdens*, *The Floods*, *Echoes of Silence* and *Music without Tears*, characters drift into imagination and talk and act as if possessed, manifesting visions to which only themselves have access. Characters also role-play other characters to who only themselves are acquainted. In *The Burdens*, for instance, during the rehearsal scene where Wamala is preparing to visit Kanagonago, he drifts into a trance seeing people and a situation that Tinka does not see. In the process, he gets carried away to the extent of threatening to harm Kaija, his own son. He only comes back to his senses when Tinka shakes him into reality and assures him that all is well.

Characters in Ruganda's plays project their own imaginary perceptions of other characters or situations through role-play, in both social and dramatic terms – creating, in the process, worlds to which only themselves have knowledge. The characters engage in impersonation of what they know or imagine of other characters and this results in a different hierarchy of the dramatic world. In *The Burdens*, for instance, through Tinka and Wamala's role-plays the audience/reader is acquainted with characters in absentia and experiences of what happens elsewhere or is imagined. Wamala enacts his being cabinet minister, through which enaction he reveals his “personality”, while in office as a cabinet minister. Actually, the reader/audience never interacts with Wamala the minister. The reader/audience gets a glimpse of Wamala the minister from his own simulation of his past. It is from this enactment,

again, that his hypocrisy as a minister, pretending to be the people's servant, while in actual practice he simply delights in the privileges and goodies of power without commitment to service, is exposed. Indeed, his sarcastic utterance in the role-play, "Never keep peasants too long in the heat if you want to succeed in politics", (Ruganda, 1972, p. 49) shows his condescension at the time of his glory. It is such pretentious leadership that Ruganda satirizes through this role-play. Wamala the minister is a total contrast of Wamala the "thinker" who purports now to be a humanist.

The image of Wamala the minister creates the context or background against which his sincerity and morality are judged in his current state of poverty. In his performance, he demonstrates his vanity as a self-important-show-off who always likes to be in the limelight of events. This is what exposes him as a failed leader. He seeks personal glory at the expense of providing the much desired leadership, which in his later days as a poor man, he imagines he can now provide. This role-play results in an inversion that contrasts the true Wamala with the current dreamer or wishful thinker. Wamala the minister is imagined as being true to himself whereas Wamala the thinker has had a taste of what it is to be a beggar and has the illusion of redressing his situation. In his state of deprivation, Wamala has to think of a way of alleviating his state of poverty. Unfortunately, his strategy is anticipated (demonstrated by his own paranoia of the Yankees, secretaries, askaris and armed tycoons) and it is likely to be thwarted by the very people he hopes will embrace him and his ideas – as a thinker. In so presenting Wamala, Ruganda portrays a picture of cyclic entrapment from which the victim can only be free from if he looks for a solution from within himself rather than looking upon other people to solve his problems. In this case the victim has to counter the force of the privileged, who are not willing to cede ground.

In the role-play of the impending meeting between Wamala and Vincent Kanagonago, Tinka plays the petty bourgeois that her husband anticipates to meet. Physically, the meeting never takes place; Kanagonago is portrayed from what Wamala says of him and the image that Tinka portrays of the semi-literate tycoon. In this scene, Wamala changes from being the Wamala of the dramatic “here-and-now” to a hypothetical Wamala of some future moment (Elam 1980). The Vincent Kanagonago that is portrayed is different from the one Wamala narrates of meeting at the Republic Bar. The latter is a descriptive prorrtraiture of an “actual” Kanagonago who Wamala encounters within the dramatic world, while the role-played character is an attitudinal projection of the behaviour of the same character at a future time; a creation by Tinka. In addition, it is important to note that the role-play takes place at a time when there has been tension between Wamala and Tinka. The performance, therefore, gives her a perfect opportunity to partly settle scores with him, arising from the previous night's brawl. She takes this opportunity not only to satirize the behaviour of the rich but also to get even with Wamala, who she has always begrudged and despised. Fortunately, she is the only actor and audience of her own performance. Thus, while depicting for us the opulence and arrogance of the petty bourgeois, Tinka at the same time debases Wamala for his failure to become a "somebody" as captured in the tenor of her voice:

**Tinka:** (*With controlled hysteria*) To hell with your lice squashing idiots. Who's the little man anyway? *You?* You with your mediocre ideas dragging yourself here – to waste my time? Are you perhaps a little uncomfortable that you were found out? I don't lose my grip quickly, Mr. Wamala, and when I do, *I act.* (*Tinka goes towards him*) Now, if you want to stay here and get plastered over that bottle of whisky, you'll have to shut your foul mouth. (*She places her hand over Wamala's mouth. He beats off the hand. She walks away pompously*)

*On the other hand, if you think quarrelling will ease your tension, let's do it the refined way. Like proper gentlemen.*

(Ruganda, 1972, p. 59) [My emphasis]

The emphasis in this speech and the author's description of the character's behavior show Tinka's twofold intentions: she criticizes the bourgeois for their exploitation and avarice, and, hits at Wamala for being a non-achiever and poor, like the common man he is trying to advocate for. Tinka's portraiture of Kanagonago, therefore, may not be truthful to his character, as it carries with it undercurrents of contempt.

In Wamala's role as the poor man that he now wants to defend, is revealed not the character of the *dramatis persona*, but a character fantasizing on change so that justice and fairness prevail, in his own way – justice that first and foremost restores him to the position of privilege, regardless of whether the status of the other common people changes or not. However, the violent means by which Wamala wishes this change to occur (as he demonstrates in his role) is likely to beget more violence, especially through resistance by the perceived enemy – the bourgeois. This manifests through the imaginary coming of the men in uniform to defend the tycoon, Kanagonago. Wamala lacks the power of protection as a commoner. Hence, he is at the mercy of the men in authority and the men in uniform. Ironically, the very men he criticizes for their excesses are the ones whose class he silently wishes to go back to. This is the class that possesses the instruments of power and control – money and the gun. These possessions are what Wamala loses after plummeting into poverty and hungers for now.

Wamala's frustration in the role-play, therefore, is a telling expose of the common man's plight at the mercy of those who wield economic and political power. In the actions and pronouncements of the two characters, the class struggle between the rich and the poor, the politically privileged and the commoners is exposed; without necessarily having to meet the groups *in media res*. The behaviour of the

mighty is mediated through the perception of the two actors. As mentioned earlier, the Kanagonago the reader/audience gets to know here is the one created by Wamala and Tinka and he can only be judged from what the two role-playing characters project. He is a construct of Tinka and Wamala's perception and attitude towards the character. Similarly, Kanagonago's world is constructed for the audience by the two protagonists. Both Wamala and Tinka have experienced good times and now they are going through hard times. Their projection of Kanagonago and his world is, therefore, out of envy. Since they cannot access that world now, they paint it negatively.

In *Black Mamba* the three protagonists Berewa, Namuddu and Professor Coarx project a situation of feigned innocence to the "outside world" while in actuality they are steeped in iniquity. The three front a world of appearance rather than reality; each feigning a different personality from who they really are. Berewa, the cunning trickster, carries a countenance of innocence before Professor Coarx and other people like Odiambo, when in reality he is a wily schemer making personal gain out of other people's desires. He pretends to be a stranger to Namuddu, his wife, so that he can trade her to his lascivious master, for monetary gain. Professor Coarx, on the other hand, feigns integrity and dignity to the public while in actuality he is a fraud, embroiled in promiscuous relationships with various women. Knowingly, the characters project a flux of lies that generate what Charles McGaw (1981) refers to as social drama lies, grounded in feigning "truths" in order to protect one's image. Throughout the play, ignorance, real or feigned – real on the part of Professor Coarx who is not aware of Berewa's scheme and feigned by Berewa and Namuddu who are actors in the lie projected towards the Professor – forms the basis of the worlds of make-believe that the characters create, until the trickster and the lies are exposed.

This structure of lies creates several layers of “realities” (Elam 1980) within the dramatic world of the play that hold only for as long as the ignorant characters remain so. By the end of the play, the police who are expected to arrest the promiscuous Professor do not have reason to do so, as submissions made and evidence adduced by the chief suspects – Professor Coarx and Namuddu – exonerate them from their crime. In the end, Berewa’s lie is bursted and by coincidence, it saves the professor’s image to the outside world, but embarrasses him before his servant.

Ideally, *Black Mamba* is the dramatization of a complex of social lies that have become the norm of society. To a certain extent Berewa simply plays what his society lives, and his exposure, together with the ramifications that it bears on Professor Coarx, is an indictment of the rottenness of the larger society in which he lives. In Berewa's guilt and Professor Coarx's embarrassment is tied the death of the moral fabric of not only the individual, but a people; an entire society.

First, as a servant, Berewa is expected to be faithful and truthful to his master. However, when he realizes that his master is randy and immoral then he has no obligation to act morally with him. Berewa picks the cue from his master who has no self-respect to the extent of sending his houseboy to get him girls for his sexual gratification. Second, as a husband, Berewa is supposed to respect his wife and possess her as his faithful spouse, but in a society that desecrates matrimony for material gain, he does not see anything wrong with selling his wife. This normalization of immorality and impunity is the hallmark of the life that Berewa's society silently sanctions. Berewa, therefore, does not care for ethics if others do not. He confesses:

**Berewa:** We can't be blamed for giving what the rich want, when we have the chance. The Professor here is infatuated by your [Namuddu's]

good looks. We must praise the Gods on high for showing us the way to get our daily potato. (Ruganda, 1973, p. 12 – 13)

This is the social reality of Berewa's urban world, which places a high premium on material wealth at the expense of moral prudence. It is a society that lives a lie where people pretend to be what they are not. People like Professor Coarx condemn prostitution verbally but engage in it secretly. It is this realization that gives Berewa impetus to claim his share of the forbidden fruit, even when he is aware it is wrong:

**Berewa:** Simply I knew that by swaying your shimmering behind in the Professor's eyes, you would dig deep in his heart and his pocket too. If less beautiful women have been able to do it, why not you, Namuddu? Sweet polished and graceful figure. He can't resist it. Poverty hooked us, we must hook riches. *That's the fashion these days. Many families have become prosperous that way. No reason why we shouldn't.* [Emphasis mine] (pp. 12 – 13)

Berewa is well aware of the game that people play and that is why he puts on a smoke screen to shield himself. As he puts it, "That's the mark of good business when everybody misunderstands your tactics" (p. 12). Indeed, he displays this very well in the presence of Odiambo, who is investigating the practice of prostitution in town – by feigning ignorance of Professor Coarx's amorous ways. He tells Odiambo that he hates women so much so that when they come to the Professor's house, he does not notice them. But interestingly he is aware of the type of women that the Professor brings home, otherwise how would he have known them to be less beautiful than Namuddu? He goes on to "agree" (sarcastically) with what Odiambo says the government proposes to do with loose women:

**Berewa:** That's fine. All those unmarried women roaming the streets and bumping in and out of bars and night clubs should be imprisoned at once. That's what we have all been waiting for. At least our government has decided to meet our wishes. (p. 19)

What Berewa is doing is to protect his “innocence” and the “integrity” of his master. The true Berewa comes to the fore when Odiambo leaves. After trying to win his confidence in a quest to elicit information on Professor by offering him a bribe this is what Berewa says behind Odiambo:

**Berewa:** (*Opens the letter – money – he laughs uproariously*) Successful hunting indeed! Does this blighter suppose that I am a fool? Twenty shillings indeed! What concern has he with other people's pleasures? The devil take him. The rat, the skunk, the porcupine! I'll milk him dry like a silly goat. I know what part of my shamba to dig. As for his weeds, (*shaking the notes of money*) his sweet weeds, they will not destroy my crop. Let him bring me more letters from the government, I will have them and all. (*He laughs maliciously*). We shall see what we shall see. Namuddu, Namuddu. (*He disappears into the hack rooms.*) (pp. 21 - 22)

This trickster trait pervades the play and Berewa is its perfect epitome. The urban world that Berewa finds himself in is a man-eat-man society in which only the fittest survive; and so, Berewa has to adapt.

Namuddu, on the other hand plays a supporting role to her husband believing that she is recompensing him for the loss she inadvertently occasions him. She goes along until her inner emotions explode to reveal her sentimental side in her relationship with Professor Coarx. The naive, innocent and easy to manipulate Namuddu of the village is shed-off gradually yielding a sensuous new character:

**Namuddu:** Our stay together has created dreams and expectations in me. It has induced me to despise my past because it appears so empty, and so meaningless. My heart longs after so many things now. What am I to do?

**Prof:** If you have taken such little time to have a different set of values, it will take you even less to get used to your old ones.

**Namuddu:** I was happy before I met you. I didn't have as many needs as I do now. I thought living in a hovel was natural, wearing rags a necessity, toiling away in my garden a duty. Nor did I care about my hard bed, my poor meals and the carelessness of our men. How can I go back to these things?

**Prof:** My dear woman, I'm a married man.

**Namuddu:** I know. But why did you treat me so nicely, so kindly, if you knew all the time that you were going to throw me back onto the rubbish heap? Is that what it means to trust a learned man? To bring sorrow into one's heart? O God! Why torment me like this? (pp. 54 - 55)

This is a transformed Namuddu that Berewa and Professor Coarx have created and now have to contend with. She is no longer acting according to Berewa's instructions. She is speaking what her heart tells her; informed by her new urban world. She is a new creature which the two men have to learn to understand; an assertive woman challenging their chauvinism and what they have taken for granted.

It is this real Namuddu of the dramatic world – not the role-playing character feigning ignorance – that confronts Professor Coarx and passes judgement on his personality and integrity:

**Namuddu:** Do you think because all the women you have been bringing in and sending out are prostitutes, Namuddu is also a prostitute? Don't go on calling me a prostitute, Mwalimu, *while you don't know who I am.*

**Prof:** Let's forget about it then. The less it is talked about the better. I'm only worried about my prestige.

**Namuddu:** Do you think just because you are rich and white and learned, everybody else does not matter? Do you expect us to spread out our garments to cover up your lust? *Why don't you do the right things, if you have any prestige at all? Why do you have to regret after sucking all the pleasures?* [Emphasis mine] (p. 55)

It is true that Professor Coarx does not know who Namuddu really is, literally. Coarx does not know that Namuddu is Berewa's wife, until the police appear to arrest him and the marriage certificate and photograph are produced. In the above excerpt, Namuddu is no longer living the lie into which Berewa has pushed her. She is being true to herself, voicing what she feels, even if it originates from flirting. In any case she is not the architect of the act. In this context, she challenges the integrity and morality of Professor Coarx, an elite, a supposed opinion leader, and in the process

exposes his precarious world of deceit and delusive sense of self-esteem. Unmasked, embarrassed and challenged thus by the unschooled Namuddu, Professor Coarx drops his guard and reveals his true self, his bestial nature. He spews out expletives at Namuddu for challenging and indicting him, and he ends up debasing himself more. In the heat of emotion, the professor loses his vain claim to integrity.

In this state of rage, challenged by Namuddu to give his perception of woman, Coarx callously retorts, "Just a ball ... that small round thing they play with, passing it from one player to another – kicking it carelessly in all directions" (p. 57). Such chauvinism, despite his schooling, contrasts sharply and contradicts the Professor's reasoned and eloquent criticism of the weaknesses of Odiambo's essay on prostitution. His insistence that a good argument should be objective and well balanced implies sobriety and integrity of mind, which he lacks in practice. In this altercation, he degenerates to the same level of the simpleton he swears he cannot pour his heart over. This is a lie since earlier in part two of the play he does exactly that; pours his heart over the simple Namuddu:

**Prof:** No, Namuddu. It's not a question of doing whatever I like. It's doing what is safe for both you and me. I wouldn't want to lose you; to be forced to lose you. Because although I am married I have never found joy in marriage. Would you believe it? Never found love at all. These few days I have spent with you have been the happiest of all my life, happiest as man and woman can be said to be happy.

**Namuddu:** I have been happy, too, Mwalimu. It all looks like a huge dream.

**Prof:** You are full of charm, Namuddu, of sweetness and laughter; of warmth and innocence. You may be unread, but you are not untutored in the pleasant ways of nature. (p. 29)

Whether or not Professor Coarx is being sincere with Namuddu in the speech above is a matter of conjecture. However, what is important is that his sentiments are contradicted by his coarse treatment of the same Namuddu after the snake incident.

This betrays the professor's feigned affection, and epitomizes the moral dilemma that humanity is trapped when it comes to issues of passion. Whether schooled or not people often fall to amorous instincts in a way that defies logical explanation.

Eventually, when the police arrive to arrest the professor, he and Berewa revert back to their life of social lies. But by coincidence, Professor Coarx's "lie" to the police, that Namuddu is Berewa's wife, turns out to be the truth. The grand liar finds himself a victim of a master schemer. Professor Coarx, who thinks himself smart, discovers a smarter fellow in his servant, Berewa. Thus, the make-believe worlds of the three protagonists are analogous to the larger society where master prostitutes, like Namatta, who do not pretend about their trade, are morally elevated than the hypocritical elite. Namatta and her ilk become the yardstick by which success is measured, the means notwithstanding.

In *Covenant with Death*, mimicry and flashback are used to establish the mystery of Matama's pre-ordained life. Matama's imitation of her parents' mannerism is what establishes their characters in the play. Matama has a fond picture of her doting mother, Kabooga and loving father, Banya, which picture is later contradicted by the flashback that establishes the truth of her life. Though the parents love Matama, their failure to divulge to her that she is claimed by a goddess puts her into trouble. It is this deliberate refusal by the parents to share this knowledge of the goddess' injunction that puts Matama on a collision course with the supernatural. In her world of ignorance, she sees her village community as having conspired against her – young girls conceiving and commanding respect from men while she is treated with disdain by the same men because she is barren. Contrary to this belief, it is her parents who are at fault for not telling her the truth. Thus Matama's world is shrouded in ignorance and illusion.

However, the audience and Motomoto, through cinematic flashback are made aware of Matama's mysterious birth. Although this flashback is intended to clarify for Motomoto the fated nature of his chargee's life, the audience/reader is let into the secret of Matama's past. This puts the reader/audience in the privileged position of first hand witness to the events of this mysterious life. The reader/audience is given a sneak view into this past world. It is the knowledge of this mystery that is denied Matama, making her the blind struggler in life.

The flashback creates distance between the protagonist and her parents that results in a kind of contestation between the knowledge the audience/reader has of them and the picture that she paints of the parent. While the audience/reader is privileged to hear the prohibition, Matama does not witness the making of the covenant as she is already dead. The knowledge, which is denied Matama, is what would perhaps have saved her. Failure of the parents to communicate the prohibition to their daughter puts her on a collision course with the goddess.

Apart from Matama's ignorance, the flashback creates an interesting nexus between the play's mimetic time and the presentation of a past event that has defined the path of the protagonist. Mimetic time is collapsed and merges with the past, implying an ephemeral fluidity that is indeterminate and alienating. The invitation to Motomoto to witness the events of contracting the covenant "just as it happened" coalesces the elements of distance and time in the reality of the drama, resulting in a fantastical world where anything is possible. This fluidity transports Motomoto into Matama's parents' past world, hence deviating from the concrete sequential logic of the human world. The technique, thus, places part of the the play's events in the realm of the surreal world.

It is within this surrealistic world that Ruganda presents the feud between mortal man and deity. It is not clear what causes the conflict between Bamya, a Saza Chief, and Kaikara the goddess of fruition, that leads to the goddess conferring on the former a child who brings pain to its parents. Ruganda, again, does not pretend to know the mystery of the spiritual world and that is why in his portrayal of Kaikara, he does not make the goddess appear on stage. Rather the goddess' presence and abode are marked through a dazing light and a voice. In this way, the playwright acknowledges the existence of the supernatural world (as a mysterious and unfathomable abode) and, at the same time, keeps the human distance from it (it is an inaccessible sacred abode to mortals). But the spiritual world can access the mortal world at will.

The contestation between the human world that the audience/reader have knowledge of and the superhuman abode that is unfathomable manifests in the struggle for fulfillment and survival in Matama's parents' and her own yearning for a child to consummate their parenthood and their desire for happiness. The arbitrary and incomprehensible whims of the supernatural world over humanity are encapsuled in the violent blows dealt by the goddess to Matama's family. The blows symbolize the vulnerability of human existence that is subject to arbitrary forces beyond ken. Indeed, *Covenant with Death* can be said to be a depiction of the precariousness and absurdity of human existence.

In *The Floods*, Nankya and Bwogo come out as double faced characters, depicting different selves to different worlds; the public world and their individual inner worlds. Nankya presents herself to the public as a self-made academic intent on championing the rights of her people, when in reality she has no nerve to actualize this intention, and instead cavorts with Bwogo, a tyrannical top government official

who masterminds the torture of the citizens. In her role-play with Bwogo, the man she pretends to loathe but secretly loves, Nankya's weakness both as an academic and a crusader for people's rights is exposed. Nankya reacts to Bwogo's imaginary flattery (in role-play) in a way that suggests she would not mind winning the award, which ironically, carries a colonial tag with it. Yet she professes to hate non-African things – read colonial things. That is why she has dropped her first name, Elizabeth, which is English.

Although the interview is only imagined, Nankya's responses to Bwogo's questions as a journalist do not contradict his thinking. They do not show any commitment to a given credo. The role-play does not show in any way that she is parodying or satirizing the very idea of winning the American award. When she acts the imaginary celebrity and responds to the Lady Journalist's question of how she intends to spend the monetary prize that goes with the J.F. Kennedy Literary Award, she proposes to arm her comrades in arms, fighting for liberation in Zimbabwe. However, interestingly, at no one time does she demonstrate her combative spirit (for political or social emancipation) anywhere in the play, not even for her own people at home. On a host of other questions, she purports to be a diehard believer in the liberation of the oppressed and a champion of human rights, yet she allows Bwogo to trample on her rights and the rights of fellow islanders. Underneath all this world of make believe lies failure to muscle enough courage to confront the oppressive forces.

Thus, the picture that Nankya portrays to the public is a façade just like Professor Coarx in *Black Mamba*. Nankya is a let down to her society that looks upon her for the much desired but elusive leadership. Her pretense of hatred for Bwogo at the beginning of the play, is thus, a strategy of edging closer to him. Eventually, she

carefully hems in; taunting Bwogo with questions of what her future will be, now that she is pregnant with his child.

With her academic knowledge and career, she has no business sticking around and whimpering at the feet of a callous man who is not even half as educated as she is and who has disowned her pregnancy. Worse still Bwogo accuses her of infidelity, which she denies, but still insists on their relationship. Moreover, if it is true as she alleges that Bwogo is the architect of the sham boat evacuation mission intended to massacre multitudes, then she has no justification sticking in the relationship. This supports the argument that she deliberately schemes to be impregnated by Bwogo so that he can marry her.

Bwogo, on the other hand, projects the image of an innocent ignorant man, defending a government that is besieged by rebel insurgence. His is a deliberate scheme, a subterfuge to entrench a despotic regime in power and preserve himself. Hence, he is not obliged to be remorseful to anybody. For example, when he receives the news of the boat massacre, he quickly conjures up who the killers. His claim that they are guerillas who are fighting the government with guns gotten from China and Russia is no true. He also levies blame on Boss for abandoning the people in the hour of need. This is false buck passing aimed at keeping his image clean. The audience/reader is privy to the fact that Bwogo is the mastermind of the massacre, being the head of the SRB. When he realizes that Nankya is clever enough not to have boarded the boat, he pretends to be a loving and caring man. This reveals him as a clever schemer who will stop at nothing when he feels threatened. The Bwogo the audience knows and the man acting to be the people's saviour are different.

Nankya having known him from childhood, therefore, is a threat to his smokescreen image. Now that she is carrying his pregnancy and she wants to get

closer through marriage means the secrecy of his deals is not guaranteed. For this relationship to be stopped from fruition, Nankya has to be eliminated. For the cover up to work successfully, many more people have to be sacrificed so that Nankya is not obviously seen as the target. Her mother has to die with her to avoid raising the hard questions. This is how costly Bwogo's cover up to preserve himself is.

Bwogo's inhumanity is further revealed through another role-play enacted at a roadblock where he interrogates Nankya as an imaginary suspect. The aggressive manner in which he handles her shows how ruthless and insensitive he is as an SRB agent. This unfortunately is the true Bwogo showing how he does his work. Indeed, after insistent nagging by Nankya he confesses that he does that as a duty. The graphic description of the government's maximum security cells that he gives earlier in the play before this scene demonstrates his awareness of what the institution that he heads is capable of doing. His confession is proof enough of his double character:

**Bwogo:** ... I'm doing my duty, Nankya, like you're doing yours. What the hell? Nagging, nagging all the time. And moralizing. That was not fair. I mean I'm not perfect. But then, who is – in the circumstances? We all have our little shortcomings, our little idiosyncrasies here and there. *Bread to earn. Our lives to keep. Future to think about. Nasty memories to forget. Is it? Murdering and burying their future by the stroke of your pen. Is it? (No response) Because, Nankya, duty is duty. And each man for himself.* (Ruganda, 1980, pp. 69 – 70) [Emphasis mine]

This individualistic attitude by Bwogo exposes his true self, destroying the feigned tough man he presents before Nankya. More importantly, his confession reveals a conscious choice that he has made. This is a man who has chosen the world of callosity for self-preservation at the expense of humanity. He is a dehumanized man who can do anything for his personal gain. It is this sense of inhumanity that makes Nankya's clinging to him baffling and indicting, especially considering her level of education. We can only conclude she sticks with him for his wealth. This is true

considering that she has grown up aspiring to live like him – in opulence and affluence. In her perception, the only ladder to the realization of this dream is to marry the man. It is no wonder then that fulfillment of her womanhood comes through him. Thus, her hatred for him is only a cover up for her true desire in this illicit association. Nankya also consciously chooses to turn a blind eye on her people in her pursuit of personal gain.

Once again, in *The Floods*, Ruganda treats the dichotomy of appearance and reality through the juxtaposition of two seemingly incompatible characters, but who are tied together by the desire for individual fulfillment. Bwogo has wealth and needs to protect it while Nankya aspires to get some and needs assurance of her personal security. The role-play, thus serves to expose the inner worlds of desires of the two characters that are camouflaged in hypocrisy.

In *Music without Tears*, action oscillates between the first level dramatic world that the *dramatis personae* inhabit and second level worlds that they create embellished by their role-playing. Odie's antics with ants and later with the telephone, and Wak and Stella's enactment of the No-Fear-No-Favour man's story create different worlds to which only the characters involved are acquainted. Odie's play with insects moves from the first level of the dramatic world in which he exists with Wak and Stella and becomes an obsession or mental state with which only himself is familiar. It is a state of a demented mind in where only Odie tries to understand the plight of the insects that he speaks to but they do not answer back. This unusual behaviour under the circumstances foregrounds itself and becomes a trope symbolizing a world at a loss with itself. It is not usual for a normal adult man to speak insistently to insects, knowing that humans and non-human creatures do not share a language. This act of speaking to insects is a deviation from the conventional

world and raises curiosity. This is what draws attention to the act so that implication and signification are read from it.

The termites that he "kills" after killing the King ant, symbolically represent the uprising of rebels against tyranny while the torturing of the King ant to death epitomizes a leadership besieged and in need of restoration. The rest of the ants "fight" to redress their majesty's death, even when they are overwhelmed in might. This, again, places the scene in the realm of the surreal. The surreal may represent the notions of suppression and struggle that are confounding and unspoken. The tentative auxiliary verb "may" is used because surrealism opens up interpretation of texts to indefinite meanings depending on the audience/reader's dramatic exposure and intellectual competence. However, in this particular scene, the inference becomes clearer when Odie and Stella in their role-play allude to various institutions of authority and power, including the presidency, supposedly of the regime, that is coming to an end.

The apparent fluidity of reference to the ants and imaginary human soldiers alternately in one context, creates a subtlety of representing issues of tyranny and struggle for emancipation. However, it blurs the notion of reality in the space and time loci of the dramatic world. The two characters speak of the struggle of the termites and human soldiers as if they were one and the same, and in the process obscure the demarcation of concrete and imaginary time. The perceptions of soldiers and ants formed by the two characters is symbolic. Noting that Odie justifies why the stayees have to fight back the returnees who mount an insurgency against the despotic regime that forces them into exile, consequently, dispossessing them of their nationality and Stella defies the order to kill the Queen Mother implies uprisal against repression;

symbolized by Odie's command to shoot. This, therefore, is a fantastical world that is symbolic of the happenings in the society of the play.

The characters' presentation of tyranny and need for redress is depicted out of their personal experiences having lived under a belligerent regime. Their allusion to various political institutions like the presidency, the OAU and the United Nations is an indictment of these organs for their failure to live to the expectations of the people that they are meant to serve. In so doing the two characters imply a world of betrayal of the citizenry, one by the national leadership, and two by the international humanitarian institutions.

Further, the image of the Queen Mother fighting on despite the killing of her many children and the King, symbolizes the determination of the oppressed to challenge their oppressors and seek revenge for wrongs committed. The confrontation between the "President" and the Queen Mother depicts the guilt of the the perpetrators of political crimes as the exiles return to reassert their sense of belonging and legitimacy. The role-play, therefore, justifies the violence with which the returnees have to redress themselves. Though disadvantaged in might and with the reality of their dispossession, they have the determination of ants to reclaim and redeem their nationality and motherland. Action is what the playwright proposes for the oppressed.

The surrealist aesthetic oscillating between two levels of dramatic worlds occludes context, letting the reader/audience drift with the *dramatis personae* into their imaginary worlds and back into the world of dramatic reality. The role-play in this case, in spite of its indeterminacy, establishes the various planes of conflict, both at individual and national levels. It dramatizes the cause of unease among the stayees with the return of the exiles. The return nags their conscience into neurosis, as seen in Odie's case.

Wak, in yet another role-play with Stella, relive his life in exile. The role-play reconstructs Wak's past, creating an interesting structural twist to this narrative that reveals the events of his experience in exile. The two narrate this experience in complementarity. The effect of this tandem narration is that it distances Wak from his own story as the narrative that Stella constructs is from second hand information, having been narrated to her by Wak. Her enactment of her part of Wak's story is embellished with her own imagination as she is partly directed by him. This means that what Stella enacts is not exactly what Wak really experiences in exile. Hence another hierarchy of the perception of the occurrence is created.

The story is performed oscillating between a stage role-play and flashback and this demolishes the boundaries between the "reality" of the here-and-now situation of the play, almost placing it in the realm of fantasy, created through the imagination of the role-players. When the performance begins, Stella and Wak narrate the story in a complementary manner, filling in details which they know. But as the story develops, Wak takes the role of director while Stella is the main narrator/performer. Later on, Wak and Stella become the main actors, taking on the roles of the two protagonists who are Wak and the No-Fear-No-Favour man while Odie is the silent spectator. This manner of presentation creates a sense of fantasy in which the reader/audience is transported, to the world of exile where the No-Fear-No-Favour man is led to believe that a *coup d'état* has occurred. Then without warning, the action comes back to the reality of the world of the *dramatis personae*, where Wak gives direction to Stella, reminding the audience/reader that what is going on is a performance. Wak and Stella play the roles as if the situation is real, moving away from the previous narrative mode before Wak comes back to himself to clarify that the incident was a performance aimed at settling scores with the No-Fear-No-Favour man who

constantly humiliates him due to his refugee status. The audience/reader is made to experience what the characters (Wak and Stella) are imagining, whether “real” or fantastical, in a mimetic mode. The technique entrenches the play in the surreal mode of presentation.

In this way, the playwright brings out Wak's past experience and sentiment about exile in a complex and subtle way that cannot simply be glossed over. Through Wak the audience/reader are made aware of the feelings of exile from a first-hand witness, while through Stella the attitude of one who is reacting to accounts she has received but not experienced first-hand is established. In this manner of embellishment of the author's and his characters' “imagination”, clarity of space and time is occluded. As such, it becomes rather difficult to transpose the “reality” of the dramatic world to that of the playwright's.

In the same idiom, Odie's involvement with the SRB is exposed. Odie stands up and picks the phone to “call” the SRB office after a confrontation with Wak over the latter's participation in the liberation war. It is not clear whether he “goes back” (in flashback) into the past and actually makes a call or he is merely role-playing. However, from his performance the reader/audience is let into the secrecy of the reports that Odie and his team make to the SRB. It turns out that most of these reports and submissions are fabrications, sometimes intended to frame up innocent people for elimination by the state. In this instance, Odie is supposedly reporting on Wak's activities at the university. The false reports are highly exaggerated so that they can convince the state that the persons involved are dangerous and should “face the music”, as the SRB euphemistically refers to its acts of execution. The SRB world is thus a world founded on falsehoods and fabrications aimed at bringing people to subjugation.

Although Odie tries to exonerate himself from Wak's accusation of being an informer by showing, through this performance, how ridiculous it sounds that he could inform against his own brother, the latter proves his case by displaying Odie's SRB file (it is not clear where this file comes from and how it gets into the *mise en scene*), thereby adducing evidence of culpability. After this expose, whether real or otherwise, Odie relapses into a state of dementia, uttering incomprehensibles, perhaps out of a nagging conscience. It is not clear whether or not Odie is feigning madness.

The idiom of surrealism employed in *Music without Tears* results in an indeterminacy that blurs clarity of (re)presentation, making it difficult to arrive at meaning with accuracy and exactitude. However, as stated elsewhere, indeterminacy is the hallmark of enduring literary works because it opens doors for individual readers to infer whatever they can read from the texts. Such subtlety of presentation and representation is what Ruganda achieves in the play.

In *Echoes of Silence*, the two protagonists, Wairi and OO, share their hatred and fears of their absent spouses through narrative flashback and imaginative role-play. Njoroge Njuguna and Grace Muthoni do not appear as *dramatis personae* in the play. Like in the other plays already discussed, Wairi and OO construct the characters of their respective spouses through remembrance and imagination. Judgement of Njuguna and Muthoni, therefore, can only be accurate to the extent of the information and slant passed on by Wairi and OO. The worlds of the absentee characters and their traits are attitudinal constructs of the narrating and role-playing characters.

Two portraits are made of OO's wife. Muthoni is pictured by OO as a vituperative unappreciative woman, always shouting and banging crockery in the house, making it an inhabitable hell. The second impression is by Wairi, who depicts Muthoni as a naive but no nonsense woman, who though unexposed, is assertive. In

the absence of Muthoni, it cannot be ascertained whether or not she is as devilish as her husband portrays her nor as assertive as Wairi's story about her encounter with Sid implies. This is particularly cryptic considering that OO and Wairi's portrayal of Muthoni is imaginary and fluid in terms of time and space. It is delivered in the surrealistically, where events occur freely between the time loci of the past, the present and an imaginary future. This phenomenon makes it difficult to accurately pin point with exactitude Muthoni's character and disposition. She, therefore, just remains an imagination.

In all the incidents discussed, the narrating, acting or mimicking characters depict their perceptions of the other characters in focus, whether real or imaginary, with attitude. This portrayal results in representations that are indeterminate in terms of accuracy of fact, but which communicate issues and traits that the author wishes to condemn or extol. Ultimately, the strategy achieves for the playwright a representation of meaning that cannot simply be paralleled to historical reality. Whether or not Sid, the American film director purported to have run away with OO's wife and daughter exists or not cannot be established. If Wairi does not recognize OO when he introduces himself to her at the beginning of the play and it takes a long time for her to remember their acquaintance in the theatre, it is doubtful that she would know his wife and associate her with Sid. The story she gives of Muthoni's encounter with Sid must be her own conjuration. However, the fact that OO is so taken in by the story that he starts to whimper about the loss of his family gives credence to the possibility that Muthoni is capable of leaving him. Such depiction, therefore, grounds Ruganda's drama firmly in the fictive world.

Overall, what is significant is that the strategy of spatio-temporal fluidity and the resultant indeterminacy make the plays polysemic. It opens the plays to myriad interpretations depending on the perspective and perceptive prowess of the critic.

### **3.3 Visual Images as Theatrical Signs in Ruganda's Drama**

Although literary works consist mainly in the manipulation of verbal language (signified graphologically through orthography), for drama, the depiction is not complete until the written text is actualized on stage. On stage, dramatic speech is complemented with visual codes for a fuller realization of communication. Stage set or scenery together with the furniture, property, and costumes that the actors wear define the character's world. The play makes sense within the consideration of the environment or world of the stage that characters inhabit. From the manner in which the actors use or relate to the furniture and property on the stage meaning is transmitted to the audience. Elam (1980, p. 8) posits that any object that is put on stage takes on a symbolically signifying role and becomes part of the representational world of the drama thereby transcending its very nature to become part of the language or communicative process. The object acquires connotative value, transcending its utilitarian function to become a sign or code with deeper meaning. This connotative value is culturally and socially determined. Elam further contends

Connotation is not, of course, unique to theatrical semiosis: on the contrary, the spectator's very ability to apprehend important second-order meanings in his decoding of the performance depends upon the extra theatrical and general cultural values which certain objects, modes of discourse or forms of behaviour bear. (pp. 11-12)

The reader/audience of drama must do the extra mile of finding meaning embedded not only in the dramatic speech, but also in the visual codes that embellish the stage. This is only possible if the reader/audience is aware of the societal symbolic cultural

values that are attributed to the stage object. The drum, for instance, has globally been associated with the spirit of Africa and the spear and shield are associated with valour or royalty in the African sense. Put on stage, therefore, these objects become part of the language of the theatrical performance. They become codes of signification.

Having been both a playwright and a director, Ruganda was very much concerned with the theatricality of his plays; minding the economy of the stage both in terms of space and action. This can be seen in the emphasis he gives to stage directions, pointing out details of scenery, properties, furniture, costume and character physiology that should not be taken for granted. This emphasis calls the reader/audience's attention to the objects of description, elevating them to a higher level of meaning, other than their utilitarian role. The stage for Ruganda is, therefore, not simply an acting space but a spatial system of communicative codes, both visual and audio/aural, which have to be interrogated for meaning, with special regard being paid to how characters relate to the visual elements that embellish the stage. In stage drama, a chair may as well become a hospital bed, depending on how an actor demonstrates its dramatic usage. In Ruganda's plays, everything appearing on stage carries meaning.

Besides, Ruganda pays attention to the physical appearance of character in terms of physiology and stage business. This, again, is important in creating communicative effect in performance. Elam says:

Costume, for example, may denote iconically the mode of dress worn by the dramatic figure but, at the same time, stand indexically for his social position or profession, just as the actor's movement across the stage will simultaneously represent some act in the dramatic world and indicate the dramatis persona's frame of mind or standing... (p. 25)

Ruganda draws attention to his characters not only through description of how they look but also how they carry out their business. This pointing out foregrounds the characters and their actions, turning them into tropes. Often, character description reveals certain contradictions in their state of being which bear meaningful implications. For Ruganda, the stage set together with the characters, are signifiers that enable him to make commentary on the condition of the dramatic character. The commentary becomes a microcosmic index of the general human condition when looked at beyond the immediate social milieu that informs his writing. Thus, set, properties and furniture together with the actors who walk the stage during performance are signifying visual symbols of Ruganda's dramatic discourse.

In their definition of symbolism Roberts and Jacobs (1998) say:

A symbol creates direct meaningful equation between (1) a specific object, scene, character, or action and (2) ideas, values, persons, or ways of life. In effect, a symbol is a substitute for the elements being signified, much as the flag stands for the ideals of the nation.

When we first encounter a symbol in a story or in any literary work, it may seem to carry no more weight than its surface or obvious meaning. It may be a description of a character, object, place, action, or situation, and may function perfectly well in this capacity. What makes a symbol symbolic, however, is its capacity to signify additional levels of meaning – major ideas, simple or complex emotions, or philosophical or religious qualities or values. (pp. 318 – 319)

By emphasizing certain details of characters and objects, Ruganda transforms what may be taken for granted into significant codes that compel the audience/reader's intuitive instincts to look beyond the socio-historical, socio-cultural and dramatic worlds for better understanding. In this way, the playwright universalizes the implicative meaning of the visual symbols of his drama.

A cursory glance at the stage directions of Ruganda's plays reveals that his sets are indices of the circumstances and contradictions in which characters are steeped. Often, there is contrast between stage set or scenery and the reality of the

characters' circumstances, implying contradiction between what is and what the characters project to be true. These circumstances are also presented as continuums of either changing fortunes or as part of larger prevailing phenomena in the lives of the characters. In this regard, the stage sets and properties become metaphors imbued with meaning that is fully realized when looked at beyond the stage.

However, the reading of transcendence in these stage visual codes is only enabled through interpretation of how the characters relate to the set, furniture and properties and how they interact in the environment that has been created for them, or they themselves create on stage. For instance, for the reader/audience to appreciate the significance of the paraphernalia of royalty that adorns the stage in *The Burdens*, keen attention should be paid to the value that Wamala attaches to these items. This value is only realized when Wamala's attachment to the regalia is extended to the wider societal signification ascribed to the objects, from an African perspective. In this way, one is able to gain insight into the embedded meaning of the dramatic codes of presentation and representation. For Wamala the paraphernalia still bestows him with a feeling of royalty and high social status.

At a glance, the set description of the set of *The Burdens*, though brief, portrays the state of squalor in which the Wamala family is steeped. The description of the "little semi-permanent house made of mud and wattle", its walls "smeared with cow dung" with "soot dangling from the ceiling" together with the home-made furniture (Ruganda, 1972, p. 1) is an index of deprivation. But then the presence of royal paraphernalia – royal drum, spear and other items of regalia – implies dignity and honour, contradicting the squalid condition indicated by the state of the house.

Coupled with the obvious lack of space and the dangling soot strands, the set quickly registers the precariousness of a life of poverty. It is not surprising then that

when Tinka first appears on stage she is described as wearing an “I have been through hell” (p. 1) countenance. This appearance readily depicts strife, which sharply contrasts with the regalia that is a symbol of authority, power and royalty. Under normal circumstances, such regalia should imply plentitude and abandon. For the reader and audience, therefore, it is this contradiction between expectation and the reality of the play’s setting that is intriguing and foregrounds the circumstances of the family and attracts attention for interpretation of meaning. In describing Tinka in the play, Ruganda says:

*Tinka is sitting alone, weaving a mat. Passing time? Waiting for Wamala? She wears an “I have been through hell” kind of face. Her son Kaija enters quietly. He is wearing badly patched shorts and a nylon shirt and carrying a hurricane lamp. He yawns. Tinka is slightly startled. Pause. (p. 1)*

This description lays bare the state of squalor and strife that Tinka and her family are experiencing. Whereas her forlon face iconizes her suffering, her son’s cheap and torn clothes are an index of deprivation. The graphic descriptions of the visual elements of the play, thus, create both mental and metaphorical images, capturing not only the physical circumstances but also the mental anguish of the characters.

Most importantly, the significance of the regalia that adorns the stage comes out clearly when it is sold by Kaija to get money for his school fees and Nyakake’s medication. The fight that this sale sparks leads to Wamala’s death. The contestation over the ownership of the regalia is a constant reminder of the great past for the family. Whereas Wamala cherishes the regalia as mementos of his hey days as a politician, Tinka lays claim to it as an inheritance from her father, a religious chief, who helps propel Wamala to a top political position of leadership. This in her thinking is what makes Wamala somebody. Indirectly, what Tinka imputes in her claim is that she is the one who propels Wamala power and fame. She wishes it to be known that

she initiates him into royalty, from his humble background through her father. Here, again the past comes to haunt Wamala.

The human instinct to claim credit for success, whether directly or indirectly manifests in this contest. Both Wamala and Tinka lay claim to the family's high moments but none accepts responsibility for the downfall. It is also instructive to note that conversely, Tinka blames Wamala for the family's current state of poverty while Wamala sees Tinka as the burden that he has had to live with for the rest of his life. Amidst this blame game, the sale of the regalia by Kaija, encouraged by Tinka, amounts to Wamala's emasculation as the head of the family. His eventual physical death is preceded by his social death, as a father figure that is no longer obeyed. The contest for authority at the family level results in a loss for both protagonists and the fact that it is Kaija who sells what are practically symbols of social status shifts this power to himself. Symbolically, Kaija takes a new step; he becomes the *de facto* new head of the family. The disappearance of the regalia sets into motion events that result in a new beginning, a new world for the children who have to live without both of their parents.

In *Black Mamba*, though the elitist props that adorn Professor Coarx's sitting room suggest the protagonist's taste and lifestyle – ethnological implements: spears, bows and arrows, pre-Raphaelite portraits of women, books and bookshelves, on the contrary, they contradict the true mannerism of the man of letters. Beneath this deceptively academic display is hidden a misconceived romantic and Eurocentric perception of Africa and the African people, and an amorous personality. The ethnological implements that decorate Professor Coarx's sitting room suggest his superficial view of Africa as being naturally wild and the people naïve and primitive. This contrasts with the pre-Raphaelite portrait that implies sincerity, religiousness and

morality. Far from it, Professor Coarx's life is promiscuous and his claim to integrity is vain. Indeed, Professor Coarx's lasciviousness is symbolized in the phallic image of the snake that upsets his sitting with Catherine and Odiambo. The snake incident in which one of the many women he consorts with runs into the sitting room nearly naked exposes him and bursts his feigned sense of integrity. This exposure inversely brings out the wild in the professor who ironically only sees the trait of bestiality in the Africans.

Professor Coarx's romantic perception of the African woman as a sensual object of wild sexuality is obvious when he compares Namuddu to one of the portraits on the wall which he says is "balanced, polished, graceful and melodious" and it is "Unchallenging and undisturbing" (1972, pp. 55 – 56). This comparison betrays the professor's racist ignorance of what the African woman is. He imagines that the African woman is reticent and sexually gratifying, a sex object.

The professor's imagination of who and what Namuddu is shows his lack of knowledge of the African world. His feeling of superiority alienates him from the black characters that he treats merely as extensions of his books and anthropological collections – things for sheer pleasure and personal gratification. Looked at from this perspective, stage properties in *Black Mamba*, are metaphors of racial prejudice manifesting an individualistic mindset against blacks. The venomous snake that upsets the academic discussion is the phallic symbol that connotes the moral danger that the randy professor poses to the African world.

In *Covenant with Death*, the scanty description of the set of the First Movement in one line that simply states, "*The scene is a country road, all countryside noises*", together with the setting of the Second Movement in the forest portend the uncertainty of Matama's future on one hand, and the mystery that surrounds her entire

life on the other. The road into her future, just like the one she is travelling on is fraught with lack of promise. The country noises on the road suggest both the wilderness and eeriness of her journey. In reality, humans are never sure of the future until it comes and recedes into the past. It is for this reason that even the diviner Traveller who prophesies Matama's impending death distances himself from the powers of his divination paraphernalia by standing aside "to let it talk". This distancing affirms the unfathomable superhuman power against which human struggle is futile. It is a confirmation of the fated reality that unless the gods consent willingly, human beings' desires and struggles are in vain. That human beings labour is in vain unless the gods ordain their desires. The human instincts to struggle for survival and personal fulfillment are in part a denial or negation of the omnipotence of the supernatural world, which they cannot access or understand. This is the essence that Ruganda tries to demonstrate through Matama's struggle; clinging to life and striving for fulfillment that elude her.

Indeed, the mystery of the supernatural is implied by the secrecy of Kaikara's shrine and the Traveller's divination bag. Ruganda attempts to capture this mystery through the cinematic flashback that shows the "resurrection" of Bamyia, "just as he was, the night he signed the covenant with death. The house, the hearth, everything... as it was that night when the false step was taken" (1973, p. 108). However, Ruganda does not pretend to lay it clear to us by bringing the goddess on stage. Instead, he only marks her presence through light and sound. In so doing, the author distinguishes the worlds of immortality and mortality. At the same time, he demonstrates mortal man's desperate attempt to access the celestial abode in vain.

*The Floods* like *Covenant with Death* is set in two locations. The main difference is that *The Floods* is set on an island in Lake Victoria, suggesting isolation.

The First Wave is located in an open space on the island while the Second Wave takes place inside a bungalow on the same island. The ravaging lightning and thunder claps of an impending storm portend danger to the inhabitants of the island. Like in the other plays discussed earlier, the setting of *The Floods* captures the conflict of the play, which consists in insecurity from both natural as well as human elements. The island, in the heart of the lake, constantly prone to life threatening storms is a reality of the threat from the natural environment. This location together with the constant storms symbolize the state of insecurity that the inhabitants have to live with from their leadership. Like the natural elements that ravage the citizens without prediction, this leadership is given to arbitrary, selfish tyranny. This is a leadership that is devoid of an ideology that would offer the citizens guidance in life. The chaos in the natural world can, therefore, be transposed to the moribund political world of the play.

In the First Wave, the limited details of the outlay of the island manifest uncertainty for the fleeing inhabitants – indeed they are not told where to they are being evacuated. They are simply commanded to carry minimal luggage of basic essentials like blankets. The state of uncertainty is exacerbated by the Headman’s imperatives, roared like the thunder claps in the skies on the citizens. This scenario of a people marooned on an island and brutalized by a despotic regime portrays an existence in desperate need of redress. Unfortunately, redress is not forthcoming because those who are expected to spearhead the fight for it – like Nankya – have become traitors by joining the camp of the oppressors. The island, therefore, is an embodiment of the people’s plight – a plight of isolation, uncertainty and disorientation. In addition, being waterlocked, outside help cannot reach the people easily.

The Second and Third Waves’ setting in an “abandoned bungalow” (p. 15) is

symbolic of the distance that the leadership and the elite have created between themselves and the common people. The bungalow has been a rendezvous for Bwogo and Nankya for their love affair for a long time. That Bwogo is head of the SRB, the state's torture machine, and Nankya an academic whom the community should look up to for guidance and the two consort in this hideout for personal gratification is treacherous. Once again, the setting reveals the underlying contradiction between expectation and reality. The leadership brutalizes and dehumanizes its subjects while the elite betrays their trust and cause. The bungalow hence becomes an ivory tower of an uncaring leadership removed from the people. This distancing signifies the class divide between the subjects and the leaders. The citizens and the people who should provide leadership for them, live in two different worlds.

In *Music without Tears* Ruganda demonstrates his keen interest with the set as part of his dramatic language. In an extravagant description of the set, (the description covers one and a half pages), Ruganda intends the reader/audience to envisage the opulence of the family whose narrative the play dramatizes. Although the directions do not particularize the details of the furniture by the use of the indefinite description, "anything that suggests affluence will do", it is obvious that the playwright intends the set designer or reader of the play to picture out what denotes affluence and then actualize it on stage or visualize it in the mind. Again, it is important to note the location of the action in "the rich end part of an African city", which signifies not only geographical setting but also economic class status. Again, the use of the indefinite expression expands the action to any part or country in Africa. The set description points to a category of the African society that is defined by opulence as a socio-economic class. This description generalizes the meaning of the play to imply the playwright's aspiration to satirize an African situation.

In addition, although it is very easy for a reader or audience to simply gloss over this ostentatious display of largesse on stage, it should be instructive to note that these items are part of the estate that is at the centre of the conflict between Odie and his stepbrother, Wak. As noted earlier in this chapter, Odie has always harboured hatred for his brother and his attempt to disinherit him is part of this long standing feud. The house described on the stage, therefore, becomes a metonymic symbol of the material wealth that Odie wants to appropriate to himself. And, by extension, this wealth again, becomes a microcosm of the wealth of the nation being fought over by the stayees and returnees in the play. Thus, by implication one can parallel the scramble for material wealth in the play to a world that is marked by inequality and lack of equity. This is a polarized world in which those who have acquired wealth fraudulently will do everything to secure it; while on the other hand, those who feel the moral obligation to share the wealth equitably fight the status.

The “big portrait of the Head of the Family” (Ruganda, 1982, p. 1) that confronts the audience stands out as an icon of the missing family authority. In the presence of the father figure Odie’s rogue appetite for wealth could perhaps be tamed. This image of the missing authority of the family extends, once more, to the national level where there is a lack of a uniting figure in the form of a visionary head of state.

Thus, in what may seem to be simple properties that adorn the stage, Ruganda inscribes subtle meanings that supplement verbal expression. This is even truer considering, for instance, Odie’s obsession with the termites in the jar, which he subjects to a variety of torture processes in order to make them ‘break and talk’, as a demonstration of the arbitrary high-handedness of the leadership. This, in a way, symbolizes Odie’s own state of mind and experience and, at the same time, demonstrates the dehumanization of the state security agency that brutalizes its

victims beyond imagination by a cabadoole of self-seeking leaders. Ruganda's treatment of brutality – symbolized by the mistreatment of the insects – in this case dramatizes the innate human propensity to subjugate and control fellow human beings through use of brute power to assert authority. The playwright's depiction of dehumanization is two pronged: the victims of the regime who are disadvantaged bear the brant of physical pain while the pertrtators of the brutality like Odie suffer psychologically. All in all, Ruganda creates a stage environment that needs intellectual engagement for better understanding of meaning.

In *Echoes of Silence*, the set represents the current frustration anchored in a near blissful past; a past that promised a better future, but which has turned out to be elusive. Emphasis is put on “posters of previous productions, a portrait of Njoroge's wedding, a rocking chair” and “a baby cot” (Ruganda, 1986, p. 1), which are indices of a near successful past for the owners of the house. A successful motherhood for Wairi would have consummated her marriage to Njoroge but this is marred by a stillbirth. Thus part of the furniture, bought in anticipation of the coming baby, is a constant reminder of the near perfect matrimonial union that is frustrated. It is this misfortune that causes the couple's estrangement. The stage furniture is, therefore, part of Wairi's desolate present life; a constant tag she has to bear of her frustration:

**Wairi:** The silence is oppressive. No one to talk to in this tomb of broken dreams, this museum of past glories. (*She stands up and moves around the room to the posters, the weddin gphotograph and almost towards the baby cot*) Dusting and arranging these artifacts can be quite unsettling. They have acquired new personalities over the years. You touch them feelingly, sometimes with ashen passion and they stare right back at you with luster gone out of them, asking you, why? What happened? What went wrong? It's then that you realize that the chimes on your wedding day were but harbingers of pain and despair, and your wedding garments, shrouds mottled by cockroaches. And you have to wear these shrouds as you wait and wait and wait. Wait? ... Wait for what, I wonder! An unknown life beyond the shrouds? I don't know. Otherwise here and now. It's haphazard existence. Dreadful ... waiting for... a little spark? A flicker of joy, maybe a

thrill, a fragrance or even a tender touch in your life. Waiting, waiting, waiting. Till you start counting wrinkles and grey hair in front of the mirror. But for how long? (Ruganda, 1986, pp. 24 – 25).

This lamentation not only captures Wairi's anguish and state of desperation but also the general feeling of hopelessness. Wairi's plight is a general human feeling of a deterministic state – she cannot do anything to reverse her state of barrenness. Under such circumstances she can only resign to the fate of her childlessness. Frustration and despair are what define Wairi's present life and world. She just becomes part of the furniture and portaits that populate the stage.

However, this situation does not condemn her to remain in an unfulfilling relationship with Njuguna. If the man cannot appreciate her predicament and empathize with her, then she has the option to break away. The fact that she does not move implies in part that her suffering is willful. Her inaction partly undescores her self-inflicted fate that is absurd because there is an exit avenue for her. When she refuses to take the bold step of walking away from a marriage that has broken down, for fear of what society will think of her, she becomes part of Njuguna's collection of portraits of past successful performances. Like Matama in *Covenant with Death*, Wairi is subject to the societal construction of womanhood and this outward looking for self-definition is the cause of her suffering.

From the exploration of the kinds of sets that Ruganda prescribes for his plays, it is significant to note that he deliberately envisions these objects as part of the complex nexus of his dramatic language and purposes to use the implements as visual signs of communication to capture the contradictions between expectation and reality (both in the world of the drama and symbolically in the world of actuality). These contradictions then become the *raisons d'etre* of Ruganda's plays.

### 3.4 Aural Images as Indices of Presence and Spatial Extent in the Plays

Sound in dramatic performance is mainly used to create ambience or leit motif. However, it can also be used as a signifier in the same way words designate concepts and notions (Barthes 1964). Ruganda uses sound to extend the horizons of his drama's worlds by indicating certain presence of character and things (both natural and man-made) that are not physically visible on stage, thereby minimizing geographical dispersion and character presence on stage. He uses the aural medium to designate the existence of characters in absentia that are significant to the creation of the enveloping action of the narratives of his plays and, consequently, the interpretation of meaning. Sometimes through techniques like retrospection, role-play and surrealistic symbolism the playwright establishes the existence of absent characters, but who bear significance on the circumstance of the real *dramatis personae*. The playwright also employs sound associated with particular things or states of being, like guns, vehicles, thunderstorms, and water waves as indices of existence, without necessarily occasioning concrete presence on stage. This technique of minimalism accords the playwright not only economy of production costs of the plays, but also aesthetic leverage that makes his drama subtle.

In *The Burdens* the family's physical state of insecurity is signified by the noise of footsteps and a bump on the roof of the house (1972, pp. 3 – 4 & 10) which Tinka suspects to be caused by thieves on the prowl (*kondos*, as they are referred to in the play). Although these characters are not present physically, the danger they pose to the family is pointed out indexically, and in the absence of the father figure, presumed to be a source of security, their imminent presence underscores the vulnerability of the family. This use of few characters and technique to check spatial disparity is what Waliula (2003) refers to as theatricality. This is the playwright's

awareness of the importance of economy in a theatrical production. Using the same technique, at the end of the play, Tinka's impending arrest is announced by police sirens, rather than the physical presence of the law enforcing agents. The background sound in both cases creates for the reader and audience a deictic world, one which is mentally/intellectually suggested rather than mimetically simulated. This world has to be recognized as being part of the *dramatis personae's* environment, extending beyond the physical stage space that the actors walk through.

In *Covenant with Death*, the presence and abode of Kaikara, the goddess are inscribed by roaring winds, chiming bells, booming sound and rolls of drum, coupled with the rhetorical, cryptic words of the diviner repeated by Bamyia (1973, pp. 109 – 110). The playwright pictures for us the blurred and mysterious nature of mythology through these eerie sounds, thereby retaining the notion of incomprehensibility of the superhuman, yet confirming its presence. Indeed, apart from “the holy radiance in the branches” (p.108) witnessed by the Old Man and Motomoto, the goddess does not appear physically. When she makes the prohibitive covenant with Bamyia and his wife, she only appears as a voice-over that speaks from outside their house (pp. 115 – 119). By maintaining the distance between the spiritual and human abodes through the aural medium, Ruganda manages to present the binary between the immortality of divinity and the vulnerability of humanity; the mystery of the superhuman versus the precariousness of the human.

In *The Floods*, the “growls of thunder” coupled with offstage “shouts, cries and all manner of noise from stampeding men, women and children” and “Intermittent bursts of machine gun-fire” extend the world of the stage beyond the *mise en scene*, in addition to pointing towards a larger population of characters and sense of insecurity. At the same time, the waves that are heard lapping and slapping

on the shore of the island and the winds whistling through the trees are an indicator of the restlessness of Mother Nature. But most significant is the fact that whereas these natural sounds capture the physical insecurity that is threatening the people, they also symbolically point to psychological disturbance born by characters like Kyeyune and Nankya, and even Bwogo. This turmoil within the natural sphere further forebodes the impending battle between forces of evil and good; a battle that seeks to restore humanity and tranquility on the island. Besides expanding the spatial extent of the play's world, the aural images serve the purpose of universalizing the state of insecurity by paralleling nature's raging elements to the chaos of a tyrannical leadership and the fight for redress. This is realized at the end of the play when Bwogo and Nankya are arrested. With this arrest, it is assumed, peace and normalcy are restored on the island.

In *Music without Tears* the *coup d'état* that Wak talks about and role-plays with Stella does not really happen. Wak actually conjures up the coup and uses it to scare the No-Fear-No-Favour man. The story is created from sounds that are heard both in the bar and the streets of the city. The climax of the story is signalled by an explosion that is "heard" from without the New Garden Bar. This sound is supposed to be imagined by both the role-playing characters, the characters for whom dramatization of the story is meant and the real audience watching the main drama in performance. During performance, this sound is expected to be produced for the audience. This has the effect of merging the audience/reader's world with that of the characters into one so that they all become audiences to the sound. The police and ambulance sirens in this story complete the imagination of the extent of the damage, and establish the geographic space as urban because of the many cars "coming in all directions top-speed" (1982, p. 89). Like in the other plays, the background sounds

mentally expand the spatio-temporal location of the action and theatrically economize on the physical extent of the scenes. Where character is implied, then the number of the *dramatis personae* is reduced.

Apart from this, the ricocheting guns denote the raging conflict in the characters' lives without having to put actors on stage running guns. The sound indicates the twin danger of the raging war of liberation as citizens turn against each other and the universal notions of culpability and innocence that indict both parties. Both the aggrieved and culprits are culpable because they are bent on killing. One group kills for self-assertion, the other for self-preservation. In so presenting the war between the citizens, the playwright avoids the extravagance of having to show bodies littering the stage to indicate the aftermath of a battle.

Of all the plays in this study, *Echoes of Silence* is the one where aural imagery is used with abandon. Though the predominant sounds are projected, coming from the *dramatis personae's* imagination, real stage background sound is also used to create awareness of possibility and meaning. In the opening scene of the play, we hear "the clatter of crockery with an animated female voice rising high above it" (1986, p. 1). The clattering noise confirms the existence of somebody in the kitchen in the house. Latter on, the audience is made aware of the common deafening silence of the sitting room – through Wairi's lamentation – which has no occupancy for long hours of the day, as the man of the house is always away from home. This situation contrasts sharply with the noise in the opening scene. Perhaps the reason why Wairi has to produce such klaxon is to preserve her sanity. In her world of solitude, she needs some diversionary activity in order to forget her loneliness. Hence, the loud music and noise from banging crockery do this for her; in a bid to kill the "echoes of silence".

On another level, apart from the "real" sounds (they are real in the dramatic

world of the *dramatis personae* of the plays as well as the audience) Ruganda also uses background sound which is ideally supposed to be perceived only by characters engaged in role-play or reminiscence. However, such sound has to be made accessible to the audience as well, prompting it to be produced for them during performance. This kind of sound is second level and imaginary in the sense that it occurs in characters' minds' remembrance of experiences, hallucination or mental projection. In some cases, for example in *Echoes of Silence*, in Wairi's imagination of Grace Muthoni the sounds are a pure conjuration of the individual character. It is not clear whether or not Wairi has met Muthoni, hence it is only Wairi who can imagine the Muthoni that she wants to depict. The challenge is that the audience has to have access to this perception. For that matter, the audience also hears such noise, which ideally is meant to be heard only by the imagining character since it is in the mind. Thus, the imaginary world of the *dramatis personae* is shared with the audience, and in such a case the wall between the world of the drama and that of the audience collapses by way of transporting the audience into the dramatic world.

The access to the character's private mental world by the audience creates a second dramatic world tier that is compelled for purposes of communication. This gives Wairi the quality of an omnipotent narrator who creates a new world while the audience acquires omniscience of access to that world. This technique privileges the reader/audience, by letting him/her into the mental process of the *dramatis persona*, by sharing access to the private perceptual world.

This aural perception of character conjurations extends the boundaries of stage space by creating an indeterminate fantastical world in which anything is possible. The impression created from this phenomenon is that of characters drifting from their "real" world into other worlds that are only familiar to them, which for purposes of

access to the reader/audience, must be rendered as if they are real and the audience/reader is first witness to the goings on therein. Hence, the audience/reader hears the boots of men on patrol in *The Burdens*, yet ideally, this should only be in Wamala and Tinka's world of role-play; because they are the ones familiar with that world. As already mentioned, this is a world of experiences and/or imagination, hence meant to be private but forced to be accessible.

In conclusion, Ruganda's use of sound is a deliberate aesthetic choice of communication technique aimed at attaining more engaging drama. Sound is used as a signifier of character, space and general perception.

### **3.5 Allegory and Myth as Meta-Codes in Ruganda's Drama**

Ruganda uses folk narrative and myth in some of his plays as meta-codes that build plot and enrich his dramatic language. The narratives are allegories that parallel the circumstances of the characters, while the myths, on the other hand, give ideological definition to the worlds of the drama in which they occur. The myths frame the worldviews of the characters that believe in them. The interrogation of the folktales and myths reveals new levels of perception through parallelism. Allegory in literary study is an extended metaphor comprising a story in which characters, objects and situations acquire extended meaning. The story becomes a trope with meaning(s) beyond itself and its world. In other words, an allegory is an elaborate figure of speech (Morris et al 1968). Myth on the other hand, means two things: one, a society's way of explaining the origin of phenomena; and two, a belief system or way of looking at phenomena, both natural and human, which gives orientation to the society in which it occurs. Often, myths are emplotted in narratives which society believes to be true and which form part of the ideology or cosmology of the very society that has authored them. In other instances, myth is can be taken to be a general belief that

orients a community's life. Usually, myth is shrouded in ahistoricity or indeterminacy of fact.

Humans create stories to articulate their plight or experiences and give meaning to their entire life situation. This has been part of human practice since time immemorial. Folk narratives serve such a purpose in the society and people find meanings in them by looking at them as life-like, and interpreting them within the social context of their performance (narration). That is to say, folk narratives are part of the societal metacode of communication; part of its repertoire of a collective mythology. In modern times, people create stories either to speculate on current events or to try to explain their plight. Such stories constitute modern myths. From this definition, myths can broadly be classified into traditional and modern. The former comprising stories and beliefs that are characterised by ahistoricity and are part of a given society's cultural heritage while the latter are contemporary narratives or beliefs whose factuality is unfounded but which members of a society believe in and/or orient towards all the same.

The story of Paramount Chief Ngoma and his beautiful daughter Nyenje in *The Burdens* foreshadows the impending confrontation between Tinka and her husband, Wamala. Like in the fantasy world of the narrative where Chief Ngoma sets the stakes so high for suitors of his only daughter, Nyenje, intending her to get a most deserving man, Tinka's father also intends that whoever marries his daughter should be a man of means and high social standing. Thus, while Chief Ngoma places a gourd on a tall tree and commits whoever brings it down to marry Nyenje, Tinka's father identifies and supports Wamala's political activities by giving him bulls to slaughter after his campaigns hoping that his daughter will live happily after she marries a man of high political standing. Tinka's father sees great potential in Wamala's political

future. However, like Chief Ngoma who does not anticipate a leper to win the contest, Tinka's father does not anticipate Wamala's overreaching ambition that brings him down. The parallelism juxtaposes the fantastical world of folklore and that of the reality of the dramatic world by its inclusion in the plot of the play. The fact that Tinka is the narrator of this story, and bearing in mind that she begrudges Wamala, makes it not merely entertainment to a child, but a trope that bears the conflict of the play from a different perspective. This is the perspective from which Tinka views Wamala. In her view, Wamala is the undeserving leper who marries a beauty on the whim of some unexplainable luck. Wamala is, therefore, the undeserving husband that she, unfortunately, is strapped with her entire life. She ends up marrying a man who has never really been a man of his own making in life. Whereas the leper takes personal effort to try and earn what other capable men have tried but failed, Wamala is given everything on a silver platter. He happens to be in the right place on the eve of independence where he is noticed for delivering a scathing attack on the previous regime and he is appointed to the cabinet. In marrying Tinka, he is assisted by her father, who ironically should have put a higher demand on him to prove that he can take care of his daughter. This contrast of character results in dramatic irony.

In *Echoes of Silence*, the story of the Orphaned Child mirrors Wairi's own situation of loneliness. Like the orphaned child who has nobody to watch over it, talk to nor play with, Wairi has an absentee husband, no one to talk to and no child to call her own. However, whereas the child's situation is hopeless, considering its tender age, Wairi's plight is not completely hopeless. She can at least redress her situation by walking away from her broken marriage, but she chooses to stay. Indeed, she talks of family relations that she can go back to but she does not go. Her suffering in solitude, therefore, is self-inflicted, unlike the orphaned child that cannot do much about its

situation. This is the world in which she chooses to live.

This narrative creates irony of character in Wairi, especially when she castigates OO to whom she tells the story. Wairi has failed to muster courage to reclaim her humanity from an abusive marriage. Like Chief Ngoma's story in *The Burdens*, this folktale introduces in the plot a new perspective from which the conflict of the play can be viewed. It opens up a new vista from which the blind spot in Wairi's character that makes her see the circumstances of other characters but she does not notice her own. She is blind to her own world but alive to the worlds of other characters. With this kind of understanding, Wairi has no moral standing to castigate OO for his withdrawal. In him is her image of a human being suffering in silence, yet she wants others not to in such a world.

In conclusion, Ruganda uses the folk narratives not only as structural elements of plot, but also as signifiers of meaning. The stories create parallels that manifest through contrast of the situations that the characters are steeped in.

Traditional myths are used by Ruganda in *Covenant with Death* and *The Floods* as part of contesting worlds of humanity and spirituality. The myth of Kaikara in *Covenant with Death* orients the audience to a world founded in a traditional cosmology that determines the perception of gender and the consummation of life. Bamyā, Matama's father together with his wife, Kabooga, desire a child in order to consummate their marriage and to ensure the continuity of their progeny. The goddess gives the couple a girl child, against their wish for a boy. The child, Matama, is again claimed by the goddess to serve her. This action by the goddess defeats Bamyā's desire to perpetuate his family's lineage because the goddess prohibits Matama from cohabiting with mortal man. She cannot bear children, therefore, she cannot fulfil her parents' desire. Matama herself cannot realize her womanhood because she is barren.

It is this relationship between Bamyā and the goddess that is the centre of conflict in the play. For Bamyā, a Saza Chief, to be recognized and fully respected by his people as a man, he must sire a child. And, for his family's name to live on in a patrilineal community, he must beget a son. However, the ability to procreate does not reside in mortal choice; it is in the providence of the divine. Thus, Bamyā's desires can only be granted by the gods who have the liberty to give or not to give. The goddess gives Bamyā with one hand and takes back with the other, thereby revealing the paradox of divine providence.

In this contestation between mortal wishes and the liberty of divine providence, the limitation of the mortal world over the supernatural is dramatized. Bamyā and Matama's world is dependent on the supernatural world for its fulfilment and perfection. On the other hand, the supernatural world is absolute, perfect and complete in itself. This makes the world of mortals subordinate to the supernatural. In addition, while the goddess can access Bamyā's world at will, he cannot access the world of the goddess. Bamyā only hears the voice of the goddess, but does not see her. It is this apparent incompatibility of the world of humans and that of divinity that underlies the conflict of the play. This conflict is responsible for the feeling of frustration and despair that make both Bamyā and his wife Kabooga accept Kaikara's child of bile. Matama brings further torment to her parents as she does not fulfill their desire of continuation of their progeny. This conflict is premised on the understanding of the humanly world as imperfect and always looking upon the divine world for intercession against its challenges. However, while the divine world has full control and understanding of the human world, the latter has no access to the former and can, therefore, not claim knowledge of it at all. It is this limitation of the human world that creates the sense of despair and absurdity in the play.

Indeed, Kaikara promises to bring Bamyā “failure in success”, “a child to sing/Thunder songs. /A child to dance on spear blades” (1973, pp. 116 – 117). This is a cursed child. Therefore, the question is, do the gods take the liberty to torment humans wantonly? It is not indicated in the play whether either Bamyā or Kabooga have profaned against Kaikara or any other god and, therefore, the goddess’ tormenting of the family is arbitrary. This relationship between humans and superhumans remains confounding. The whims of the gods are not quite understandable. It is this unfathomable knowledge of the nature of divinity and the human position in this whole spectrum of constellation that this myth epitomizes.

Elam (1980, p. 115) refers to such a world like Kaikara’s as the deontic world. It is the world in which the goddess orders things to happen the way she wishes. It is a world beyond human ken, and when Bamyā in his state of human imperfection breaches the prohibition of safeguarding Matama’s chastity, he is punished together with his entire family by death. In semiotic terms, Bamyā’s world is boulomaeic. This is the world of people’s fears, wishes or hopes. It is a precarious world full of uncertainty. Therefore, at the centre of the conflict of *Covenant with Death* is the contest between the precarious human world that is dependent on a higher arbitrary world for fulfillment of its needs.

In *The Floods*, the myths of Kagoro and Nalubale that Kyeyune refers to point to a disappearing traditional world that is ordered by belief in a humane co-existence that lays a big premium on mutual respect among people. Besides these two myths, Kyeyune recounts personal experiences, which define his world that differs so markedly from the tyrannical world of Boss and Bwogo. While the myths form part of the larger context of his rhetorical language and worldview, his personal accounts are part of the experiences he has gone through and interpreted. In this regard, the

accounts form part his past. The myth of Kagoro defines Kyeyune's cosmology and it is responsible for the old man's reverence of some higher power that reigns supreme, making him subordinate to its authority. This is the myth that forms the worldview that is the essence of Kyeyune's life. Every time Kyeyune feels threatened and insecure he invokes the name of Kagoro, Lord of the sky, the deity he believes wields omnipotent power over human life. In Kagoro, therefore, Kyeyune finds both spiritual and ideological orientation. This submission to Kagoro is what makes Kyeyune not wish to harm anybody and neither does he expect anybody to do him harm. His sense of morality and respect for other people's property also emanate from this belief. His life is governed by this worldview that upholds the virtues of truth, moral obligation and sanctity of human life. On the strength of this belief, therefore, he challenges "what the radio said" (Ruganda, 1980, pp. 8 – 9), and Bwogo.

Kyeyune's life's perception is in total contrast to the life of the servants of the ruling regime. In their enthusiasm to display the might of the government they serve, they trample on the rights of the citizenry with impunity. These leaders lack both the moral and ideological epicentre that Kyeyune possesses, which makes him compassionate and mindful of humanity generally. Thus, whereas the agents of the state are driven by the instincts of avarice, aggrandizement and self preservation, Kyeyune is guided by a humanism emanating from his spiritual belief in Kagoro. This is why he feels pity for the young Fisherman whose father is abducted and probably murdered and who has a chain of dependants to support, but whom the Headman does not allow to carry his fishing nets to the evacuation boat to enable him fend for his family wherever he goes. The callousness demonstrated by the Headman in this scene is a clear indication of the dehumanized world that he serves. Kyeyune belongs to a generation that respects humanity and seeks to preserve life. However, this is a world

that belongs to the past and no longer exists. It has since been replaced by a world of selfishness.

Thus, the myth of Kagoro no longer holds sway in the new world order where might and greed for material wealth reign. Those in positions of power and authority will do anything to oppress those under them for no apparent motivation other than avarice and self actualization. This is the new world of *The Floods*, which is different from Kyeyune's traditional world that is guided by a strong sense of morality and ethics.

Kyeyune also refers to yet another myth, of Nalubale, a deity he believes rules the lake. According to this story, Nalubale, the goddess of the lake is twice sexually abused by Nyamgondho. In the first instance, Nalubale willingly relents to Nyamgondho's sexual advances. She later blames herself for venturing into human territory and allowing this to happen. She accepts to be Nyamgondho's wife and brings him wealth and renown. However, when the wealth gets into Nyamgondho's head he abuses Nalubale for not bearing him children and she goes away. Nyamgondho is killed by his fellow humans and dumped into the lake. Nalubale makes him the patrol of the lake, to net evil doers.

Nyamgondho abuses Nalubale a second time by raping her while she is sunbathing. This time round, she becomes pregnant. Out of anger, she sends floods to ravage humanity on the island. Thus according to Kyeyune, the frequent floods the island experiences are a punishment from the daughter of the lake for the impudence of Nyamgondho; and, by extension humanity. The deaths that occur in the lake are also a punishment to the straight ones – humans – for their lack of respect for the goddess. Those who die in the lake are beckoned by Nyamgondho, the patrol of the lake.

The myth of Nalubale fuses the worlds of the supernatural and natural. Nalubale a goddess, marries, Nyamgondho, a human and when the latter dies and becomes a spirit he works for the former. The myth thus establishes a kind of cosmology that explains the rampant deaths in the lake. It reflects Kyeyune's perception of his current world that is fraught with insecurity and uncertainty. Nyamgondho's impudence can be paralleled to Boss' despotic leadership. Like Nyamgondho who abuses Nalubale's benevolence and providence, Boss over-reaches himself, brutalizing the very people who bring him fame by allowing his rule. Boss' coming to power is heralded by palm fronds and singing, signifying celebration. Nalubale's marriage to Nyamgondho is heralded with wealth, implying celebration as well. However, when Nyamgondho takes Nalubale for granted and chases her away, everything she had brought to Nyamgondho's home follows her back into the lake. Like Nyamgondho, who is arrogant, Boss takes the people he rules for granted. He brutalizes his subjects and becomes like Nyamgondho who beckons people into the lake. Indeed, Boss and his agents dump their victims into the lake. Like Nyamgondho who is killed, Boss is deposed at the end of the play. Although it is not clear where the liberation forces that come to the rescue of the islanders come from, it is obvious that Boss' reign of terror has come to an end. The myth of Nyamgondho, therefore, is an allegory of the hubristic nature of not only Boss' character, but the entire humanity that has the propensity to turn against its ilk when in position of privilege. Through this myth, Ruganda gives *The Floods* a sense of African folkloric aesthetic that connotatively depicts the moribund state of a political world that lacks legitimacy to rule.

In yet another story, Kyeyune tells of a dead general with three nails in his skull who he pulls out of the lake while on a fishing expedition. This encounter causes

him to give up fishing and haunts him throughout the play. It becomes a kind of leit motif for the old man whenever disaster strikes in the lake. He is never at peace. Yet while Kyeyune's conscience nags him out of this one singular occasion, Bwogo who has dumped so many innocent people into the lake, is not bothered. It is this callousness, which contrasts so markedly with Kyeyune's compassion and morality that distinguishes these two characters' worlds. This contrast dichotomizes between the worlds of the humane and the inhumane. Unlike Kyeyune who is guided by a sense of higher power that gives direction to his life, Bwogo has no spiritual orientation. This trait in a man who wields power over other people epitomizes the tragedy of a leadership that has lost its essence. Thus, by use of contrasting myths in this play Ruganda portrays a world ruled by impunity displayed by the privileged who trample on their subjects like the mythic villains. It is a world devoid of spirituality and humanity. The use of myths in *The Floods*, apart from building the structure of the play shapes characterization. The myths manifest the characters' beliefs and perception of the world around them, revealing in the process their sense of humanity or lack of it. The worldviews held by the characters, again, reveal perceptual worlds towards which they are oriented and which differentiate them.

Besides the traditional myths, there is implicit in several of the plays a way of looking at success and fulfilment in life pegged on wealth that has created a myth of materialism and power. This is the modern myth and ideology that have put in place new parameters of measuring human satisfaction. This notion of modern myth mirrors a class divide and contestation that are the root cause of much of the conflicts in the plays. The quest for money and wealth and the attendant power of control that comes with these possessions is the basis of strife in five of Ruganda's plays. In *The Burdens*, the Tinka-Wamala conflict emanates from the husband's inability to get a

source of income that would restore him back into the position of head of family and member of the high society. At the same time, it is Wamala's ambition to wrench leadership from the incumbent leader – which would guarantee him authority and riches – that lands him in jail and eventually, poverty. In general, the quarrels between Wamala and Tinka, revolve around a societal perception that a man is not a man unless he is rich. That is why in Tinka's words, Wamala is not a father; because he cannot afford a bed for his son, neither can he pay school fees for his children, nor afford medication for his daughter. In this worldview, it does not matter how well educated one is. So long as one has money, one is respected; like Vincent Kanagonago who is semi-literate but is respected because he is rich. This is the perception of the post-independence world, where those in positions of leadership control the wealth of the nation and call the shots in everything. This money-power relation plays out very well in the Kanagonago-Wamala anticipated meeting. Wamala is afraid of humiliation because he suspects that he will not be welcomed by Kanagonago since he belongs with the poor.

The same perception is carried in *Black Mamba* where Berewa commits his wife to immorality because he is looking for quick riches. Moreover, the fact that characters like Namatta have become societal role models of success, the means notwithstanding, is a pointer to a perverted world. As stipulated earlier in the study, the urban world is one in which one is only recognised through ostentation. It is the dehumanized world of vanity that Ruganda satirizes and condemns.

In *The Floods*, the atrocities meted on innocent people are wrought out of selfish lust for political and material control epitomized in the characters of Boss and Bwogo. The effect of this inhuman leadership has created several attitudes to life in the people and compartmentalized them. For instance, Nankya's mother

contemptuously looks at people like Bwogo, disapproving of their way of life and looking up to other people (like Nankya, her daughter) to change the world through scrupulous ways, and in so doing make a statement to the rest of the world that morality can be restored. Nankya's mother's attitude is that of quiet resentment and inaction. Unfortunately, Nankya lets her down through her treacherous association with Bwogo. Apart from Nankya's mother, there is Kyeyune, who has faith in Nankya, because she is learned. That is why he sticks with her, not trusting blindly what the radio says and believing that if she is not boarding the evacuation boat, then he is safe in her company. Kyeyune's trust in Nankya is based on his contempt for the repressive government together with its agents and his misconception of Nankya's equanimity and humanism. However, Kyeyune's trust ends when they are all arrested at the end of the play. Nakya and Bwogo's world is thus not enduring.

Other characters choose to be subservient to the despotic regime, and in the process lend it legitimacy. The Headman, who commands the people to board the boat, is an unquestioning servant of the state. He has learnt the ropes of the state machine so well having previously served in the army that he does not stop to question anything the government decrees. Like Bwogo, his master, he executes his duty without regard for humanity. However, unknown to him, the very government that he serves so diligently, turns him into a victim of its atrocities. Thus, this is a character who is a victim of his own choice. He is a victim of a world he chooses to support and uphold without proper understanding.

Still, there are other characters who have simply surrendered to fate. The young Fisherman who is molested by the Headman can only plead and beg for mercy falls in this category. This group forms the majority of the voiceless masses. They are the type that let things happen to them in silence. It is this group that has receded into

subservience that Ruganda indicts for its inaction. These people have the advantage in their numbers but they choose not to do anything about their plight. This group's inaction is what gives the regime the impunity that it exercises with abandon. However, the group can be excused for its lack of a galvanizing leadership that can organize them to say no to the acts of inhumanity and impunity being meted on them. It needs a leadership to consolidate their numbers into a fighting force in order to change its circumstances.

The attitudes discussed above are a result of the anarchy of individualism and selfishness displayed by a few characters. These are attitudes that thrive on both the anxiety of self-preservation and political and economic patronage. The attitudes have created worlds that are defined by exclusion and inclusion, where those who have the privileges belong and are readily acceptable – their shortcomings notwithstanding – while the underprivileged do not belong, hence, they are marginalized. This forms the foundation of the stratified society that Ruganda condemns.

In *Music without Tears*, the key cause of conflict is the fight over wealth and national sense of belonging. As already stated earlier in this chapter, the sibling rivalry between Odie and his stepbrother Wak is partly over the family's estate left behind by their late father; and partly it is a fight for recognition and assertion of belonging. It is the feeling of the threat of dispossession among the citizens who stay behind during the days of repression that creates apprehension against the exiles. This fight is driven not only by the quest for restoration of human rights and equity, but also by material possession. Therefore, it is clear that materialism and quest for identity form the basis of the conflict in *Music without Tears*. But above all, the value attached to material possessions in this play undergirds the way the characters look at their worlds and are willing to fight to secure their turf.

Finally, in *Echoes of Silence*, the OO-Muthoni quarrel rests squarely in the fact that he cannot provide adequately for his wife and daughter and when he prescribes austerity in domestic expenditure there is strife in the family. OO's admiration of Njuguna's house and his fear that his wife has run away with an American film producer belie his feeling of emasculation because he is not man enough to afford comfort for his family. It is this feeling of ineptitude that results in a sense of self-pity and frustration. Once again, what seems to consummate a happy world for OO is money and material items – like what he sees in Njuguna's house – that would make his family comfortable. Ironically, despite the material possessions that adorn Njuguna's house, his family is not happy. This points to the fact that money and wealth are not the determinants of happiness. Happiness comes from a mutual sense of humanity and not the crave for vanity.

Ideally, what emerges out of the analysis of the various planes of perception in the six plays is that individual characters create or submit to certain mental or mythical orientations that define the worlds in which they exist. The characters deliberately or unconsciously submit to these worlds in which their circumstances are steeped and in the process define them.

### **3.6 Conclusion**

From the foregoing discussion, it is clear that Ruganda's choice of literary and dramatic aesthetic elements aims at creating profundity of representation and presentation that engage the audience and reader intellectually. The role-play technique and symbolism that dominate Ruganda's dramatic discourse accord his drama subtlety of presentation of the messages and themes. In terms of theatricality, the fluidity of character, time and space resulting from the deployment of elements of surrealism create hierarchies that make the interpretation of the plays indeterminate.

The visual and aural symbolism employed supplements speech, and as established earlier, expands the spatial environment without exerting pressure on stage space. Lastly, Ruganda's use of allegory and myth achieves a meta-code that mutes the perception of phenomena resulting in a discourse that cannot be interpreted from a single approach.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### 4.0 THE VERBAL ACTS OF RUGANDA'S DRAMA

#### 4.1 Introduction

In drama, as characters exchange speech, they reveal intentions, desires and aspirations which underpin what they say and do, and ultimately define character. Dramatic speech is designed, in part, to reveal the narrative of the drama as the *dramatis personae* interact. Speech in drama is, therefore, part of the raw material the playwright uses to construct the narrative. Austin (1962), Searle (1969), Levinson (1983) and Elam (1980) all posit that utterances constitute speech acts. Speech acts are verbal actions, which together with the physical actions ascribed to the *dramatis personae*, constitute the events of the dramatic world. It is, therefore, in the world of the *dramatis personae's* interaction that meaning in drama consists. Elam (1980) observes that drama consists in the intersubjective nature of speech acts. Short (in Carter and Simpson 1989) adds that cumulatively, the layers of dialogue ascribed to different characters in a drama text constitute the larger story. Mimetic speech, needless to say, together with the stage business that complements it, are the bricks with which drama is built.

The mimetic interactive nature of dramatic speech gives it uniqueness that sets it apart from the language of prose and poetry. In its mimetic form dramatic speech is both intra-textually and extra-textually directed at its recipients. This means that besides the speaking character directing the speech to the recipient character, the same speech is also oriented towards the audience/reader – as evidenced sometimes, but not always, in the use of such techniques as the aside or soliloquy. Such techniques aim at revealing a character's intention or "psychological" disposition. Emphasis is put on the psychological element because literary characters do not possess a psychology of

their own. They are the author's creation, hence subject to his or her manipulation. Dramatic speech, more often than not, is designed to reveal the tensions that pertain between and within characters. Characters display different attitudes or intentions in the company of other characters, depending of course on the circumstances. These attitudes manifest through the aspect of speech called tone, which is a property of the utterance. This aspect is what undergirds speech acts. For the reader to get the correct tone of dramatic speech, he or she must project the words in print into utterance form in order to realize the full potential of their meaning, both literally and literary.

In addition, dramatic speech may exhibit mannerisms in which a character remains consistently fixated in a given speech paradigm depending, again, on his or her intention or opinion toward another character that may be the recipient or subject of the conversation. The observation of this fixation as oriented towards another character or group of characters and the audience/reader constitutes the basis of harmony or conflict and, subsequently, impacts on the interpretation of meaning in the dramatic text. Such elements of verbal language aimed at bringing out character intention embedded in the dramatic speech constitute speech acts (Austin, 1962, Searle, 1969), which possess implicative meaning (Levinson, 1983) that the audience/reader must decipher in order to access the message. Ideally, dramatic speech describes, names or defines the dramatic world.

Thus in dramatic speech a reader may discern direct verbal exchange in which the dramatic figures confront each other with accusations or allegations and counter-accusations, give complements, make demands, promises, vows, evade topics of discussion or questions, (through silence or digression) and so on (Austin 1962). In such usage of language is realized directly the power of utterances as forms of verbal action. The speaking character expects reaction from the listening character, just like

it happens in every day conversation, which is constructed on action-reaction basis, as the interlocutors take speaking turns. Alternatively, the speaking character may simply be expressing individual opinion, which may only be rhetorical. In such circumstances, the speech only relays information or knowledge. Whatever the case, the audience expects dramatic speech to manifest a mutual dialogic intercourse in conformation with the Grician Cooperation Principle, like in every day conversation. However, as stated elsewhere, if the dramatic idiom radically deviates from normal every day conversation or conventional drama, then this should be made clear through consistent conformation to the unconventional idiom. It is this persistence in the conventional or unconventional that draws the attention of the audience/reader to the speech and compels him/her to infer implicative meaning.

On a different level, characters may recount events, narrate stories or situations or talk about other characters, either as a group or individually in monologic speech. Under such usage, the dramatic action manifests indirectly as it is not active. Here the speaking character supplies information to other character(s) or the audience/reader, either about himself/herself or (an)other character(s), hence reporting events that have happened or are assumed to have happened elsewhere or in a different time. This form of language use is diegetic as opposed to the mimetic form that reveals events *in media res* (happening in the present time locus). In the latter case, the reader or spectator assumes a first hand witness role to the unfolding action. In diegetic speech the audience/reader is second witness to what is recounted. For the audience/reader the diegetic information supplied forms part of the larger meaning creating milieu of dramatic discourse as it supplies the enveloping action and context of the dramatic events. It forms part of the complex sign system that the playwright establishes for the creation of the dramatic world. It becomes part of the meta-

language of the play, which needs to be deciphered within the circumstance in which it occurs. Such accounts also supply the textual context of the world of the drama within which the audience/reader has to interpret the meaning of the dramatic sign. Accounts like these can be directly or indirectly indicative of the plight that informs the events of the dramatic world.

In other cases, characters may act out the mannerisms of other characters, particularly in plays which employ the role-play or play-within-a-play technique, creating a new mimetic level, and, consequently a different tier of the dramatic world. In cases like this, dramatic speech moves to a second level of perception of the world of drama, from the point of view of every day speech; meaning that such speech is twice removed from reality. Interpretation of such speech demands cognizance of this distance that results from having two tiers of mimetic action. In yet other cases, the action drifts in dreamlike waves into other worlds, which ideally should only be perceived and accessed by the characters involved, as they wander mentally or psychologically in their wonderland or dream worlds; but which under dramatic demands, have to be shared with audience/reader, somehow.

Furthermore, characters may talk at cross-purpose, especially in instances where their mindsets diverge. In a cross-purpose dialogue situation characters are under the impression that they are talking about the same subject when in actual fact they are not. For instance, after Kyeyune reports the massacre of the islanders by the SRB men, Nankya and Bwogo, though talking about the same topic, are focused on different subjects. Whereas Nankya is pondering over what has befallen some of the victims of the boat massacre, Bwogo is conjuring up whom to apportion blame for the atrocity. The audience/reader is aware, as well as does Nankya, that Bwogo is responsible for the heinous act, but in his SRB style, he has to find another person to

carry the cross. This reveals the different characters' feelings or intentions.

Characters may also talk in complementarity, finishing off each other's sentences or thought lines, where their mindsets converge on the same subject, especially when they recount a shared experience. This results in a "relay narrative", which is an account delivered by two people on the same subject. An example is in *The Burdens* where Wamala and Tinka recount events of their wedding, in which case they reveal the revelry during the occasion. In other extreme cases, like in the drama of the absurd, the speech may be mere unintelligible blabbering, being employed as a poetic image on language itself or as an expression of a metaphysical situation that is beyond logical comprehension, hence verbally unintelligible.

All these variegated uses of verbal language foreground events through either familiarization or defamiliarization of speech so that the audience's/reader's attention is drawn to the peculiarity of language use, not for its own sake, but for subtlety of presentation and representation of ideas. Familiarization takes the form of certain repeated patterns of speech, which the audience/reader is aware of, while defamiliarization takes the form of unusual tropes or deviation from the conventional. This foregrounding in speech is a marker of embedded meaning in dramatic discourse. This chapter discusses the various uses of verbal language in Ruganda's drama.

#### **4.2.0 Mimetic Dialogue as a Marker of Conflict in Ruganda's Drama**

Ruganda in all his plays pits his protagonists against each other in relationships that are estranged. This estrangement arises from differences in the characters' past encounters or lack of proper acquaintance. For instance, Wamala and Tinka in *The Burdens* form a quarrelsome couple that has seen better days, yet they cannot part. Berewa and Namuddu in *Black Mamba* are also two strange bedfellows whose relationship as husband and wife leaves the reader/audience baffled as to

whether or not they really are married. In *Covenant with Death*, though Matama is the protagonist, her father, Bamyia, an elder and Saza Chief, who ought to know better, taunts Kaikara the goddess of fruition with words, ending up with a cursed child. Nankya and Bwogo in *The Floods* also assault each with accusations and counter accusations creating the impression that they actually have no love lost between them, yet in the end, they swear to remain together forever. Odie in *Music without Tears* attacks Wak, his stepbrother, verbally so caustically that in the end when he seeks forgiveness for persecuting his siblings he earns no sympathy from the audience/reader. Lastly, the two couples in *Echoes of Silence*, Wairi and Njuguna, and OO and Muthoni, have no love lost between them, yet they stick in their relationships. This incompatibility in these relationships manifests through speech, which when scrutinized reveals tensions that are implied by the verbal actions.

#### **4.2.1 Tinka's Spite and Wamala's Estrangement in *The Burdens***

Ordinarily, spite is a personality trait that easily manifests through the tone and tenor of speech. In *The Burdens* Wamala and Tinka treat each other with so much open spite and contempt. This is easily detectable through acts of suspicion, accusation, counter-accusation and silence directed at each other; that reveal a strained relationship between characters that under normal circumstances ought to co-exist harmoniously as husband and wife. Tinka in this relationship believes she is the one more sinned against than she has sinned. Right from the onset of the drama, we meet her poisoning her son's mind against his father. Even in his absence, Tinka accuses Wamala before Kaija, their teenage son, of irresponsibility as a father and infidelity as a husband. Capitalizing on Kaija's quest for a bed of his own, Tinka demonizes Wamala, making it clear to her son that she is the one who shoulders the financial burdens of the family:

**Tinka...** What did he say about the bed?

**Kaija:** He simply kept quiet and stared ahead of him for a long time. I felt I had asked a wrong question (*Pause.*) He frightens me when he keeps quiet, for I'm never sure whether he's thinking or cooking up something.

**Tinka:** (*Sarcastic laugh*) So he actually kept quiet when his son asked him. Our loving father kept quiet? (*Another derisive laugh*) That's him Kaija. That's the old man if you don't know. Keeps quiet to make others silent.

**Kaija:** Silence that gnaws.

**Tinka:** You've said it.

(*Silence. Kaija stares at her accusingly*)

**Kaija:** Then as if to himself he said, 'Ask your mother why you haven't got one.'

**Tinka:** (*With dirty, damaging laughter*) Oh! Our adorable father! Next time ask him, innocently of course, 'Father, do all mothers buy beds for their sons? Pay school fees for their children and ... poll tax for their husbands?' (p. 5)

Through stage directions in this excerpt, the author draws the reader's attention to Tinka's paralinguistic behaviour as she responds to Kaija's speech. It is not difficult to notice Tinka's spite from her display of "sarcastic", "derisive" and "dirty" damaging laughter.

Barthes (1964) posits that paralinguistic aspects of speech function to illuminate elements of semiology. Tinka's manner of laughter shows her contempt for the man, who under normal circumstances she should stand with in adversity. At this juncture, the audience/reader having not yet interacted with Wamala, the man being accused of irresponsibility, cannot make any judgement to prove what Tinka alleges. But what one finds intriguing and unethical is the fact that Kaija is only a teenager, hardly grown enough to be dragged into issues of the adult world; yet he is his mother's audience for such 'adult talk'. The only plausible reason that can be advanced in this situation is that Tinka is desperately in need of company, preferably male, as Waliaula (2003) has argued, to complete her world. Since Wamala is perpetually absent from home, the only available male is Kaija, his age notwithstanding.

In another instance when Kaija tells Tinka that his father claims she brought him down, she tells him that his father has “Never been really up” as other men like Isaza and Isimbwa (p. 6). Such kind of remarks against one’s husband before his son besmirch him as a father and emasculate him as the head of the family. It is on this consideration that Tinka can be indicted for moral irresponsibility as a mother. She fails in her maternal obligation to nurture filial responsibility in her son, whom she subjects to such violent verbal father lashing that the boy sees his fatherly model in another character – Teacher. Her carefree talk and constant lamentations about her husband in the presence of her son lead Kaija to easily notice in her countenance, “Spleandour soured by anger and bitterness/About hopes unrealized” (p. 11). However, contrary to what she wants Kaija to believe, when Wamala appears, as Imbuga (1991) and Waliaula (2003) note, he disproves her allegation of him as a totally uncaring father by bringing the boy a second hand safari bed. This act proves that Wamala is actually mindful of his family, only that opportunity does not come his way easily. In addition to the bed, he also saves a little money from his slogan business to share with her.

Considering this turn of events, therefore, Tinka’s hatred and contempt for her husband, evidenced in her haughty remarks about him, cannot be explained in the present circumstances of her life without due recourse to her past. Wamala can no longer provide the kind of life she enjoyed and now hungers for. Neither does he seem to be getting out of his current financial quandary. It is this bitter reality of their predicament that makes Tinka a disenfranchised woman whose venom is directed at her poor husband. And Wamala is aware and used to this unwelcoming tongue-lashing. It has become part of his current reality. So, when he eventually comes home late, he is the first to throw the salvo, perhaps also as a form of self-defence, knowing

that he has not been at home the previous night:

**Wamala:** Well, well, well. How is the old girl tonight? Things under control, eh? (*No response from her*). Still plaiting away at your mat, are you? Like a witchdoctor stringing lies together. (p. 18)

The insinuation in the above simile is easy to tell. Wamala implies that Tinka is wicked and she fabricates lies against him. This fabrication is habitual, from the tone of the utterance. However, as already observed, Wamala is not innocent. In the conversation that follows, he tactfully evades answering Tinka's question about his previous night's whereabouts. Instead of answering straight on, Wamala attempts to interest Tinka in his double-head safety matches and slogan ideas, which he fantasizes will bring huge financial gains to the family and lift it from its state of abject poverty. This attempt to divert attention is not only self-incriminating but also points to the fact that poverty is the bedrock of this couple's conflict. As Levison (1983) observes, a speaker attempting to divert from the topic or subject of conversation could signal a different intention. In Wamala's case, he is trying to run away from the compulsion of explaining his waywardness. Persistently, he refuses to answer the same question from an unrelenting Tinka who in frustration blurts out, "Who is she this time? The same old dirty tart who seduces you with *kwete*?" (1972, pp. 20 – 21). Such a blatant accusation implies a habitual practice, which both characters are aware of, even if there is no proof of commission of the sin of adultery in this particular incident. The innuendos in Tinka's caustic remarks, emphasized by the author in the stage directions through description of her tone and other physical reactions, therefore, reveal a deep-rooted contempt for her husband.

In Tinka's estimation, there are certain hallmarks or criteria that define a man. Wamala lacks these qualities. Her criterion is simply money, which he does not have. A man who cannot provide for his family financially, jail or no jail, is not a man. The

fact that she pays Wamala's poll tax and her children's school fees makes her the "man" of the house. It is for this one reason – taking over a man's responsibility in the family – that Tinka loses all respect for her husband. Hence, Kaija has only a father in name but not in the real meaning of the word, because according to Tinka, "A boy with a father should have a bed of his own" (p. 7). For Tinka's, a man worth his salt should pay his own poll tax, afford decent housing for his family, pay his children's fees and meet other family obligations. In her eyes, therefore, Wamala is only a paper tiger that cannot lay claim to its tigritude. She sees herself as the suffering angel, the victim aggrieved by an uncaring spouse.

Again, as observed earlier, Tinka's grudge against her husband stems from a lack of fulfillment in life. By marrying Wamala at independence, she had expected to live a life of luxury and splendour. Things work well until ambition overtakes the man. Having surprised himself into the position of a cabinet minister, he feels the urge to climb further the ladder of success. His ambition to overthrow the head of state and takeover leadership is what catapults him from the pedestal of his incidental grace to the squalor of his current world. It is important to note that Tinka turns glum only after the illusion of the life she expects to last her lifetime bursts. Indeed, Tinka's love for money and good life is evident whenever Wamala has money or shows prospects of making some. In spite of her fury over her husband's absence from home the previous night, Tinka leaps up and embraces Wamala when it dawns on her that his idea of the double-headed safety matches could fetch a lot of money from manufacturers. She exclaims, "Let's sell the idea to Associated Matches/ They'd pay you a million" (p. 24). However, on realising that there is a possibility that Wamala could be denied access to the managing director's office, she goes back to her nagging question of seeking an explanation to where he spent the night.

It is clear that Tinka's begrudging Wamala has a material attachment to it and has nothing to do with a failed love/marriage relationship. The two never quite loved each other. Each had an ulterior motive in the relationship as the both of them confess in Act One. Tinka wanted a rich husband while Wamala married her to make a political statement to the church. With this understanding in mind, it is no wonder then that the two have no mutual respect for each other as husband and wife. For example, Wamala, unable to withstand Tinka's unrelenting questioning bursts out:

**Wamala:** (*gestulating*) I was here, I was there, I was everywhere.

**Tinka:** Doing what?

**Wamala:** Doing this and doing that. Doing everything, which means I was doing nothing. (p. 26)

Wamala's spiteful response in the above quotation shows the strife that has characterized his married life. Of course Tinka has the right as a wife to know the whereabouts of her husband. Yet Wamala does not care to explain or credibly mitigate his absence from home. Wamala's panic, when Tinka threatens to assault his mistress, confirms her suspicion of infidelity. His alibi that he spent the night with a fellow-suffering man cannot stand. In such circumstances, the question that begs for an answer is why Wamala is more often than not away from home? The answer lies in Wamala's self-piteous remark that when a man comes home from the unfriendly outside world, he "wants sympathy and sweetness, tender care and kindness" (p. 36). These things are obviously lacking in his house, where he meets a hostile spouse, always bent on deriding him.

The verbal interaction between these two characters, therefore, establishes a rather strange relationship because nothing seems to bind the two together. The picture one gets from this couple's discourse is that of people who wish to break-up

from one another but dare not. The two stick together for two possible reasons. One, they fear loneliness because they have nobody else to turn to except themselves. Two, they have inner feelings of guilt from their past life, where nobody mattered to them except themselves and those in high circles. And, since they cannot access their old acquaintances and friends, they only have themselves for company.

Familiarity breeds contempt. These two characters are forever steeped in a flux of accusations seeing each other as the burden of each other's lives. Wamala holds nothing back in telling Tinka, "You are a very subversive woman, Tinka. You are a big burden," and adds, "The only thing you are good at is undermining my efforts" ( p. 31). Tinka responds by calling Wamala names: 'pig', 'filthy fool', 'skunk', 'porcupine'. In return he calls an 'idiot' (p. 33). Such bare-knuckled expletives expose the violent relationship between the couple. Yet despite the "Blows, battles, hunger, hatred, poverty and a cold bed", (p. 35) Tinka is not willing to break away from Wamala; and in spite of her unwelcoming cold look he is not willing to walk away from her either. This sticking together despite the hatred is weird and foregrounds the relationship between the two.

The suspicions, accusations, counter-accusations and abuses repeatedly erupt in spates of physical violence. Physical violence marks the extreme of human inability to control oneself. When the attempt to exercise power and authority over the other fails, then brute force is applied. The height of violence in *The Burdens* is Tinka's murdering of Wamala. This act of murder, by a seemingly vulnerable character, marks the peak of the stormy relationship that characterizes the marriage of convenience that the two contract. The act resolves a conflict that has been building up in waves and leaps, particularly in the inner life of Tinka. Tinka's seemingly not very serious verbal threat to Wamala, "You'll pay for this [the beating], dearly" (p.

35), comes to pass when she actually stabs him in his sleep.

On the other hand, Wamala's spates of violence, both verbal and physical, against Tinka underlie the feeling of disaffection of which he accuses his wife. This hostility is what eventually culminates in the tragic end and signifies the death of the family unit as well. It is the innocent children who bear the biggest brunt of this strife, being exposed to vulgar life, both verbally and physically. The children end up having to spend the rest of their life, without proper parentage. Tinka realizes rather late in the day that the man who she has disparaged before her children through demeaning sarcastic remarks is an important pillar of the family unit. Her frantic confession and apology to the children, does not help matters because the damage is already done. In a nutshell, Tinka's haughty speech is underlain by an egocentricity that leads to the destruction of life both physically and socially – Wamalwa dies, Tinka heads for prison while the children are sent to an orphanage.

In conclusion, Tinka's egocentricity and feeling of condescension towards ordinary people betray her self-denial that confines her in a frustrating solitude. For Wamala, refusal to give concrete answers to Tinka's nagging questions and allegations coupled with his propensity for violence against her, lend credence to her suspicions and accusations. This gives Tinka impetus to continue with her onslaught of verbal attacks such that even when the two are role-playing, she finds opportunity to vent her anger on him. Wamala, rather than defend himself against Tinka's accusations takes recourse to bemoaning her disenfranchisement with him. Thus, the two characters share the blame of their plight.

#### **4.2.2 Berewa's Wiliness versus Namuddu's Naivety in *Black Mamba***

In *Black Mamba*, Namuddu is verbally coerced into an indecent proposal of immorality by her husband. But what emerges from Berewa's rather curious deed of

seeking compensation from his wife is a perverse enterprise that is logically difficult to comprehend, because of its queer nature. First, Berewa takes advantage of his wife's desire for fine things and twists it to serve his scheme – his desire for riches. He convinces Namuddu that one has to work hard, the means notwithstanding, to attain whatever one desires. According to his doctrine, one cannot afford to be virtuous in a society that is perverted. Berewa makes Namuddu to agree to work, not for herself, but for him. As soon as she makes her first earning he grabs it from her, with the promise that she will get better things if she continues to work hard:

**Namuddu:** What about my hundred shillings? Haven't I sweated for ...  
**Berewa:** That's because I did good homework. Whetting Professor's appetite within two weeks. But yours was an excellent beginning. Perfect.

**Namuddu:** What? Do you believe I should go on sleeping with your master?

**Berewa:** *I believe in prosperity and a good life, Namuddu.*

**Namuddu:** I shan't go to back to that man, let me tell you that!

**Berewa:** Then don't talk of earrings and necklaces anymore, lest I knock your block off.

**Namuddu:** But I need them.

**Berewa:** What do you need your bloody head for if you can't think and see where money is?

**Namuddu:** I meant the clothes and shoes and ...

**Berewa:** There you are. You want fine things, but you don't want to work for them. *I called you from home to come and help me rise up very quickly*, and there are plenty of chances here. We have three whole months before professor's wife comes back. We can do a lot in these three months. But there you sit like a little rat waiting to be fed all the time. I'm getting fed up with you.

**Namuddu:** How you talk! Berewa, do you really love me? How can you lend me away to another man?

**Berewa:** I' am not lending you to anybody. You are mine. Every fly knows you can't help being mine. But *necessity obeys no laws*. (1973, pp. 8 – 9) [Emphasis mine]

From the italicized lines in this quotation, it can be seen Berewa wants to make riches quickly through whatever means. There is obvious exploitation and selfishness in what Berewa is doing when he uses his wife to attain his end. However, Berewa is

just playing to the tune of the community. For this society to recognize him as a man, he has to make money. Thus, nothing can stand between him and his ambition, even if it means trading off his wife. The question then is why would one so easily sell off his wife for monetary gain? As Namuddu aptly puts it, a wife should belong to her husband and no other man. To be able to understand this despicable proposal by Berewa, consideration has to be given to the kind of society in which he is living. As noted previously, this is a society that is perverted, a society that glorifies and worships material wealth at the expense of moral uprightness. Therefore, what Berewa is doing is in conformity with his society's way of life.

On the other hand, Namuddu knows very well that what her husband is asking her to do is immoral yet she still complies. This act of complicity by Namuddu begs the question, why would one accept to be an accomplice in such an unnatural scheme? Namuddu, despite her indictment of Berewa, also wants to be seen to be well groomed in the public eye. Whereas she thinks that by aiding her husband she will be forgiven her sin of inadvertently burning down his house, her man knows her desire to dress smartly like Namatta, will work for his scheme. Unfortunately, her choice of a role model puts her in the same league with her husband – they are both attracted to material things because that is the hallmark of good living in society. Namuddu is, therefore, not innocent in the blame game of immorality. Verbalizing her desires before Berewa puts her right in the path of his scheme. He knows for one to become “a somebody” in this society one cannot afford to be scrupulous, and he does not pretend about it. He confesses his ruthlessness in the way he deals with the people he wants to wrench prosperity out of and these include his wife Namuddu, Professor Coarx and Odhiambo.

While he only uses Namuddu as a conduit of getting money from Professor

Coarx, he targets the professor for his lasciviousness. Berewa knows what he wants and how to get it. He is also aware of the dangers of engaging in the trade. Thus, when Odhiambo unknowingly plays into his hands, Berewa acts the ignorant fool and lies to him, yet deep inside, he is fully aware of the goings on in the professor's life.

The irony of Odiambo's situation is that he does not know that he is actually dealing with one of the perpetrators of the ill that he wishes to investigate and eradicate. The interaction between Berewa and Odiambo shows how wily the common man is and at the same time exposes the ignorance of the institutions of knowledge and government in their quest to put society on the right path of morality. Berewa is a sharp schemer who reads his targets weaknesses and capitalizes on them quickly.

He reads through Odiambo's naivety and takes advantage of Namuddu's vulnerability capitalizes on them to make instant money. Namuddu's desires provide the opportunity for streetwise Berewa to exploit her. Berewa knows how to milk any opportunity that comes his way. Thus when his master's lust presents him with opportunity, coupled with his wife's feeling of remorsefulness, he does not let it pass. Like a spider, he weaves Namuddu's feeling of guilt and his master's amorous ways into his opportunistic web, hoping for a mega-catch.

Through blackmail Berewa manages to intimidate his wife into his immoral scheme of pursuing elusive riches. But Berewa is not the only one doing this – the society has silently sanctioned waywardness as a means to riches, as witnessed in Namatta's success story. This has become part of the normal psyche of the populace. Thus, both Berewa and Namuddu in their aspirations are both culprits and victims of societal perversion. Berewa justifies his actions thus:

**Berewa:** And what is right about being poor? What's moral about sweating to death for only one hundred shillings a month? I don't see

why you are weeping, Namuddu. We have got to use what we have. And what we have is your body and mine. Those are our major sources of income as things stand now. If God didn't expect us to use our blessed bodies he wouldn't have given us the bloody brains to think how to use them; nor would he have had us poor like this. (p. 12)

Berewa's confession and invocation of God's name put blame on his society for the rampant immorality. Hence, for Berewa the dictum is simple. If you cannot fight them, join them.

Berewa's indictment of society may be justified to a certain extent. First, it is actually immoral to pay a man such little money – one hundred shillings a month – yet the one paying can afford to spend a similar amount in the lustful pleasure of a single instance. Nevertheless, sadly, that is the reality of Berewa's world. The rich have more than enough to spend on their illicit appetites while the poor have to labour hard in their service in order to maintain the status quo – of master and servant, poor and rich, educated and uneducated classes – in the society. Berewa continues with his invective:

**Berewa:** We can't be blamed for giving what the rich want, when we have the chance. The Professor here is infatuated by your good looks. We must praise the Gods on high for showing us the way to get our daily potato. (pp. 12 – 13)

Berewa's simple logic, though warped, is that living in a decadent society cannot allow one to be moral.

However, looking closely at what seems to be a mere lust for riches and cheap pleasures reveals an embedded dearth of personal integrity. The conclusion that can be drawn from this strange husband-wife relationship is that this society's humanity and integrity are corroded, if not non-existent. This inference is made on account of the audience's/reader's awareness that it is extremely bestial for one to trade off his

wife for monetary gain, however much the amount may be. It is indecent. And, this is the reason why Namuddu cannot be forgiven for her subservience and complicity. However much the society has decayed, the individual is expected to exercise some degree of self-respect. Her acceptance to abet her husband's scheme robs her of personal integrity. The same applies to Professor Coarx. It is unforgivable for a person of his calibre to succumb to lustful passions, which he should take charge of in his awareness of his social status. Thus, "the sweet plague", as Odiambo refers to the endemic problem of prostitution in *Black Mamba*, maybe widespread and of national concern, but the individual has the responsibility to tame it. Unlike Berewa who sees an opportunity to make money from the problem, Odiambo sees in it the potential of compounded corruption:

**Odiambo:** Yes, Berewa, prostitution. It seems everybody is obsessed with lying, cheating, swindling and money grabbing. Our society is falling to pieces at a very first rate. And the root cause of it all is prostitution. Our citizens are committing all sorts of crimes so that they may get money to pay for a prostitute – drive away their worries and frustrations. (pp. 17 – 18)

Despite his crusade against the vice, ironically, Odiambo finds himself entrapped in the tentacles of the same practice he condemns – bribing Berewa in order to elicit information from him. And, shrewd Berewa gets the better of Odiambo's quest for facts. Odiambo's academic approach to the problem, therefore, proves to be superficial as he gets nowhere with his research, both with Berewa and Professor Coarx. In their conversation on the topic of prostitution and particularly Professor Coarx's waywardness, the complexity of the situation that the government is trying to stem is revealed. There is no way the government will win the war against immorality with the kind of cohorts under whom the perpetrators of the ill operate.

The vice has eaten into the entire fabric of the society afflicting both the elite

and commoners alike, albeit on different levels. While some people like Namatta make no secret about their trade, the likes of Berewa operate under cover, right under the nose of their masters. The people Odiambo believes to be innocent and expects to be helpful in wiping out the vile (like Professor Coarx), are the very ones steeped in the sin. This scenario creates dramatic irony in the play. Odiambo, who is expected to be more informed on the complexity of the problem, ends up exposing his ignorance by imagining that the game is just a matter of man-woman relationship. Berewa, whom we expect to be ignorant, turns out to be more informed and the grandmaster at playing the game.

Berewa confesses at the end of Act One that he has no concern with other people's pleasures, meaning he has no moral obligation to anybody. Odiambo's quest for a solution to the socio-economic pandemic weighed against Berewa's wily responses to his investigation reveals a conflict that pits the individual against society. Society has let the germ of decadence to take root in its midst and it is threatening its very fabric of integrity. People would rather pretend to be in tandem with the government's effort to eradicate the problem but sabotage the very effort. Berewa and Professor Coarx are good examples. The contradiction between what Berewa tells Odiambo and what he does is a microcosmic picture of the lie that the larger society is living. It has to take conscious individual effort to root out the vice that is so entrenched in the society and become normalized.

While individuals like Professor Coarx would like to be discreet, they end up becoming manikins to the more cunning Berewas. For Professor Coarx, if only Namuddu "would keep her place" it would save him a lot of trouble. Coarx wants to partake of the pleasures without letting the cat out of the bag. The same is true of Berewa who acts as stranger to Namuddu in the presence of Professor Coarx and his

visitors. This individualistic hypocrisy is what underlies the widespread immorality in this society.

In conclusion, it is such clamour for ostentation that drives people to decadence. Ostentation is the hallmark of distinction and awe in Berewa's society. And, it is in its pursuit that immorality thrives. The hypocritical and ignorant speeches of the major players in the quest for morality reveal the contradiction between desire and reality.

#### **4.2.3 Ignorance and Delusion in the Face of Death in *Covenant with Death***

In *Covenant with Death*, Bamyā's failure to divulge Kaikara's prohibition to his daughter Matama is at the centre of the conflict of the play. Prompted by his desire to consummate his parenthood, and pressure from his community that does not fully appreciate him as a Saza Chief without a child, Bamyā keeps the covenant he contracts with the goddess secret and lets Matama to wander in ignorance. Even after swearing to himself that he will not permit other people to live his life for him; meaning he will not bow to the community's perception that a man can only be respected if he sires children, (sons), Bamyā gives in to the society's pressure and taunts Kaikara for a child. It is this pressure that makes him accept a child that the goddess curses to bring him "failure in success", "sorrow in joy" and "a living dead" (p. 116). Bamyā lives in a world where manhood and womanhood are defined by the ability to procreate. Thus, his childlessness makes him desperate and degrades his station as a Saza chief. Bamyā voices his frustration of being childless:

**Bamyā:** (*Brooding on his stool*)  
That fire in our hearth burns low  
Soon it will die and pass away  
Like my desire to sow and reap.  
Thirty years now, empty years  
Of craving, longing and praying.  
Yet nothing has brought me any good

Laboring day and night and serving  
    A people who scorn service and dedication  
    Digging a garden that bears no fruits  
    I have stood it all.  
    *(Stands up and goes to his wife)*  
    My wife, my maid in desolation.  
    I have no hope in life  
    I will tumble and crash into the dark abyss  
    With no mark, no imprint, no line, nothing  
    With which to trace Bamyā: Ruyonga's Bamyā,  
    Bukuku's Ruyonga, Nkongge's Bukuku,  
    Kabongoya's Nkongge, and all of them,  
    My grand, grandfathers, end here.  
    (pp. 100 – 110)

It is this quest for recognition of his manhood that leads Bamyā into accepting Kaikara's gift. In the ecestasy of the promise of an end to the community's spite towards him, he forgets the prohibition that Kaikara puts on her gift of child, to "... take charge of her eternal chastity, /Ward off the malicious eyes of men" and fails the instruction by the goddess to cool Matama's "passion and vanity" (p. 118). Bamyā, does not disclose to Matama her condition of pre-ordained chastity. It is this breach of the vow and failure of instruction for which Bamyā and his entire family are punished by death.

Like her parents, Matama in the process of seeking fulfilment of womanhood breaches Kaikara's covenant with her father unknowingly. Steeped in the ignorance of her predestined fate, Matama is pitted against the superhuman. The myth of Kaikara and the community's imaging of manhood and womanhood define Matama's world. But, it is majorly her ignorance of her fate that leads to her tragic end. That is why even when all odds are against her, she looks forward to a happy family reunion. This hope, again, is against her ignorance of her parents' death, coming as punishment from the goddess. Unaware of her parents' plight, her hope of a great family reunion is a delusion. Ultimately, when she learns the truth, it is too much for her to bear, and

she dies.

Apart from the secret prohibition, Matama blames her society and specifically men for her plight. She feels unfulfilled in life because no man from her village wants to marry her:

**Matama:** Yeees, something like that, perhaps. Shall we say that it was society, rather than individuals. Shall we say it was the village that was contemptuous about my state; and individuals were merely instruments accidentally engaged in hurting me. I mean the men, you see. They had their own petty ideas and beliefs about what a woman should be and those ideas didn't quite match my state. (p. 85)

It is this societal definition of woman and womanhood that leads to her frustration and her decision to leave secretly with Duncan, a white stranger, to the city. The quest for personal fulfillment as evidenced in the foregoing discussion brings out the facts underlying the plight of the characters and the attendant tensions in their relationships. The myth of Kaikara shrouds the action of *Covenant with Death* and determines the perception of characterization.

#### **4.2.4 Complicity and Double-Speak as Betrayal in *The Floods***

In *The Floods*, the Bwogo-Nankya verbal fight is a sharp contrast to the Kyeyune-Headman verbal and physical confrontation. Whereas the fight between Nankya and Bwogo is a façade meant to conceal their love affair, the fight between Kyeyune and the Headman is a genuine demonstration of dissent. This is dissent of a despotic regime. Symbolically, the Kyeyune-Headman's verbal exchange is a microcosmic depiction of the ordinary citizens' contempt and struggle against agents of the state. It is a David and Goliath puny contestation of power and authority by a repressed citizenry. In the Biblical story, little David slays mighty Goliath and in the play old Kyeyune dares to challenge government authority and its agents. When the play opens, the Headman is issuing orders to the islanders to board the "evacuation" boat without telling them exactly where they are being taken:

**Headman:** The captain is getting impatient and the floods are coming! Hurry up! Hurry up everybody! Ten minutes and the boat will set sail! Whether anyone likes it or not! Dogs are prohibited, goats not permitted! No cocks and no cows! Just you and your blankets. Pigs will be prosecuted and cats will be quartered. Just you and your blankets. (*Angrily*) HURRY UP!!! (1980, p. 1)

The Headman's imperatives reveal the excitement that comes with men of little authority who are eager to exert power on their subjects. The Headman's impatience and zeal, reflected in the manner in which he shouts and threatens the people, because "he is only obeying the orders of what the radio said", manifest the intolerance and inhumanity of the establishment towards its people. The Headman's speech paints a picture of a robotic government agent who enjoys the use of brute force to subjugate those under his charge. Whereas it would be expected that the Headman be compassionate as a leader of a people ravaged by calamity, on the contrary, he displays an unequalled callousness. Thus, the evacuation, which is supposed to be an act of benevolence by the government, is in essence, a coercive and intimidating exercise. The Headman's sheepish and authoritarian announcement and execution of the order is a demonstration of the autocracy of the regime. Ironically, the same Headman becomes one of the victims of his own zeal when he is killed together with other islanders on the boat.

Kyeyune, unlike the Headman, questions the sincerity of the evacuation by the government. His questioning of the Headman's authority and the radio announcement is proof of the suspicious government action. Radio decrees as Kyeyune observes, have not been truthful in the past. Kyeyune has, therefore, learnt to distrust radio them. This, by extension means that people cannot and should not trust what the government announces. Taken in this context, Kyeyune challenges not only the Headman's but also the ruling regime's authority as well and indicts his fellow

citizens, albeit indirectly, of subservience and inaction. His audacity to question government authority elevates him to a higher moral ground than Nankya who does not attempt to challenge the system despite her advantage of being an academic. For Kyeyune, humanity is predestined and one cannot re-order life:

**Kyeyune:** Seven minutes, seven minutes! What is the hurry for? Can you time your destiny?

**Headman:** The captain is impatient and the floods are coming.

**Kyeyune:** (*insistently*) Can you time your destiny? Tell me. When Kagoro has mounted his throne, who are we to point a finger at him? (*Mimicking him*) Seven minutes, seven minutes. What is all this baying for? (1980, p. 4)

Kyeyune also insists on etiquette that is grounded in a strong socio-cultural system that respects status and divinity. This accords him a sense of equanimity that the Headman lacks. This culturally grounded social decorum that Kyeyune insists on lacks in the establishment's communique to the people. The government only issues decrees without due recourse to the subjects' rights. It is this recklessness that gives Kyeyune audacity to challenge authority thus:

**Kyeyune:** (*mildly insulted*) Eh! Eh! Eh! Young man, who do you think you are talking to? A cockerel? You of all the people! You who, only yesterday, were licking your own mucus and kneading soil with your urine? And you talk to me like that? Has your brief stay from the island taught you to frown at our wrinkles?

**Headman:** I'm in charge of this operation and I don't tolerate this, this...

**Kyeyune:** STUPIDITY. Is that it? Isn't that what you wanted to say? Well, then, say it. Go on and say it. (*Pause; no answer*) You are overrunning your zeal, young man. No wonder they threw you out of the military! Good for nothing, that's what you are. Now if you are using the floods as an excuse to spit on our grey hairs, then there is as much wisdom in you as there is in a weevil. (*imitating him*) Hurry up everybody! Hurry up mates, the floods are coming! What do you know about floods? (p.5)

Kyeyune's challenge to the Headman is a challenge to the entire government whose leadership is not founded on any ethic. Rather it is a regime that thrives on making the individual to prey on fellow individual as seen in the Headman's behaviour. The

common citizenry has no say in the hands of such a regime whose agents delight in terror and intimidation.

Kyeyune, like Nankya, understands the diabolic regime well and that is why he challenges the Headman openly asking him to show some sense of humanity and allow the young Fisherman to carry with him his fishing nets; his only source of livelihood. The Headman's act of dispossessing the Fisherman of his fish and appropriating it epitomizes the exploitation and repression that the agents of Boss' regime mete on the people. Kyeyune's refusal to take some of the smoked fish that the Headman grabs from the Fisherman is act of a strong sense of moral probity. It is a demonstration of humanity rooted in the traditional belief system to which Kyeyune subscribes. But in the present circumstances, the society has lost this guiding principle and it is alienated.

Kyeyune's challenge to authority, however puny, contrasts sharply with the complicity of the elite who choose to perpetrate the status quo without pretense, like Bwogo, or who submit but hypocritically purport to advocate for the rights of the masses, like Nankya. It is on the basis of this question of moral probity that Nankya and Bwogo trade accusations against each other. Nankya purports to accuse Bwogo of crimes against humanity when in actuality she is an accomplice. She accuses Bwogo especially because he is in charge of the SRB, branding him a "bloody murderer" because of his complicity with government. Bwogo, on the other hand, accuses Nankya of being an academic fraud and opportunist who wants to take advantage of their relationship for her selfish gain of getting married to him. Bwogo alleges that Nankya has slept her way up the academic ladder to her current position in the academia and accuses her of killing her students' future by failing them at the stroke of her pen. This in Bwogo's view is tantamount to the physical murders that

Nankya accuses him of committing.

The verbal confrontation between these two characters is paradoxical. It reveals both estrangement and a yearning for each other at the same time. Nankya and Bwogo are supposed to be lovers, and naturally, it is expected lovers co-exist harmoniously; each caring for and minding the other. But this is not what happens in the Bwogo-Nankya relationship. The two provoke each other and expose each other's weaknesses and dirty past and threaten blackmail, often times exploding into spates of physical violence, making it difficult for peace to prevail in their relationship.

For instance, Bwogo's attempt to engage Nankya in conversation when the two first come face-to-face in the play is greeted with silence. This is indicative of tension between the two, which keeps the audience/reader curious to find out the cause of this unwelcoming attitude by Nankya. According to the Grician maxim, this is an index of lack of cooperation, thus implying a hidden agenda. It is important to note that Nankya's annoyance is feigned (p. 16). She does not respond to Bwogo (apart from asking him to leave her alone) until the conversation builds up into a role-play, where she is not acting as herself, but as Ms Nankya the imaginary celebrity of the J. F. Kennedy Literary Prize. In this role, she acts as a human rights activist while Bwogo alternately takes the roles of various journalists. Nankya only responds to the Lady Journalist's questions, implying a feminist inclination that is lacking in her, as noted earlier.

Although the situation is imaginary, because it is role-played, it betrays Nankya's wishful thought as an "intellectual". Her response to one of the questions that she will use her prize money of ten thousand dollars to arm the Patriotic Front in Zimbabwe shows her pseudo-intellectual solution to African political problems, to which, unfortunately, she is not committed. In addition, her response to what the

guerrillas have done to “innocent civilians and public property” buttresses this feeling of responsibility not taken. She refers to those who are supposed to have been killed by the guerrillas of the Patriotic Front as “oppressors and their lackeys” and the nuns who are raped as collaborators. In her “intellectual” interpretation of the struggle for dignity and justice, therefore, she would ideally take the forefront to lead the people or support them. But this only exists in her mind. In “reality” she does not dare join or support the struggle.

In the circumstances of her real dramatic world, she acts contrary to this edict that she projects through the role-play. The fact that she tolerates Bwogo, in spite of what he is, raises questions about her integrity and her commitment to the dignity of humanity, which she so militantly articulates with the various “journalists” in the interview. Nankya cavorts with Bwogo despite the accusations she levies against him. She indicts Bwogo and Boss for perpetrating the atrocities of murder, avarice and corruption, forgetting that she is an accomplice by association:

**Nankya...**The land is caved in with corruption. The atmosphere hangs heavy with various grievances. Men deprived of the land they fought for. By Boss. Mercenaries terrorizing the populace.

**Bwogo:** You do not fancy Boss, do you?

**Nankya:** Graduates groveling in dustbins in search of sustenance; the Civil Service sore about MPs’ salary hikes; temples tainted with martyred blood and above all, uncertainty and death. Death stalking the streets like thousands of soldiers on the beat. The situation is real bad. It will either be assassination or a bloody coup.

**Bwogo:** No. Boss will be the last one to be toppled by a coup.

**Nankya:** That’s what he says. (p. 26)

From her exposition, it is clear that her people need to be mobilized and “armed” for action; to liberate themselves from the yoke of exploitation, repression and indignity. The sins of corruption, deprivation and brutality that she cites are all crimes against humanity for which the leadership should be held responsible. In this light, her own

inaction exacerbates her people's plight. Her ideology of liberation and humanism only occurs remotely in her mind. Unlike Kyeyune, who dares the agents of the regime in his small way, Nankya prefers to play safe by keeping close to those holding power, for her own convenience.

Her complacency, especially because of her intellectual position, puts to question her integrity and conviction. She goads Bwogo about his conscience of what he is doing, yet she forgets to reflect seriously on herself and her position:

**Nankya:** You're coming round, aren't you? Facts glaring at you right in your face. You can't close your eyes to wipe them off, can you? They tickle the conscience, once in a while.

**Bwogo:** Look, let's get away from this...

**Nankya:** Dumping ground

**Bwogo:** What?

**Nankya:** Dumping ground for the State Research Bureau. Credit is all yours.

**Bwogo:** Don't say that Nankya. You are starting again... the prodding.

**Nankya:** Prisoners spending too much time digging graves. Besides, we need the land for mechanized agriculture and industrial development. Let's just dump the bloody bodies in the lake. Minimal pollution. You probably proclaimed that at your SRB meetings. And everybody applauded and agreed you deserved the annual anti-pollution award. That's distinguished service for you. (pp. 34–35)

In progressive societies, intellectuals give direction to leadership. In *The Floods*, there is no effort from Nankya towards such a responsibility. Hence, under these circumstances, she has no moral standing to judge Bwogo. Her threat to expose both Bwogo and Boss to the Amnesty International, Interpol or CIA cannot be taken seriously. In fact, Bwogo is not threatened at all by her talk and he tells her outright that he will not grovel before her and apologise, calling her "A freak with calculated interests. Always looking for chances. ... always waiting for the right moment to pounce" (p. 77). This is indeed a true description of her fickle character.

With her account of the sordid and squalid conditions that she and her family live through, while Bwogo's family lives in extreme affluence, one would expect her

to work towards change. Yet, in spite of this knowledge, she still accedes to Bwogo's advances. Her relationship with Bwogo bespeaks a kind of childhood envy that she never gets over. As a child, she always peeped at Bwogo's palatial home from behind a high wall and admired the expansive lawns and space, while suffocating in the squalor of deprivation that her own family lived. Having failed to attain scrupulously that kind of lifestyle, which she so much desires and aspires to, she wants to get it by association. In a long tirade (pp. 86 – 87), Bwogo accuses Nankya of being an academic fraud, a pretender to traditionalism and humanism.

The tirade captures Nankya's double speak character. She professes to be a humanist but according to Bwogo, she takes advantage of situations that favour her, without minding the welfare of other people. The contradictions inherent in Nankya's speech and actions, to a greater degree, confirm what Bwogo says in this long speech. Whereas he blatantly confesses he has no remorse for what he does, Nankya's accusation of Bwogo becomes meaningless because she lacks the resolve and courage to take him on. Nankya betrays her mother's cause and trust in her to disapprove the people who mistreat her while she works for them, that nothing can come out of humble background. Instead, she plays second fiddle to these very people, seeking to rise up the socio-economic ladder through them, instead of working hard to prove her mettle. It is not surprising, therefore, that towards the end of the play, she confesses her love for Bwogo:

**Nankya:** The wall is still there. And so are the masks.

**Bwogo:** Which wall now? Which masks?

**Nankya:** Between your father's mansion and the servants' quarters.

**Bwogo:** You are imagining it.

**Nankya:** *It's impregnable. Re-enforced with iron-bars and granite. Even the square holes are blocked. No chinks for peeping through either. Just one solid impregnable wall between us. In a way, it's a pity. Because you're not really that bad.* (p. 103) [Emphasis mine]

Nankya's last statement in this excerpt reveals the desire to cement a close relationship with Bwogo, but she is frustrated because he plays hard to get. Moreover, partly, this explains her hanging on him, everything else notwithstanding. When he seems relenting to her quest and proclaims that the floods no longer scare him because there is Nankya and the baby boy, Rwenkuba, to think about she pours out her heart's desire to cross the boundary of the iron wall:

**Nankya:** On the contrary. The wall is still terrifying. We are glued on to either side of it. It is fiercely smooth and slippery, radiating balls of red heat. Lizards are tumbling down from it and moths are burning their wings. I can hear general commotion from your side. The Bwogo's are restive, their guns at the ready. They mustn't let the Nankya's drag their poverty beyond the wall. And mother... my mother ...is scared stiff. She is pulling my skirt, forbidding me to climb over. 'We must keep our proper places, Nankya, our proper distance.' But I'm scaling the wall, despite her advice and the balls of red heat. I'm scaling the wall just to have a peep at the world beyond the wall. *(she has managed to climb on to the table)*. I must see what lies beyond this dinginess and darkness. *(Peeps over the imaginary wall)* My God! What beauty! What brightness! Everything is so bright and beautiful. Cars sliding by in somnambular silence. Doves dipping themselves in the swimming pool. This is paradise. *(Panicky and shaking)* What is happening now? What are they doing to me? You don't want *me* to bask in the brightness? You don't want me to feast on that beauty? The wall is shaking. The wall is shaking. I'm falling. Help, help, help! *(She jumps into his arms)* (p. 104)

This monologue, though done in a trance-like manner, easily translates into Nankya's desire to taste the life she never experiences as a child. With such life long aspirations, Nankya cannot be trusted to be a crusader for the rights and dignity of peasants. If she has always coveted Bwogo's lifestyle, then her prodding him is a way of prying for an intimate bond with him. Her allegation that Bwogo cheats her into bed out of what was supposed to be only a platonic relationship cannot be true.

Indeed, as Bwogo confirms later, the two have enjoyed a romantic intimacy in the past, to which they both look back with a lot of nostalgia. They have enjoyed

retreats in the very house where Nankya runs to hide from Bwogo at the time of the impending floods. From their recall of the blissful days, it is clear they have had a relationship that is founded on mutual consent:

**Bwogo:** There's no need to fight each other. To find out the winner. You made your point. Let's just be friends again. (*Realizing he is bringing her round to his point of view*) Remember when we had just met? At the zebra crossing. Opposite the Post Office. Along Republican Road?

**Nankya:** Your Mercedes-Benz screeching in my ears.

**Bwogo:** Picnics every weekend. Movies on Mondays. Dining and dancing on Wednesdays. Parties on Fridays. They called us the 'inseparable ones'. Do you remember?

**Nankya:** (*breaking away from him; sits down*) It was good when it lasted. (p. 90)

From this confession, Nankya is exposed as a double-faced and double-speak character. Her tantrums against Bwogo are, therefore, a mere façade. Indeed, she plays "the Queen of Sheba", (p. 55) as she puts it herself, eating, dining and sleeping with the SRB boss, but pretending to be a humanist to the outside world. Her contemptuous talk against Bwogo is thus only a smoke screen, to cover her willing amorous character. She is aware of what befalls innocent people like Rutaro, Ssalango, the headmaster, and Kyambadde – perceived enemies of the state – who are brutally murdered by the SRB and yet she still associates with Bwogo.

In conclusion, while Nankya and Bwogo are guilty as accomplices in acts of commission against humanity, Kyeyune, on the other hand, is an innocent victim who ignorantly believes in the power of the people with whom he is tacked. He becomes a victim by association. *The Floods* is a play whose main power resides in the chain of accusations and counter-accusations and confessions by the protagonists against a background of a despotic regime.

#### 4.2.5 Accusation as a Mask of Guilt in *Music without Tears*

In *Music without Tears*, accusations between the two step-brothers, Odie and Wak form the *tour de force* of the play. Odie accuses his stepbrother, Wak, of running into exile, deserting his siblings and fellow citizens during the time of political upheaval only to sneak back when a little calm has returned to the country. In Odie's view, Wak should be shot for his cowardly act. Odie does not hide his hatred for his brother and has no kind words for him. According to Odie, the exiles had it easy complete with relief aid and monthly stipends from the UN. Hence Wak has no business coming back home to share the spoils with those who stayed behind and endured the suffering during the repression of the despotic reign that is almost coming to an end. However, this world of pampered refugees, living in luxury, while back home people have to contend with lack of basic commodities is Odie's conjuration to cover an inner guilt of treachery. Attack is the best defence, so Odie is quick to attack his brother in order to cover his own guilt of treachery.

Whereas Odie may have reason to be bitter with those who "abandoned" their brothers and sisters in the hour of need, one has to look at the cause of their running away and at the same time, investigate what those who remain behind achieve or endure and also look at what those who run into exile face or contribute to the well being of their society. Wak mitigates the accusation of running into exile:

**Wak:** (*Abruptly but curiously*) Do you still think it wasn't necessary to run for my little neck? A cowardly act, do you?

**Odie:** (*For lack of a better answer*) I guess you had to.

**Wak:** (*Reflectively*) You guess I had to (*Pause trying to detect any sense of guilt in ODIE: None*) I met the trio. In the corridors of the Social Science Building. They had been sent to pick me up. Was going for my class. 'Excuse me sir, we are looking for a Mr. Wak,' one of them asked me. Mr. Wak? Do you know his other name? ... "WAK WITU" ... Oh the Marxist. Sure thing. I know him. Second floor. Office number 213. (*To the audience*) That was the store room. Almost always locked. (*Back to the trio*) He is out at the moment. Salaries Section Main Building. Perhaps you would like to wait or

shall I... “No, no. We will wait. You said 213?’.... That’s right officer. 213, second floor. You can’t miss it. Or just in case he doesn’t show up, check him in the Main Hall at 5.00 p.m. Giving a public lecture on “THE INEVITABLE ROAD THAT WILL LEAD US BACK TO DEMOCRACY Man that was quite a gamble. But it worked. Dashed home, put a few things in a bag, got money from the family kitty, left a note for Beth to lock up and go to the village and I began the long tortuous trek into exile. Do you still think it was unwise and uncalled for? A cowardly act to save my neck? (pp. 101 – 102)

Wak’s rebuttal of Odie’s conjuration is partly the basis of Odie’s hatred for him. After Wak’s recount of the circumstances that force him to run, Odie’s guilt conscience disturbs him. But, Odie does not only betray his brother, he betrays the rest of the citizens as well. He chooses to work as a spy for the despicable SRB, a government institution that brutalizes the citizens. This is a selfish individualistic choice that does not warrant pardon nor the sympathy he craves for at the end of the play.

The sin of which Wak is accused is a necessary evil. He has to run for his life so that he can fight the liberation war for his country and assert his rights. He has to run because he is a marked academic who should to “face the music” for inciting students to agitate for democratic rule. This is a false accusation that is framed by his stepbrother. Later on Wak has to run from humiliation and denigration while in exile, in order to fight not only to redeem his country, but to assert his humanity and dignity. Thus, Odie’s persistent accusation of Wak’s abandoning his fellow citizens does not hold.

The spate of accusations and counter-accusations again plays out in the primer game scene where Odie wants to domineer over his siblings in supplying corresponding words to the letters of the alphabet. The whole game degenerates into violence and more accusations of cowardice and complicity, and claims of patriotism and heroism (pp. 56 – 82). Wak projects the accusations from the family to international political level, when he indicts foreign countries for quickly recognizing

military regimes that come into office through the power of the gun. This is an invective against powerful foreign countries that pay lip service to democratic rule but are quick to safeguard their sources of natural resources and market for fire arms in unstable countries like Wak's. This indictment finds a parallel in Odie's character, who is quick to work for a government that brutalizes its people rather than fight for redress of the situation.

Wak concludes his countering of Odie's accusation by exposing some of the sham charges he has read from the SRB files that are levied against innocent people who are targeted for execution by the state. Some of the charges are so ridiculous that they do not make sense. One such example is, "Peter spat at the President's portrait in a public bar." (p. 98) The absurdity of the frivolous charges satirizes the extent of the repression in his country.

In conclusion, the plot of *Music without Tears* develops on account of a series of accusations and mitigations which challenge the audience/reader to pass moral judgement on the characters involved in these verbal acts. In so doing, the judgement is stretched to the level of society where ethical obligation prompts questions of culpability, right and wrong. Wak claims a higher moral ground in his mitigation as whatever choices he makes are guided by a sense of humanity rather than selfish individuality.

#### **4.2.6 Phatic Communion as Externalisation of Frustration in *Echoes of Silence***

The speech of *Echoes of Silence* is almost entirely phatic as the two protagonists pass time and familiarize with each other. After the introduction, the two engage in a series of remembrance and role-plays of other characters in absentia, as they share their different life's circumstances. Wairi and OO are brought together in a coincidence that leads to confessions of their frustrations in married life. In fact, the

title “Echoes of Silence” hints at their individual suffering in silence. What begins as pass time conversation as OO waits for Wairi’s husband, with whom he has an appointment, turns out to be a forum at which the two characters pour out their hearts to each other. This sharing of marital experiences reveals intra-character conflicts that hitherto have been born individually in silence.

What strikes the reader/audience, however, is that although the two are only remotely acquainted, they reveal a lot about their private life. This is a projection of pent up anxieties that the characters have carried from their past life that belie their despair. Each of the two characters carries false presumptions about the other. OO believes that Wairi enjoys a blissful married life; while Wairi thinks OO is a typical case of a frustrated man from Luo Nyanza whose aspiration to realize full potential as a husband and father has been hampered by poverty and family strife.

These presumptions turn out to be false as each of the characters shares their story. OO believes his frustration emanates from his insatiable wife’s ingratitude. Wairi on her part believes her woes are caused by the arrogance and lack of understanding of her wayward husband who has abandoned her due to her barrenness. Thus for OO the mention of the word ‘wife’ gives him “pinpricks” in his heart and “cold shivers” (1986, p. 3); while for Wairi the mention of Njuguna rekindles moments of solitude and taunts from her women rivals. For OO:

**OO:** It’s wrapped up with sore memories. The slamming of doors, the shattering of windows and a tongue spewing out cascades of venom like a cobra ... (p. 3)

Like Wamala in *The Burdens*, OO blames the alienation and frustration at home on his haughty-tongued wife, Muthoni. Home is not sweet because of this vituperative noise-making wife, who is an ingrate. OO alleges Muthoni looks down on him

because he is not financially able to provide for his family. This is the cause of his self-piteous attitude towards himself. He looks at himself as a failure, because of what he regrets to be a false step he took in rescuing Muthoni from vagrancy and eventually marrying her. Because of his humanitarian gestures, OO expects maximum respect from his wife. Her turn-around arrogance and disrespect make him feel a failure. But in Wairi's view, it is the self-piteous attitude that makes OO a failure. Wairi expects OO to stand up to be counted as a man – lame or not lame, circumcised or not, schooled or not.

This attitude is what translates into a misconceived feeling of envy for Njuguna's family. What OO is not aware of is that belying the seeming comfort and satisfaction, is frustration underpinned by a childlessness that has estranged Njuguna from his wife. To OO Njuguna is:

**OO:** *(Almost begrudgingly)* Lucky fellow, madam, Mr. Njoroge Njuguna, Respectable profession, diligent companion, and a very cozy atmosphere ... Look at it. Just look at it. It's not a house of horrors. *(Stands up and surveys room with admiration)* Posters of successful productions, portraits of glorious moments and upholsteries. Books defying cobwebs and cockroaches. Stainless steel and glass. Everything prim and proper. And roses... Look at them. *(Goes over to flower vase and sniffs their fragrance)* Oh, this sweet balm of the bruised... *(Stops in midstream... turns to Wairi)* But above all a smiling spouse. You should look at the pigsties the desolate ones squat in. Dreadful. Only an idiot could shun a place like this one. *(Snaps out of reverie)* You are alone, are you, madam? *(Without thinking she nods affirmatively. Pause)* Taking his time, isn't he? Said I could see him at six. At home. Could anything have happened?

**Wairi:** Should be here any moment now... Is he a friend of yours?

**OO:** *(Hasn't heard the last question. Continues with a tinge of envy)* Who wouldn't hurry home to this happy haven? Who wouldn't bolt back to the fragrance of a gorgeous steak in the oven? *(Addressing Wairi)* Who wouldn't I ask you?

**Wairi:** *(Embarrassed)* I wouldn't be all that sure. You should tell that to Double N.

**OO:** Who in his right mind would want to go back to the whiff of boiling beans and the jungle of dirt and disorder? Who would have the

courage to scale the mountains of muck and stuffiness or listen to the unorchestrated clang of crockery and gadgetry? Who would, for Christ's sake? *(At this precise moment he hears things shattering, breaking, crushing in short, an unassorted din of various things breaking. A husky woman's voice is distinct above the din. It must be assumed that Wairi does not hear this din and the voice, except where it is indicated. OO writhing with torture).* (pp. 4 – 6)

Wairi's embarrassment is caused by what she knows to be contrary to what OO thinks. OO's assumption that other people live more fulfilling lives than his causes his envy. This misconception makes him a recluse even in the bar where he drinks, to steel himself against his self-pity.

OO and Muthoni's life is actually an echo of Wairi and Njuguna's. In essence, none of the couples is happy. Wairi is not happy because despite everything that she has been provided with, her childlessness causes her a lot of agony. But above all, she has an inner fear of the way the outside world looks at her. Njuguna is unhappy because like her he fears public perception of their condition. That is why he drowns his frustration in the theatre and women. OO on the hand has a child but this does not make him happy. His economic inadequacy and loneliness make him self-piteous.

This realization makes the perception of happiness a very individual feeling of actualization. OO's perception of happiness is misconceived and deceptive. Even when Wairi fusses over fixing Njuguna's dinner in time, often, he does not come home to eat, thereby compounding her frustration. All her effort to make her man happy does not bear fruit. On another level, despite Tina bringing happiness into OO's life, he realizes that is not all that he needs. Confidence, love and compassion are missing in his life.

Both Wairi and OO long for matrimonial love, which they submit they do not have. From OO's lamentations there is an implication that if only Muthoni was

considerate and understanding, he would be happy. In his mimicry of Muthoni's mannerism, OO portrays a wife who wants to live large but she is restrained by circumstances:

**OO:** 'Go easy on the money, Muthoni. You are using too much Omo. Muthoni. You are using too much Kimbo, Muthoni. You are using too much salt, Muthoni' (*Her own voice and mannerisms*) 'Too much this, too much that. Christ where shall we end up? (*Derisively... Her interpretation of him*) 'Don't you think we could do without hot water?' (*Her own voice and mannerisms*) 'Don't you think this, don't you think that?' (*Self-pity*) Oh Muthoni, what have I done to deserve this cabbage? ... (*She lets out one terrifying wail. Double O has been stretched to the limit ... Pause as he staggers back to his seat*). (p. 6)

The image that is created of Muthoni is of a woman who wishes to assert herself as a wife but her husband puts too many injunctions in her way. From the tenor of her voice, it is clear that her defiance of the injunctions is deliberate. OO comes shy of controlling her activities and that is why he hibernates into the bar.

It is this lack of confidence that makes OO describe himself as, "Limp and lame like a lizard. Can't even hug a woman properly like other men do. Dark as a devil, uncircumcised, you may even add..." (p. 7) before Wairi. This feeling of inferiority leads him to hold the belief that people believe his community did not participate actively in the struggle for the liberation of his country, compared to Wairi's. He alleges that that is why Wairi's people are confident and more rich. These are stereotypical views because there is no evidence to corroborate the allegation. Such feelings and misconceptions make OO a conceited character.

Wairi on the other hand, also has a stereotypical misperception of OO, whose life she alleges is written all over his body:

**Wairi:** Worse. Because I know it [the story of OO's life]. It's written all over you. Born somewhere in Nyanza Province. Most probably near Lake Victoria. Bred on fish, water and sim-sim. Educated in Maseno. Dropped out of school, because of too many brothers and

sisters to be fed. And your father's meager wages from the Railways isn't enough for everyone, isn't that it? (p. 9)

Such superficial notions, based on prejudices held by other people, create in OO an anxiety to justify himself. He struggles to tell Wairi a remote story of his grandfather's opposition to European missionaries coming to settle in Africa, which he ties to his dropping out of school, to counter Wairi's preconceived notion of his life. Wairi's warped account of what she believes to be OO's background and OO's story about his grandfather's heroic deed of killing Bishop Hannington, reveal ethnic stereotypes that are the causes of inner conflict in the characters. The characters silently carry misconceived notions about each other's identity that inform their standpoints. These misconceptions create feelings of inferiority and superiority that prejudice the character's view of the other. The feelings of insecurity and inferiority that OO harbours make him conjure up what he believes other people think of him and explain the anxiety of his intent to correct the misconception. Out of nowhere, he begins to narrate his life to Wairi when she has not solicited for such information. In the Grician theoretical framing, OO is supplying irrelevant information to Wairi because she has not asked him to tell her about himself. In addition, he becomes inquisitive over Wairi's family, inquiring about the "baby" who should be the hallmark of her "happy" marriage. This curiosity (which Wairi also notices on page 21) is what opens up the wound in Wairi's life, of "His [her dead baby's] silent cries that are never heard" (p. 18).

This nagging inquisitiveness leads Wairi to speak up and confess her feelings of hurt and an unfulfilled marriage. Like OO, Wairi finds home unbearable and unfulfilling, making her wish loudly to go back into her mother's womb, "wipe out all the years of... tortuous existence and start all over again" (p. 27). Though she blames

it on the theatre people, in reality it is her childlessness and society's imaging of her condition that are the genesis of her problem. Wairi realizes and accepts she belongs to the group of people whose deformity cannot be seen physically, unlike OO's, whose lameness is visible. Her main cause of pain is that other people around her, including Njuguna her husband, do not accept her in her condition. Her sense of frustration, therefore, results from this feeling of self-rejection.

Both OO and Wairi's frustration is steeped in their societies' collective perception of manhood and womanhood, respectively. For OO the larger perception of what a successful husband should be and the elements of cultural practice, coexistence and acceptability are the denominators of his tribulations. By constantly reflecting on and referring to the apparent historical experiences and cultural differences between his community and Wairi's (which also happens to be Muthoni's community) OO sucks up to the social prejudices and stereotypes that lower his esteem. In this world a man is defined by the success of his endeavours and the ability to provide for his family.

Wairi, on the other hand, falls victim of the society's perception of a consummate marriage. A marriage is seen to be successful only if there are children; "cherubs" as OO and Wairi refer to them. The absence of children, like the case is with Matama in *Covenant with Death*, renders a woman less human. That is why the love that Njuguna overwhelmed Wairi with disappears with the reality of her barrenness; the reality that her "womb is a contraption of sterility" (p. 28). This subjects her not only to her own psychological anguish but also to spite from Njuguna's girlfriends who call and abuse her. Yet she keeps silent about it, she does not confront Njuguna about the insolent calls she receives from his women. It is this silence that eats her from within, turning her life into misery. So, when OO presents

himself, she finds a fellow suffering being to share her suffering with. Ironically, her refusal to inform Njuguna makes her complacent to the cause of her suffering.

Wairi's refusal to confront her man and her rejection of company constructs a world of subservience around her. She has willingly resigned to her plight of solitude. She blames the still birth she suffers, which kills with it Njuguna's dream of a messiah, on herself yet she knows very well it is not her fault. Why she feels apologetic and expects forgiveness from Njuguna for this unfortunate occurrence remains a mystery. The play does not make it clear why she blames herself for the miscarriage, unless she does something that is not divulged to the reader/audience.

Both OO and Wairi long for an illusive audience to listen to their stories. That is why they strike a bond very fast and they are eager to tell each other their experiences. As OO puts it, he has to tell somebody to wrench it out of his system (p. 48). It is this purgation of inner feelings and charting a new future that these two characters need in order to come to terms with their situations. OO confesses that he hardly talks to anybody (p. 49), while Wairi moans her solitude (p. 26). What establishes the bond between the two characters, despite their remote acquaintance, therefore, is their anxiety to reaffirm their existence and humanity.

OO's low self esteem, again, makes him suspicious that Muthoni is having extra marital affairs. So, when Wairi jokingly pries him, he gets convinced that the visitors Muthoni keeps receiving can only be her lovers. That is why the insinuation by Wairi that Muthoni could leave OO because she has struck a deal with a film director, makes him panic. This is proof that OO is insecure and has an inner yearning for Muthoni, showing stifled love for her. This is a sign of the humane feeling he has towards her the first time they meet. The distance between OO and Muthoni can, therefore, be attributed to depravity rather than the socio-ethnic and cultural

differences that he keeps citing. Circumcision and ethnic identity cannot change or determine economic well-being of an individual. It is the individual's determination and focus that chart one's economic progress. This is the reason why OO becomes jealous of Muthoni's "new found luck and talent" (these are only probable because they are imagined by Wairi). In Wairi's imagination, Muthoni finds success in big screen acting, where OO has failed.

The self-confidence and assertiveness in Wairi's portraiture of Muthoni, which leads to her eventual signing up for a role in the movie that Sid is shooting, represent what has eluded OO all along. OO needs to assert himself economically as a man and a father in order to be respected. These are the two qualities that he lacks, which Sid, an artist like himself has established. Incidentally, he has come to meet NN over a venture in the theatre that he feels will catapult him to instant fame in the entertainment industry. If he does not try and only whines and moans, Muthoni will always be ahead of him.

In conclusion, the two protagonists are refractions of each other. Both aspire to a life of fulfillment but none realizes that they are obstacles to their own goals. Thus, it is only self-realization and acceptance of individual circumstance that can set them free.

### **4.3 Diegetic Monologue as Strategy of Context Establishment and Story Building**

Diegeisis is an aspect of language that recounts events in a past tense time locus rather than in a here-and-now present time frame. Ruganda uses diegetic speech extensively to build enveloping action of his plays. Diegeisis is the opposite of mimesis. Mimetic speech constitutes directly part of the events of the plot while diegetic speech fleshes in the gaps of information from the past that is necessary for comprehension of the narrative. In diegetic conversation characters give accounts of

past events, rather than engage in discourse from which the reader/audience can abstract narrative. Diegeisis in this regard extends the context of the play to cover other events that are not enacted on stage.

In drama, the author withholds some information, supplying it piecemeal at opportune moments, thereby creating suspense. Diegeisis, therefore, serves the purpose of helping the reader/audience locate the present events of drama in a larger frame as more information is supplied. The happenings narrated take place “elsewhere” and “elsewhen” but affect directly or indirectly the plight of the characters of the drama in the present time. Ruganda uses reflexive diegetic conversation to supply information that characters wish to share in the form of narratological monologues from their past in a bid to understand each other. The listening character may interject here and there, and largely the series of monologue coalesce into the larger narrative or “history” of the present predicament of the characters of the plays.

*The Burdens* is presented as a continuum of the life of Wamala, a former cabinet minister who has plummeted to a lowly level in social status and is trying to rise up again to reclaim that past. His speech is largely referential touching on his experience as a college tutor, then cabinet minister and finally a jailbird. Wamala having failed in his quest to ascend to higher office, now looks for a scapegoat to blame for his present situation. He lays blame on the colonial legacy and the grip it has left on his country both politically and socio-economically:

**Wamala:** Look at it properly, Tinka. Why should there be so much prejudice against the blacks? Why should white mothers sweat and freeze with horror when a black man ogles their blonde daughters? You know why? Our colour suggests real power and mystery when you stand in a crowd you can't be seen through. Our unpredictability nags on the white conscience. Hence the reality of black power. My slogans exploit white fear and emphasize our pride. We can't go on being insulted. Every blinking advertisement asserts the beauty,

virtue, the superiority of whiteness. Shit. Even when we manufacture goods ourselves for the home market, it is for the white to persuade us to use them. Cars, cigarettes, drinks deodorants, toilet paper, tablets, the lot. (*pause*) Is your 'kill – me – quick' sold out? (p. 28 – 29)

It is ironical that Wamala who attempts to topple the government through the help of the same Yankees should now turn around and denounce them. Wamala now wants to sanitize his failure as a leader by blaming the westernization that has taken root in his country. Having plummeted from high society to beggary Wamala is rationalizing on his current plight, but not putting into perspective the past. Currently, being one of the suffering masses, he is looking for the cause of his people's plight, forgetting that he is part of the cause. Furthermore, such belated realization of the reality of the black people's plight coming from a man who has had the opportunity to influence the course of his people's future but fails due to selfish ambition cannot be taken seriously. Wamala, therefore, is a character suffering from a split personality – he is lonely now and that is why he reflects on his current predicament. However, given a chance to go back to his former life, he will not champion the black people's case.

Wamala in his reminiscence role-play speeches portrays a hypocritical character who should not lament about the Yankees. He plays in the same bourgeoisie league with the same people he now calls enemies of the black people. Even when he presents himself as the pathetic down trodden common man whom the likes of Vincent Kanagonago exploit and loathe, he cannot receive any sympathy because he is simply getting a dose of his own medicine. He is in league with the Kangonagos when life is rosy for him and now his lamentation can only be a case of the sour grapes that he now cannot reach. Wamala's series of monologues, therefore, clarify the circumstances of his personal life and family's present state of squalor and frustration, arising out of the fall from a glorious past of misused power and authority.

In one long example, Wamala sums up his family's depressing routine, after the encounter with a secretary as he tries to access the managing director of Associated Matches:

**Wamala:** When the secretary woman foiled my chances, I began to see our predicament as it really is. In a way I'm grateful to her. I suddenly realized we couldn't take the situation much longer. You, me and the children. We get up at the crack of dawn. Tea without milk. Cold potatoes and beans. The searing sting of smoke and the smell of urine from Kake's bedding. We wash our faces with dew because water costs a fortune and there isn't any in the house. Kaija goes to school. The cold morning making his teeth chatter and biting his bare buttocks. Kake chases butterflies or walks around the house in silence because you and I have nothing much to talk about.

**Tinka:** We should take that girl to a proper doctor, Wamala

**Wamala:** Ten o'clock comes. You start your weaving or setting out tins and tubes for distilling *enguli*. I borrow the previous day's newspaper and begin an endless search for jobs in the vacancies column. When I see one I think I can do, there is still the problem of three referees. And yet the only people who know me, who dare associate with me, are fellow drunks; drunks at the Republic Bar who best know the predicament of developing nations. Then lunch comes. Potatoes and beans, sometimes *kaunga* and *dodo*, and our indefatigable silence – except for occasional mediocre jokes to reassure the children. In the evening I go to the Republic to meet the outside world, to meet the new breed who are susceptible to praise and can afford to stand us drinks. I drink and drug myself against depression and frustration. I come back home to silent curses and to the empty eyes of the children of uncertainty, who know but dare not say they do. You slink away to the bedroom and I have to follow knowing full well that neither you nor the room welcomes me. Another dawn. Tea without milk. Cold potatoes and beans. The searing sting of smoke. Day in, day out, until the second political coming. We can't stand it any longer. (pp.25 – 26)

This monologue evokes the reader's/audience's sympathy and pity, if only for the children, in the world of squalor to which the Wamala have been consigned. In a way Wamala sounds like he is appealing to everybody for tolerance and sympathy, yet he has none for people in a similar situation while he is in office. The contrast between the past life of plenitude and the current one of beggary lays bare Wamala's plight.

Sometimes Wamala's reminiscences are mere phatic communion after his

spates of quarrels with Tinka. Pfister (1988) says phatic communion:

...is associated with the channel between speaker and listener and is designed to create and maintain the contact between them, is of greater relevance to the external communication system. By 'channel' and 'contact' we do not just mean the purely physical link which enables the dramatist to convey information from sender to receiver; we are also referring to the psychological willingness of both parties to communicate with each other. (p. 113)

By external Pfister means the manner in which a message (in this case a dramatic message) is received and decoded by the recipient (audience). In drama, besides the two interlocutor characters, we have the audience/reader, towards whom the stage communication is oriented. This third party participant in the communication process decodes messages not only on account of what the speaker and listener of the dramatic world say, but also on account of the immediate context of the speech. Thus, it is rather unusual for two characters that have just had a brawl to immediately converse harmoniously. That is why when Tinka agrees to participate in the remembrance of their wedding, her speech is fraught with undercurrents of accusations underpinned by hatred. At the end of Act One, the two retire to bed hand in hand, but it is everyone's guess the cease-fire is only temporary and artificial. It is just meant to reassure the children; as Wamala confesses.

Many a times, Wamala's monologues come across through role-play remembrance. This theatre technique introduces a different hierarchy of speech, which creates a different fictional level in the play that distances the character's actions from those of the first level of the mimetic dramatic world in which he is the *dramatis persona*. Since what the role-play portrays is Wamala's abstraction or simulation of the subjects or notions he enacts, then it cannot be that the enactment is on the same hierarchy of the dramatic world as the one that he exists in. Hence, what

the actor in the role-play projects toward the audience or reader is his imaginary or remembered “this is what happens or happened or will happen” situation. This being the case then, inference of meaning should be done on a different plane; that of the character’s ‘perception’. Again, emphasis is put on perception because fictional characters do not possess the disposition of their own to perceive things. The effect of role-play is to create distance between the world of the character on one hand and that of the author.

In *Black Mamba*, although the monologues are not as long and lofty as those in *The Burdens*, they serve the same purpose of grounding the play’s narrative in past circumstances that help to explain the characters’ choices. Namuddu’s questions of morality can, for example, be explained on the basis of Berewa’s observation of what has become an acceptable sin. He justifies his choices and scheme through long monologues to Namuddu, revealing a character who has sold into what has become a societal perversion. According to Berewa perversion has become a norm. If one is to be recognized as a “somebody”, then one has to be rich, the means notwithstanding. And, since this situation is unforgiving, then one cannot afford to be virtuous. One has to grab any opportunity that crosses his or her way. It is in this vein, therefore, that Berewa goes on to persuade his wife – in long explanatory monologues – to prey on Professor’s lust for women. He even coaches her how to conduct herself so that she sticks in the trade longer without being discovered (for example between pp. 12 – 14).

Similarly, Professor Coarx's inner self is revealed through a long soliloquy:

**Prof.** Yes, she is a good girl despite everything. She is loving and lovable. But I must hold her gently as a new born babe. Yes. Yes, that's what it is, love. Of all the weaknesses a man may have, of all the strength of character a man may possess, young or old, master or servant, it is love: love of a woman. It is love that makes men fight, it is love that makes men love. Love is the spring board of life, of joy and success. Its absence breeds utter failure, bitterness and death. I

have spent seven years with my wife, no, seven years have spent me, growling in a dark pit of animosities. I know love well, because I have lived on the other side of it, always moving from unbearable uncertainties to agonizing absurdities. Well, what of that? Doesn't love really transcend petty prejudices of creed, colour and status? Doesn't love bend and break women – and men too? What use is marriage if it stands far below all these? What use is any woman at all, of whatever sort and size, if she is only to whimper like a mosquito and to rant like an unknowing lecturer? Lord! I'm becoming too hot and I am losing my way. (*He walks about the room in a pensive mood for some seconds - then looks at his watch.*) Is this chap not coming? It's past time! (*Namuddu breezes in – he runs round unsteadily, as though exhausted.*) What is it now Namuddu? (pp 30 – 31)

This voicing of inner thoughts brings to the fore the professor's fickleness. Like the other couples in Ruganda's plays, Professor Coarx is an unsatisfied man in his marriage. However, it is not easy to explain his lust for women and chauvinism. The professor takes women as play-things to be used and discarded. Such a perception coming from a man of letters is both puzzling and demeaning. Puzzling in the sense that he should try to understand the dynamics of humanity; demeaning because as a learned man he is expected to have a more humane perception of gender. Again, puzzling because the professor is not ignorant of this contradiction. He wants Namuddu but at the same time he is concerned about his public image. That is why he tries to get rid of her by telling her:

**Prof.** The thing is you have to go, Namuddu. I just can't help it now. Everybody will come to see the white Professor's indiscriminate consorting with black prostitutes – and a married Professor too! I can't stand being a show-piece. It's intolerable, Namuddu. It has done me a lot of damage already. My students, my staff, and the whole world will lose confidence in me – merely because of your timely popping into my sitting room. Think, think, what it will mean to me! Newspapers could easily pick it up and inflate to God knows what degree. I'll be in the headlines. No, no! 'Professor's Prostitute!' Incredible! (p. 55)

The panic in the speech undermines the professor's initial show of confidence, which he displays before his student, Odiambo, and his colleague, Catherine. It bursts his false claim to morality as it exposes his hypocrisy.

From these examples, it can be said that Ruganda uses monologue to share personal character traits and predicaments with the audience/reader from an omniscient point of view. The technique privileges the audience/reader, sharing inner sentiments of character while in some cases hiding the same from fellow characters. By revealing the professor's inner sentiments Ruganda once more establishes the literary dichotomy of appearance and reality. The professor of sociology who appears so knowledgeable about the evils of prostitution is also a secret perpetrator of the vile. This irony of character very strongly predicated the conflict of the play to the psychology of split personality. By painting his characters in this way, Ruganda establishes the context of the personal, interpersonal and societal contradictions that reveal the various layers of conflict in this play.

In *Covenant with Death*, the two protagonists recount their plight through short accounts of their past experiences, thereby again, constructing the circumstance of the drama. For instance, when Motomoto feels frightened of the road they are walking on, Matama reassures him saying:

**Matama:** You are a stranger to this road, and you may be right to feel as you do. Five years ago, I remember, when I was running away from home to the city, I felt the same. I was walking with half my legs in the ground – slowly and steadily sinking into the earth. Be calm, it will be over in no time. (p. 73)

Motomoto's fear compels Matama to reveal her past – that she actually ran away from home. This revelation clarifies for both Motomoto and the audience Matama's history. On another level, Motomoto's fear is both real and symbolic. It is real in the sense that the road is lonely and long just like it was five years ago. Nothing has changed. At the symbolic level, the road portends the uncertainty for Matama, the same way it did five years ago. This cryptically symbolizes the unchanging

circumstances of Matama's fate, whether she runs away or not. The cyclic nature of her destiny remains unchanging, just like the permanence of the road. The road and Motomoto's persistent fear become a trope that portends the coming to an end of Matama's life and struggle. Motomoto observes passage of time that has seen Matama's life move towards the end:

**Motomoto:** I'm not being unkind to you, my lady, but five years ago when your people last saw you, you were different from what you are now. You were pretty like gems of dew, people say, and healthy as a heifer. That is what you were when I also first saw you. Just the sort of woman every respectable man could have gone crazy about. But what are you now, my lady? Completely changed. A few moments now who knows, you might be ... (p. 75)

This sort of reflective speech helps to clarify where the characters have come from and speculates on their future. In Matama's thinking if men had been as understanding as Motomoto, she would not have ended up in her present predicament:

**Matama:** Oh, don't bother me with questions. What can't you understand? I mean if men were as kind as you are, if our men were kind, then I would not have gone to the city, and if I hadn't gone there, I wouldn't have fallen seriously ill, and I would not have bothered you on this dreadful journey .... You see what I mean? (p. 76)

This structure of speech gradually builds into the larger narrative of the play, revealing little by little details of the characters' experiences and relationships. In fact, structurally, the whole narrative of *Covenant with Death* is constructed in this manner, except for the flashback of Kaikara's covenant that concludes the exposition of the saga.

In *The Floods*, the atrocities committed against the citizenry and the backgrounds of the protagonists are recounted through monologue. Kyeyune gives us an account of how he retires from fishing and what causes him to stop eating fish and his perception of Boss in this manner (pp. 9 – 11). The use of monologue in this play,

apart from widening the physical environment, entrenches the themes of tyranny and dehumanisation. The narratives of these monologues are grotesque. For instance, the gruesome picture of three nails driven into the head of a dead man and his genitals stuffed in his mouth from Kyeyune's account forms a very unforgettable leit motif. The trauma that this experience occasions on Kyeyune symbolizes the national trauma that the citizens suffer at the hands of a moribund regime. These accounts by Kyeyune and Nankya, contrast with the fairly tranquil life before Boss takes over rule of the country (pp. 12 – 13). Towards the end of the play, Kyeyune's report of the gory massacre of the islanders on the evacuation boat is the climax of the inhumane narratives of death. Kyeyune's accounts are allegories as well as picturesque portrayals of ruling regime's tyranny. The monologues in *The Floods* fill in the action that is not presented *in media res* and form the context of interpretation.

Kyeyune's accounts contrast Bwogo's narratives of blissful consorting with Nankya. Amidst this blissful past, Bwogo's accounts reveal how other people have lived in constant fear. Although he tries to disclaim this reality of tyranny as a conjuration of foreign papers, from his own accounts, he confesses he is the architect of these diabolical acts. Through a medley of soliloquies, asides and role-plays, Bwogo attempts to exonerate himself from the crimes of mass murder before Nankya. The role-play, soliloquy and aside monologues narrate the brutal experiences of the citizenry at the hands of a military terror outfit familiar to both Bwogo and Nankya. The monologues paint an imagery of a world in which insecurity stalks innocent people, revealing a dehumanization that is not mimetically played on the stage.

In *Music without Tears*, what compels Wak to join the liberation movement is given through a strong reminiscence episode, narrated in monologue. In addition, Odie's projection of his failure at university and his father's disappointment in him is

narrated diegetically:

**Odie:** The man [father] never loved me anyway. Thought I was a disgrace to the family, a big embarrassment. You know it. He never bothered to find out why I wasn't doing well at the University. Our strike was the last straw. Good excuse for him to wash his hands off me. He could have found a scholarship for me if he had wanted, couldn't he? But what did he do? (1982, p. 100)

The genesis of the hatred between the two brothers is established here. What follows this revelation is series of courtroom-like submissions in which each character takes a turn to defend himself. The reader/audience becomes the jury that judges the two characters from their mitigations on the human principle of moral probity and ethics.

The construction of characters in absentia in *Echoes of Silence* through role-play and reminiscence is based on the emotional turmoil of the characters. OO's feeling of insecurity and inferiority is established when he struggles to assert his grandfather's heroic deeds of fighting colonialism and the price he (OO) pays through expulsion from school. Apparently, his grandfather plays a role in the assassination of the British missionary, Bishop Hannington, in Uganda. What he tries to lay claim to is the heroic deed of freedom fighting, which comes to him only by association. In addition, OO is thrown out of Maseno School when the missionaries running the institution learn that he is a descendant of one of the assassins of the Bishop. OO's anxiety to tell this unsolicited story of his past (pp. 9 – 10) seeks to demonstrate the sacrifice that he has paid for his kin's heroic deed. However, since this story is not solicited, it ends up portraying him negatively as a character looking for any slight opportunity to boost his ego. This narrative is both ironical and contradictory. While OO hails his grandfather for the heroic act of murdering the Bishop, his own father fights for the British in Burma during the Second World War. This can be taken as an act of betrayal by his father; and it ends up destroying the heroism to which OO

wishes to lay claim.

The technique of narrating the past in *Echoes of Silence* is problematic like in the other plays where it creates apparent contradictions within the situations being portrayed. As pointed out earlier, couples quarrel then invite each other to role-play, when there is so much tension between them. OO offers to tell Wairi the story of his past when she is actually bored and impatient with him, wishing him to leave so that she can prepare dinner for her husband. In addition, the two hardly know each other enough to share intimate information about their lives. Already, Wairi has formed a stereotypical view of OO because he is Luo. In her mood she does not need him to tell her the story. OO, on the other hand, has a contemptuous attitude towards Wairi's tribe, which he believes lays undue claim to the credit of the fight for independence. The characters take the liberty to narrate themselves so that the other can understand them. In their interlocution, since the information they wish to supply is about events or perceptions, they take more time hence the narratological monologues.

This technique of sharing unsolicited information, often, is used to introduce new subjects or to clarify issues by adducing evidence. OO's accounts of the bishop's assassination and Wairi's people's role in the liberation struggle, introduce in the play the theme and conflict of ethnicity that is tied to the politics of inclusion and exclusion. This political perception is embedded in the characters' social psyche through ethnic socialization. The characters' anxieties about what other people think about them and their community should not be the criteria for self-actualization. The twin problem of ethnicity and patriotism revealed through the OO story is perceived through the prism of stereotype and misconception.

Wairi's narrative of Nyanjiru (pp.11 – 14), a Gikuyu historical figure who challenged Kenyan men in Nairobi to face the colonialist outside the Norfolk Hotel in

1922, is aimed at countering the Bishop Hannington tale. It is as surprising as OO's narrative because it is just off the cuff. However, whereas these narrations render the play episodic, they tie the dramatic context directly to the socio-historical perceptions of identity, patriotism and nationhood. The direct allusion to history and the ritual of circumcision that marks the passage into manhood among the Gikuyu, which ritual is not performed among the Luo, is what connects the two contexts. This ethnic tension is captured in OO's statement, "Lakes are not known to climb mountains" (p. 15), implying that Luos (people from the lake region) are not known to marry or associate closely with the Agikuyu (people from the mountain region). Such subconscious beliefs underlie the conflict of the play.

Immediately after the rendition of the two stories, Wairi and OO get into a violent spat. Wairi slaps OO for asking her about the child who should be in the baby cot but is missing. The two then proceed to role-play baby-sitting Wairi's imaginary child that OO lulls to sleep. Later the two continue narrating tales and occurrences in their lives or other characters' lives. This series of accounts constructs the plot and story of the play.

#### **4.4 Conclusion**

Ruganda's use of dramatic speech creates different hierarchies of perception that ought to be decoded carefully for comprehensive understanding of his plays. There are moments when the playwright locates the speech in the first mimetic world of the *dramatis personae*, and there are moments when the *dramatis personae* move to other levels above the first dramatic world where they simulate situations and incarnate other characters. In other instances the characters tell stories or recount events that they experienced. This layering of the dramatic worlds collapses the boundaries of plausibility of action and elevates the drama to the level of tropes

whose meaning has to be deciphered from the various levels of perception. In so doing, Ruganda grounds his drama more in the realm of the fictive rather than the immediate reality of history.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### 5.0 SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 5.1 Summary

The general objective of this study was to abstract the structural elements of semiosis that the playwright uses to construct the narratives of his plays to try and establish how they influence the inference of meaning. The interrogation of these elements was done within a semiotic framing and understanding of how the elements of space and time make the plays comprehensible. The study was guided by three specific objectives: one, to construct the structural elements of semiosis that make Ruganda's drama coherent and intelligible, and to evaluate the communicative effects that result from the use of these semiological elements; two, interrogate the significance of use of non-verbal dramatic codes and assess their contribution to the process of signification; three, investigate linguistic patterns that manifest and establish their influence on the development dramatic action, the narratives and interpretation of meaning of the plays.

The interrogation abstracted several elements of semiosis including time, space, technique, aural and visual non-verbal codes, symbols, and dramatic speech, for investigation of influence on the dramatic structure and effectiveness of use in Ruganda's plays. Particularly, the investigation relied on the three elements of time, space and technique to establish dramatic contexts from which analysis and interpretation of the plays was done. These contexts formed hierarchies of looking at Ruganda's dramatic worlds, since as demonstrated in the analysis, they are hierachical. The element of technique was also investigated for its deployment for aesthetic and communication purposes. In essence, the hierarchies form different

levels of worlds within the main mimetic dramatic world, from which events of the plays are perceived. The study specifically explored the possibilities of embedded meanings in relation to the way characters related within their dramatic world, with regard to spatio-temporal, audio-visual and verbal elements. Lastly, at the level of speech, the study looked into how various forms of speech, including dialogue, monologue and narration, variegated the dramatic discourse of the plays in time and space and how this impacts on the processing of meanings. The elements of time and space were, in addition, interrogated for purposes of development of dramatic action and the narratives of the plays. This established how the playwright structured his plays resulting in distinct forms of style. All this inquiry was premised on one general assumption that conveyance of meaning in drama consists in the codes embedded within its world and that these codes are identifiable from their frequency of recurrence through foregrounding. It is, therefore, imperative to isolate and decipher possible meanings of the foregrounded elements within the context of the dramatic world.

## **5.2 Conclusion**

The structural elements investigated established that the playwright deploys structural patterns premised on deliberate aesthetics of plot, tropes and speech that determine inference of meaning from his drama. As demonstrated in Chapter Two, within spatio-temporal considerations, Ruganda's plays are predicated on past experiences of his characters that keep going back to these experiences through strong nostalgic remembrance, role-play or projection. The strategy of reflexive reference and enactment connects the characters' past worlds with their present, making clear the origin of their plight. In other circumstances, the characters project future events and times, making their actions imaginary rather than concrete within the dramatic

world.

In Chapter Three, investigation of Ruganda's use of theatrical technique and tropes, both aural and visual, reveals his fusion of aural and visual imagery with the verbal to give his plays both dramatic and theatrical aesthetics. Included in this exploration are non-linguistic aural elements that form part of the plays' language and theatricality. The combination of these elements of theatrical communication create a dramaturgy that is unique in that at times it blurs the space between the reality of the audience/reader and that of the *dramatis personae*. This becomes even more complex when the *dramatis personae* at times play themselves, and at other times, they play other characters. This phenomenon, it was observed results in an indeterminacy that is closely associated with the aesthetic of surrealism, which is characterized by fluidity of time and space both within the world of drama and the world of reality, especially when the playwright intends to draw the audience directly into the world of the drama. This coalescence of the worlds of reality and that of drama is enabled through use of techniques such as role-play, background sound and cinematic flashback. The techniques at times collapses the human social and textual contexts merging them into one.

Chapter Four, which dealt with use of speech, again reveals hierarchies of language use resulting from perspectives of spatio-temporal location of the characters and their actions. The variegated use of language in different contexts – either real to the dramatic world or remembered from past or projected through imagination into the future – results in different planes of perception that need keen understanding for implicative interpretation of embedded meaning.

The layering of the worlds of the plays, whether real (to the dramatic character), remembered, therefore subject to faithfulness of the 'memory' of the

remembering character or conjured up from imagination, (again of the character) create a drama that is indeterminate in meaning at times. One has to pay cognizance to the various levels of the worlds created as a result of the use of technique in order not to misread the various perspectives of perception. Often, when the author collapses the various layers of the dramatic worlds, the result is a fluidity of interaction between character and fellow character, and between character and the audience/reader, thereby merging the contexts of the actuality of the human world and the virtuality of the dramatic world. This phenomenon is more associated with drama of the absurd and surrealism. This makes it difficult to put a closure to the possible meanings that can be abstracted from Ruganda's dramatic discourse. In this regard, the plays remain a polysemic field for further exploration of style and meaning.

### **5.3 Recommendations**

Considering what has been said, it is recommended that further exploration be carried out on the playwright's love for the surrealistic idiom and fascination with what most critics refer to as the Fugardian influence. These aesthetic elements accord the playwright a leverage of fluidity of time and space that distinguish his drama and also obscure the element of the reality that if made clear, imbues drama with fictionality. Further investigation of Ruganda's use of speech is also recommended bearing in mind the fact that he is an African writing in a foreign language and the obvious challenge of expressing an African world in a foreign language rears its head. Finally, a semiotic reading of other playwrights' works should be carried out to find out how different they may fair compared to Ruganda.

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