

**CHILDREN'S LITERATURE AS AN IMAGE-FORMING
FORCE: CASE STUDY OF EZEKIEL ALEMBI'S BOOKS**

BY

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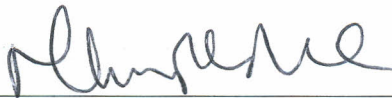
DECLARATION

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



Michael Oyoo Weche

This thesis has been submitted with our approval as University supervisors.



Dr. N. Mpesha



Prof. F. D. Imbuga

DEDICATION

Dedicated to the memory of my late father:

Austin Pius Oyoo.

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A B S T R A C T

The main objective of this study is to find out the kind of influence Alembi's children's story books have on children who read them. Underlying the study are two main assumptions: that the writer's works have a great influence on the Kenyan child's moral and social development, and that through the books, he, consciously or unconsciously influences the young Kenyan reader's world view.

Primary sources consist of the use of interview questions in our discussion with the respondents in order to elicit their response. Secondary sources consist mainly of library research on critical works on children's literature, aimed at finding out the relationship between criticism and Alembi's works. The primary data has been collected from four Kenyan primary schools. The theoretical assumptions have been proven true by the data gathered both from the field and in our analysis of the books.

The findings elicited from our respondents show that Kenyan children expect books not only to entertain them but also to inform them. This finding is revealed in their overt rejection of vices such as stealing and selfishness. The readers' immediate responses to Alembi's works show that the books may have an influence on them. They reinforce their social and moral development. The responses to the books are culturally contextualised. Thus the books enhance

what the children get from education, Christianity and cultural set up.

The findings are significant in understanding the potential influence that children's literature in general has on children and also the possible influence that Alembi's books in particular have on the Kenyan child reader. Understanding the influence that the books may have on the young reader should help writers and patrons of children's literature to make suitable books to the Kenyan child.

CHAPTER ONE

1.0 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The state of children's literature varies from country to country. Jan observes that in countries where there has been a high social and economic standard, one would expect to find children's literature flourishing (1973: 13).

Odaga describes the history of children's literature in Kenya in three phases: the pre-colonial, the colonial and the post-colonial (1985:15). Her description is significant for it recognizes how the three phases of children's literature acted differently in influencing image-formation in the Kenyan child. Odaga recognizes the fact that literature is a powerful force in society; it is not just a record of social reality, but also a tool for socialisation.

The pre-colonial children's literature in Kenya was oral. Through this literature children learned to respect themselves and others. It was vital in the child's image-formation for enduring values of the community were passed onto children.

The second phase of children's literature in Kenya was the colonial literature. This was literature written by the colonizer for his or her own preferred readers back home. It distorted the image of the black people, viewing blacks as

'uncivilized' and 'primitive'. This literature had a negative impact on the young black people's image-formation. Micere Mugo in her paper read to the conference on the teaching of African literature in schools held in Nairobi in 1973, entitled "Written Literature and Black Images" (cited in Ngugi 1986: 18) related how her reading of the description of Gagool as an African woman in Rider Haggard's **King Solomon's Mines** had for a long time made her feel mortal terror whenever she encountered old African women. For most people the negative image becomes internalized and as Ngugi (1986) says, it affects their cultural and even political choices in ordinary living. This is because every writer tries to persuade his/her reader to view the world from a certain angle. Ngugi says:

..... the product of a writer's pen both reflects reality and also attempts to persuade us to take a certain attitude to that reality (1981: 7).

Ngugi's observation presupposes that the written word can influence the reader's world view and also the type of image he/she forms of his/her society. Indeed, as Rosenblatt argues, children build up their sense of the socially favoured types of adjustments in the culture from the books they read (1968: 20). She further adds that 'in books they are meeting extremely compelling images of life' that will undoubtedly influence their world view. This view is supported by Micere Mugo in her observation on the influence of the written word on a young mind:

What is implanted on the mind through reading particularly among young people may form a permanent impression (in Gachukia and Akivaga 1973: 35).

The third phase of children's literature in Kenya can be referred to as the post-colonial. This literature is mainly written by Africans whose aim is to re-interpret and re-assert the African identity from an African point of view. As Odaga says, this literature expresses pride and dignity; it therefore has a positive influence on the Kenyan child's image-formation. It corrects the stereotypes that had been created about the African people by the colonial literature (1985: 37).

Alembi's works fall under post-colonial children's literature. Throughout this thesis the focus is on the hypothesis that through his children's story books, Alembi consciously or unconsciously aims at influencing the Kenyan child's image-formation. Lewis (1955) argues that every writer deliberately describes a character or situation to convey certain messages and attitudes to the reader.

Mwanzi (1982) supports this view in her argument that every writer uses words and symbols to influence the child to see the society from a definite angle.

Writers of children's story books aim at entertaining the child reader and at the same time informing him/her. In the process they influence the child's social and moral development.

1.1

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Child: The study employs Tucker's definition of a child, as "those beings between the school age and puberty", thus excluding babies (1981: 9).

Children's Literature: Various scholars define 'children's literature' differently. For instance, Davies considers the term to refer to both written books and 'folk and fairy' tales for children (1973: 21). Cass (1967) considers children's literature to include children's books and children's fairy tales. Smith et. al. consider 'children's literature' to include both factual and literary books (1970: 294). For the sake of this study the term 'children's literature' has been used to refer to printed children's story books, in this case Alembi's children's story books.

Image-formation: The terminology 'image-formation' has been employed to refer to the child's view of himself/herself and of his/her society. Lewis argues that the images presented in children's books reflect the child's external reality and can influence his/her worldview (1955: 18). Rosenblatt (1968) supports this in her argument that children's books can have a great influence on the child's moral and social development hence affecting his/her worldview. This stance recognises literature as a product of a particular culture and will thus reflect the socially favoured kind of adjustments. Thus literature becomes significant in the child's assimilation into a particular culture.

Response: Purves defines 'response' as 'the ongoing interaction between the individual and the work ...' (1973: 36). He argues that this is an interaction that may continue long after the individual has finished reading the book. He further defines 'response' as interest, appreciation, and taste, or conversely boredom and rejection. Purves argues that response can be revealed indirectly through observation of the works preferred or rejected by the individual (1973: 43). Akoleit (1990) defines 'response' as the child's reaction to what he/she reads. Akoleit's definition presupposes that books have a lot of influence on the mind of the child reader. In this study we have employed Purves' definition of 'response' as the interaction between the text and the reader. Since image-formation can only be revealed through the child's response, this study limits itself to the child's immediate response (1973:38). This is because, as Rosenblatt (1968) argues, image-formation can be a long-term effect. Furthermore, children read different authors and it is impossible to gauge the long-term effect of a book on a child reader.

Originality: The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English defines 'original' as "newly formed or created; not copied or imitated". This study has used the term 'originality' to refer to Alembi's inventiveness both in style and content in his children's books. We have also used the term 'Originality' to refer to Alembi's ability to use well known material like folk narratives in a new way.

Moral development: The term moral development has been used to refer to children's growth and awareness in habits and standards of behaviour. It is also used to entail children's growth and awareness in principles of right and wrong.

Social development: This terminology has been employed to refer to children's growth and awareness in matters of relationships between people living in a community.

1.2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Children's literature is currently recognized as a special branch of literature. However, as Akoleit (1990) observes, critical literature on children's books is more copious outside Africa than in Africa. In the western world, there are works on children's fiction, drama and poetry. Akoleit argues that these critical works have encouraged writers of children's books to produce better books for the western child.

A number of manuals for the writers of children's books have come up in the western world. In a manual edited by Bingham (1988) a number of children's books are critiqued. In analysing the books, all the contributors emphasize style, thematic concerns and characterisation. Most of them argue that, like books for adults, what makes a book attractive to children is the style employed. This study benefits from these scholars' analysis of style and

characterisation and particularly their recognition that it is through the style employed that a writer can communicate to his/her audience. The scholars' analysis of style helps us in analysing style in Alembi's books and also the children's responses. In another manual edited by Burack (1983), writers receive guidance from different scholars. Most of the contributors to Burack's manual deal with adults' literature. However, a few offer some light on writing for children. One such critic is Charlotte Zolotov whose article "Writing for Children" offers significant insight into the nature of the child. Zolotov notes that everything that is true of fine literature for children can also be seen in distinctive writing for adults (in Burack 1983: 520). She further observes that the difference between the two audiences is in the level of experience. Zolotov's contention is that we need to understand children's feelings and interpret their responses critically.

Crouch (1962) offers a general survey of children's books in Britain between 1900 and 1960. Crouch considers children's choice of reading material. His analysis of some of the properties that children look for in their choice of books benefits us in our analysis of children's response to Alembi's books. Crouch observes that properties such as illustration, humour and characterisation affect the child's choice of books. However, Crouch's work is general and offers little insight into children's response to what they read. Haviland (1973), like Crouch, offers a general survey of children's literature. He enumerates the properties that make a children's book good as 'vitality', humour and

illustration. Haviland fails to say why these properties are important in children's books. This study examines children's response to some of these properties and how the properties influence children's image-formation.

Colboy (1974) analyses what she considers good books for children. She argues that a children's book should entertain and at the same time inform the child. Her work is significant for writers and illustrators of children's books. In this study, we analyse children's response to action in Alembi's books and critically look at why humour is a valuable ingredient in children's books.

Byler's "American-Indian Authors for Young Readers" recognizes the role of children's literature in image-formation. She argues:

.... the effects on children of negative stereotypes and derogatory images is to engender and perpetuate undemocratic and unhealthy attitudes that will plague the American society for years to come (in Cann and Wood [1977: 38]).

Byler's contention is that children's books that portray their society negatively can have a negative impact on the child who reads the book. This is true because children tend to internalize what they read from books. Thus a writer can create a sense of inferiority, or even superiority in the reader. As Inglis points out, child study experts and sociologists have shown that children are sensitive to the existence of racial overtones in children's books (1973: 215).

Byler (in Cann and Wood 1977) concludes that characterisation and thematic

concerns are significant for they are crucial to the child's response to the book. The conclusion benefits us in our analysis of themes in Alembi's books and how children respond to the ideas.

Laura Herbst discusses the role of imagery in children's literature. She argues that "fostering of the child's self-image is an important role literature is constantly performing" (in Cann and Wood 1977: 58). Here emphasis is being placed on the value of literature in terms of its effect on children. This value can only be discovered through a careful study of the given literature. This study critically analyses Alembi's children's story books emphasizing their influence on the children who read them.

Ray (1970) gives guidance to librarians on fiction which is liked by children between ages 9-13 years. Her work is monumental in equipping librarians with the knowledge they need for selecting children's books. Ray's work is significant to this study because of her examination of the kind of fiction that is suitable to the child reader. Her contention is that children prefer a style that is simple for their comprehension. This observation helps us in analysing Alembi's style and how effective it is in communicating to the child.

Dixon (1977) focuses on fiction written for children. Apart from examining ideas and attitudes conveyed by authors to children through novels and stories, Dixon looks at the way authors influence the child reader. Our study benefits

from Dixon's conclusion that all writers write to influence the readers in one way or the other. Inglis notes that a story book can greatly influence the mind of a child who reads it. She concludes that story books are crucial in the development of cognitive thinking in the young child (1973: 205). The child's social and moral development is greatly influenced by the images and characters presented in the story book he/she reads.

In a book edited by Kirkpatrick (1978), the history of America's children's literature is surveyed. This book has some important comments from authors of children's books. Such comments come from Kerry Wood, an established writer of children's books. Wood says:

A children's book should be sincere and accurate. It should have natural characters, some humour, be of interest to both children and adults, and reveal enduring values. (our stress) (in Kirkpatrick 1978: 1363).

Wood's 'enduring values' pertain to the European child. We have asserted that literature is a product of a particular culture and that it fosters the values of that society. This study explores how Alembe's children's books contribute in helping the Kenyan child form a positive image of his/her society by revealing to him/her enduring values from his/her society.

Benton and Fox (1985) examine the teaching of literature to 9-14 year old children. They critically examine the responses of children to stories and

poems. Their conclusion is that the child identifies himself/herself with the characters in a story and that this determines the kind of image he/she forms out of the story.

Helbig and Perkins (1986) survey children's fiction in America from 1960-1984. Their conclusion is significant for children's literature in America:

Throughout its history, children's literature has mirrored the society which produced it and has reflected its attitudes to children (1986: x).

Like adults' literature, children's literature reveals the society that has produced it. It explores the values of that society. Thus children's literature acts as a tool for interpreting the society that has produced the literature. In addition, children's literature acts as an agent of socialisation for the child reader.

Stanley-Collins et. al. (in **Child study Journal** Volume 26 No. 4 1996), in their article "**Choice of Romantic, Violent and Scary Fairy Tale Books by Pre-school Girls and Boys**", have looked at the kind of stories liked by pre-school children. Their observation that age and environment are important in the choice of stories by children is significant for any critical analysis of children's books. This thesis examines the response of 9-11 year old children to Alembi's children's story books.

McKenna and Ossuf in their article, "**Age Differences in Children's Comprehension of a Popular Television Program**", (in **Child Study**

Journal, Volume 28 No. 1, 1998) offer important insight into the nature of the child. Their conclusion is that children who watch violent models on television may imitate violent behaviour in their interactions with others. This study greatly benefits from Mckenna and Ossuf's conclusion, particularly in our analysis of the responses elicited from the children who read Alembi's books.

Micere Mugo (in Gachukia and Akivaga 1978) recognizes the power of the written word on the child. She exposes the underlying racism in the works of Daniel Defoe among others, illustrating the need for criticism of such works from the African perspective. We need to investigate the kind of influence that children's story books have on the children who read the books.

Other critics have used adult literature to stress the need to use literature to re-define the African people and to enhance the understanding of our culture. Nazareth underscores the importance of literature in the society in the form of questions he poses:

What moral values emerge from it What does the work reveal about the society the writer is dealing with? (1972: 10).

Okot p'Bitek (1973) reiterates the need to maintain a strong cultural bias in Literature. He recognizes the ideological influence literature may have. Both Nazareth (1972) and p'Bitek (1973) recognize the influence of books on the readers. Their stance presupposes that books explore the values of the society of the writer. Alembi's children's books explore the values of the Kenyan

society. This study investigates the children's responses to these values. The study also looks at how the values explored in the books affect the children who read them.

Other scholars have used the general criticism of literature to appraise children's literature. Githiora (1979) examines the influence of literature on the young child's concept formation. Her work contributes to the criticism of children's literature by emphasizing the need to understand the background of the child reader in order to meet his/her needs.

Mwanzi (1982) looks at selected children's prose fiction in Kenya. She concludes that the images found in children's prose fiction are deliberately used to create definite effects on the young readers, to persuade them to see the world in a particular way. Mwanzi contends that a critical assessment of children's books is vital before the books are availed to the child reader. This study benefits from Mwanzi's analysis of different images in her selected children's prose fiction. Her analysis helps us critically examine children's responses to characterisation and style in Alembe's children's books.

Odaga (1985) gives a general description of literature for young people and children in Kenya. She recognizes how literature of different periods has influenced the Kenyan child differently. This thesis focuses on what Odaga calls "post-colonial" children's literature in Kenya. We focus on Alembe's

children's story books and investigate the kind of influence the books have on Kenyan children who read them.

Akoleit (1990) critically looks at children's adventure fiction in Africa, using Barbara Kimenye's adventure books. She studies the response of Kenyan children who read Kimenye's story books. Her analysis of the responses to Kimenye's thematic concerns and style sheds some light on the analysis of style and how it communicates to the child reader.

Kahenya (1992) examines the values contained in **Tintin** comics as they relate to the Kenyan children who read the comics. In her study, Kahenya's argument that socialization, in the context of children's literature, means helping the children to grow into socially acceptable and useful members of their society is significant to the current study. She concludes that the **Tintin** comics are quite entertaining to the Kenyan child. However, she argues that the comics have nothing important to offer the Kenyan child in terms of values that can help him/her in social and moral growth. She further claims that the comics perpetuate racist ideas which can only create a sense of inferiority in the Kenyan child. In examining Alembi's story books we study how the author uses characterisation and thematic concerns to influence the Kenyan children who read the books.

Children's response to different categories of children's literature have been

analysed by Mpesha (1995), in her survey of children's literature in Tanzania. Mpesha examines three types of responses: response through re-reading, response through dramatization and response through writing. Her observation that a writer of children's books is dealing with an audience that can easily be influenced and changed by what he/she reads is significant. This is because Mpesha recognizes the influence of children's books on the child reader. Her study helps us in analysing the immediate responses of our respondents and in relating it to Alembe's books that they read.

Our literature review has revealed that there has been little criticism of children's literature in Kenya. Even the works of criticism available have not examined the influence children's books by Kenyan authors have on the moral and social development of the Kenyan child. Furthermore, the available criticism has failed to address the question of the child's world view and how the story books he/she reads influences this world view. This study, therefore, fills part of the lacuna by critically examining the influence Alembe's children's story books have on Kenyan children who read them.

1.3

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

This thesis considers children's literature in Kenya as a powerful image-forming agent. It therefore investigates the kind of influence Alembe's children's story books have on the moral and social development of the children who are exposed to them.

The study answers the following questions: How do Alembi's children's books influence the moral and social development of the Kenyan child who has read them? How do the books influence the Kenyan child's world view?

Rosenblatt has emphasized the need to examine the influence literature has on the young readers:

We need to find out what happens when ... human beings participate in the emotional and intellectual life that books make possible (1968: vii-ix).

Literature plays a crucial role in the process through which the child becomes assimilated into the society. Kenyan children are exposed to Alembi's story books, hence the need to examine how the books influence their moral and social development and their world view.

1.4 JUSTIFICATION OF THE STUDY

This study focuses on eight (8) books by Alembi. Two of the books have won awards in major writing competitions in Kenya. His book, **Mistaken Identity** won the children's category of Evangel Publishing House Writing Competition. In 1997, **Settling the Score** won the Jomo Kenyatta Prize for literature (a major literary award in Kenya). This is evidence that the originality in Alembi's books has been recognized in literary circles in Kenya. This originality is both in style and form. Alembi recognizes the needs of his audience hence he uses a

style that communicates to them. Galava, in his review of **The Cry of a Goat**,

Yellow Mangoes and **Selly** has this to say about the books:

... are so well written in simple and clear language, illustrated (at times in colour) and intended to impart morals such as honesty, obedience, respect and love to children (in the **East African Standard**).

Apart from this recognition of Alembi's works, no critical study has been done on the books. Furthermore, no critical study has been done on any Kenyan author of children's books, particularly on the impact of the books on the children who read them.

For the critic of children's literature, our examination of the potential influence children's books have on children provides him/her with a framework for the study of other authors of children's books. Our findings on the impact of Alembi's books on the children who read them will help patrons of children's literature in their selection of books for children. Furthermore, our study on the impact Alembi's books have on the children should help in safeguarding the child from writers who do not put the children's needs in consideration while writing for them. Publishers of children's books will benefit from our findings in their analysis of manuscripts before publication. Thus both writers and publishers will be able to produce suitable books for the Kenyan child.

A scholarly preoccupation with the impact of children's books is justified because every writer aims at influencing his/her audience. Books are thus

loaded with the values that the author wishes to embody and perpetuate. Such values impress themselves on the child's mind affecting him/her either negatively or positively.

1.5 **SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS**

Our study is limited to one author - Alembi, owing to financial and time constraints. We focus on children's story books he published between 1994-1997. The selection of the eight (8) books is based on their originality, both in style and form. Even when the author is using well-known narratives from his society, as is the case in **The Cry of a Goat**, the material is manipulated in a new way to conform to the needs of the target reader.

Our research sample consist of all the pupils in standards four (4) and five (5) in four primary schools selected from two provinces - Nairobi and Nyanza. We sample only four schools because of limited time and funding. The pupils selected as respondents fall within the age of 9-11 years. The four schools are reached through multi-stage cluster sampling.

The provinces are used as our primary units. From the eight (8) provinces we randomly pick two. The same is done for districts and divisions in Nyanza Province until we arrive at our sample. For Nairobi Province we cluster schools into four zones - western, eastern, southern and northern zones. We randomly pick one zone and finally sample two schools from the zone.

The selection of the classes is done purposively. From our reading of the eight (8) story books by Alembi and our knowledge of children's reading habits we conclude that the books are suitable for pupils in standards four (4) and five (5). Tucker (1981) analyses the type of stories read by children of different ages. He concludes that children between the age of 7-11 like fantasies and stories that are full of action. He also adds that the most typical sort of reading for ages 7-11 years is the heady world of domestic adventure set in a world of reality. Tucker's observation guides us in sampling the classes and the age of respondents. The respondents consist of pupils aged 9-11 year

Alembi's books are full of adventure and in most of them the hero/heroine has a problem to solve. For instance, in **Settling the Score** Ojango struggles to save himself from five masked men. This makes the plot dramatic and children are interested in the action. In addition, most of the stories are domestic adventures set in a world of reality. These stories are therefore suitable for pupils in classes Four(4) and Five(5).

In investigating the responses we limit ourselves to the most immediate. This is because children read different authors' works and therefore it is impossible to gauge children's long term response to a particular author's books. As Rosenblatt (1968) argues children's responses to books is affected by different factors such as environment and the child's own experience. Thus, it is impossible to gauge a book's long term impact on the child.

1.6 RESEARCH ASSUMPTIONS

This study is guided by the following assumptions:

- (i) That Alembi's children's books may have influenced the moral and social development of the children who have read them.
- (ii) That through his style, Alembi consciously or unconsciously aims at influencing the Kenyan child's world view.

1.7 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The present study seeks to achieve the following aims and objectives:

- (i) To analyse Alembi's books and determine how their content could influence the moral and social development of children.
- (ii) To analyse style in Alembi's books and to determine whether or not it could influence children's world view.

1.8 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In evaluating the influence of children's story books on the child's social and moral development, three critical theories are employed. Being a study that borders on values, the sociological theory of literature is used. Under this theoretical framework, literature is interpreted from the point of view of its societal importance, its social function of storing and transmitting the values of a given society. This theoretical framework holds that a writer writes with a purpose. A writer's work will therefore reflect the social and related experiences he has had.

Ellis observes that there has been an ancient dispute as to what the function of literature should be (1974: 233). Scholars who support the sociological theory of literature interpret literature as a mirror of the society that produces it. Ngugi (1972), Hudson (1972) and Achebe (1975) support the sociological theory of literature and consider literature to serve some purpose in the society.

Other scholars have argued that literature should be an end in itself for aesthetic delight. They emphasize the aesthetic appeal of texts. They argue that a text's form makes it an entity in itself and thus readers should not relate it to factors outside itself. Ellis (1974) argues that this position does not consider literature as serving some purpose in society.

The literary scholar using the sociological framework emphasizes the content of a text. However, the present study concurs with Lubbock's assertion that in a good work of art content and form are inseparable (1957: 23). Such elements as diction and imagery are significant in the consideration of children's books: for these are what create the communication effect. The present study therefore employs the stylistic approach in the analysis of Alembi's style. This approach considers literary language as an important tool for communication in any work of art. As Stephen says, one aim of stylistics is to define the work of literature in terms of its patterns of speech, diction, sentence structure and imagery (1991: 349). Stylistics thus concentrates on the style of a work and how an author

chooses to express himself. Stylistics also considers a work of art as a reflection of the author's appreciation of his own cultural environment. Stephen (1991) argues that stylistic interpretation of a work of art can be related to author or sociological, historical and biographical features. The stylistic approach is thus adopted for its relevance as the main descriptive theory of the literary text.

This study also employs the reader-response theory because, as Huck (1976) observes the child's response is significant in the assessment of a children's book. This theory emphasizes the variety of readers' responses to a work of art. It is associated with the reader, the reading process and the response.

Iser (1976) is interested in the reader and the reading process. Iser's premise is that the literary work is an effect to be experienced, not an object to be defined. He argues that the reader assembles the meaning of a text. Reader-response criticism which emerged in the 1970's focuses on what texts do to the mind, or in the mind of the reader, rather than regarding texts as objects to be defined. For instance, Fish (1980) stresses what literature does and not only what it is. He argues that literature exists when it is read. The emphasis on what pages do to minds is central in the works of most, if not all reader-response critics.

These theoretical approaches guide us in appraising Alembi's children's books. The three approaches are used in the analysis of the writer's style and also the

responses elicited from the respondents.

1.9 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Our research methodology is guided by the assumption that the child is the best critic of what he/she reads. The sample consists of all the pupils in standards four (4) and five (5) in Kilimani Primary School, Gatina Primary School, Korondo Primary School and Mukuyu Primary School. The respondents fall within the age group 9-11 years.

The study is conducted in a normal classroom learning atmosphere with the assistance of the class teachers. During the first session the pupils from each class are asked to select one book from a total of eight (8). This book is then read out aloud in class after which the pupils are asked to write a short paragraph on what they like or dislike in it. This session lasts one hour in each class.

During the second session the pupils are broken into groups. The books are divided among the groups and the pupils given two days to exchange the books amongst themselves so that each is able to read all the eight (8) books. Ten copies of each text book are made available to the pupils to reduce the time taken in reading the books.

The third session is a discussion with the pupils to find out how they respond to Alembi's story books. We use an interview schedule (see appendix I) to guide us in our discussion with the children in their various groups. In most cases we have to change some of the questions so as to probe the respondents and find out their responses to Alembi's books. For instance question B (ii) is modified in order to find out what events or situations the children enjoy in the books.

The data collected from all the sessions are used to critically appraise Alembi's books. Apart from the responses elicited from the children, general works on literary criticism are used to analyse his style. We use general tenets of criticism to analyse the author's style, characterisation, plot and themes. We also interview Alembi (see appendix II) on his intended image building. Chapter two of this thesis focuses on the themes in Alembi's children's story books and examines the effect that the content of the books has on the children who read them. The analysis of children's responses to the themes reveals that children tend to accept ideas that conform to the societal norms. Thus the children's responses are culturally contextualised.

Chapter three looks at the effects of style in the books and how it affects children's responses. The style conforms to children's reading needs and influences their responses to the books. The chronological plots conform to the child's moral schema and hence makes it easy for the children to follow the action in the books. The cause-effect pattern enhances the children's

identification with the characters in the books.

In chapter four the findings of the thesis are examined and recommendations for further research made.

CHAPTER TWO

2.0 THEMATIC INCLINATION

Theme is what a reader is left with after all the specific details of people, scene and setting are stripped away. Arbuthnot and Sutherland define theme as “the central core of a story” (1947: 28). Theme deals with the major issues in a text. According to Stewig theme is the underlying idea, a foundation upon which particular information rests (1980: 14).

A study of the values propounded by a particular artist necessarily means a preoccupation with the thematic content of his/her work. By themes we mean the main ideas contained in Alembi's books. In children's books, theme often reflects developmental values that are pertinent to the process of growing up. Akoleit (1990) argues that these values encompass childhood needs such as security, belonging, love, freedom from fear, physical well-being, change and achievement among others. Fiction for children not only entertains the child but also helps the children in their social and moral development. Thus themes in children's books have much to do with children's socialisation.

Gorky has the following to say on themes in children's literature:

The problem of themes in books for children is of course a problem of the line of social education to be followed with respect to children (1933: 314).

Literature and social learning reinforce each other. Thus children tend to internalise concepts they encounter in books. The inter-relationship between social values and themes in children's books becomes vital in the type of image a child forms from reading a book. The ideas propagated by a writer of children's books will inevitably influence the child's social and moral development hence influencing the process through which the child gets assimilated into a particular culture. Ngugi puts this in other words: "Thus the second aspect of language as culture is as an image-forming agent in the mind of the child" (1986: 15).

Ngugi's observation recognizes the fact that what an artist writes has much to do with a people's conception of themselves and can influence their world view. Rosenblatt argues that just as the young child and the adolescent acquire images of behaviour and ways of thinking and feeling from the actions and lives of the people around them, so they may assimilate such images from the experience offered by books (1968: 187). The child learns from books the culturally appropriate emotional responses to types of situations or people.

Alembi's books explore themes that are pertinent in the process of socialisation of the Kenyan child. In all his books the thematic concerns are those that are meant to impart to the Kenyan child positive values and hence assist him/her in social and moral development. In **Yellow Mangoes** the major theme is theft and its consequences. John, Dan and Fraser decide to go and steal Nabakwe's

mangoes. Right from the introduction the author presents characters with differing views on the act of stealing. John is opposed to stealing, while Dan is not sure of what to do but knows that “it’s a bit risky” (p. 5). On the extreme end there is Fraser who believes that picking a neighbour’s mangoes is not stealing. However, the three boys finally decide to go and steal Nabakwe’s mangoes. This act lands them in many problems. First, Fraser is caught by Nabakwe’s son and beaten up. Secondly, the boys run into the bush and sleep out, and lastly, Dan is attacked by a snake. The book concludes with the rescue of Dan and the chief’s warning to the boys not to steal again.

This book clearly confirms that literary themes are very much inter-related with the values of a particular society. Most respondents dislike Fraser, arguing that he is the one who comes up with the idea of going to steal. Indeed the literature of a particular society grows out of that society. Ngugi puts this succinctly, “culture transmits or imparts those images of the world and reality through ... the written language” (1986: 15).

Sometimes children demand that their books deal with ideas related, for example, with personal salvation, heroism or good and evil. In children’s literature the hero plays a very important role in imparting to the child values that help him/her in social and moral development. The heroic character is normally one the children can easily identify with. In **Settling the Score** the heroic character, Ojango, is set against the powerful force in the form of the

five masked men. In this book good and evil are set in opposition. The major theme in the book is that of bravery, as shown in Ojango. While most respondents admire Ojango's courage, others pity him in his situation. Ismael Abdi of Gatina Primary School has this to say: "Ojango took a big risk. Sometimes it is not good." However, all the respondents are relieved when Ojango finally overcomes the many hurdles because of his bravery and also because of the policemen's intervention. In this book the negative values of robbery, cruelty and oppression crystallised in the five masked men affect the respondents, particularly in their identification with Ojango. As Rosenblatt (1968) correctly observes, books can have an influence on the child's social and moral development. In reading **Settling the Score**, the respondents condemn the five masked men and their possible apprehension at the end of the book is a delight to the children interviewed. Max Ogot of Gatina Primary School says, "The men should be punished." Fredrick Okinyi of Korondo primary school has no sympathy with them. He says, "I hate them. They should be jailed".

Children's literature explores a variety of themes that inform the child reader. In **Settling the Score**, minor themes such as cruelty and theft are explored and Ojango is fighting against the two. When the five men steal his father's goat, Ojango vows to bring it back. Thus all his horrifying experiences arise out of the determination to get his father's goat. Because of this determination, he is exposed to cruelty from the five men. He is beaten up and made to starve. His rescue and the apprehension of the evil men is a triumph against evils of cruelty

and theft.

A good writer of children's books should be able to clearly bring out a definite theme in his/her book. In **Settling the Score**, Alembi explores the theme of bravery juxtaposed with cruelty and theft. A twist in the plot of a children's book can also be interesting for it may bring in a minor theme that enhances the child's imagination. In **Settling the Score**, Ojango's situation is made worse by a family 'friend' - Pukiki. This revelation helps the child learn more about human relationships and the hypocrisy in most of them. Faith Mwaisaka of Kilimani Primary School notes, "Pukiki is the worst character in the book. He is a hypocrite". Isiaho of Mukuyu Primary School argues that Pukiki is an example of some friends who cannot be trusted.

the characters the child is able to learn more about

The story in children's books has to be appropriate for the age and the stage of development of the target audience. By their enjoyment of books children will unconsciously acquire certain fundamental feelings in regard to life. Such 'feelings' are acquired through the themes of a book. In **Fine Feathers**, the story of Tecla also deals with the theme of theft. In the book, the author creatively brings out the hypocrisy in human behaviour. While travelling to Nairobi to visit her father, Tecla meets a smartly dressed man on the train. At first Tecla is shy and declines talking to him. However, because of the man's kindness and apparent understanding they engage in a friendly conversation. She soon sleeps only to wake up and find her 'kiondo' and purse stolen. Tecla

does not believe that the smartly dressed man could have stolen her property. She says, "I don't know ... I don't think so. He was very kind. He didn't look like a thief" (p. 14). Tecla is shocked at the end when it is discovered that the smartly dressed man was the thief.

In this book the author explores human issues in a simple way that presents no difficulty to the child reader. Apart from exploring the theme of theft the author also examines human nature particularly in his portrayal of the young man, the policemen and the taxi driver. The policemen are portrayed as cruel in their approach to suspects, particularly in their treatment of the old man who is mistaken for a thief. The taxi driver is oblivious of Tecla's predicament and is portrayed as only concerned with money: "my money ... he hasn't paid ..." (p. 20). From this portrayal of the characters the child is able to learn more about human personalities and their nature. It is also through this portrayal that the author's thematic concerns come out clearly.

Children's literature should entertain the child reader and at the same time offer him/her important information that can help him/her in social and moral development. The child's world-view is very much determined by the kind of social and moral development the child undergoes. Children's story books play a crucial role in this process by exploring themes that are relevant to children. Cass underscores the importance of themes in children's books:

We want children to build up a store of satisfying and enriching experiences so that they will have something on which to draw as life goes on (1967: 79).

In **Fine Feathers**, the author brings in other minor themes, particularly those dealing with human relationships, so as to develop the main theme of theft. Most respondents interviewed argue that “all that glitters is not gold” in relation to the smartly dressed young man. The respondents condemn the taxi driver for insisting that the young man has to pay him. For an adult reader who understands the economic crisis in the world, the taxi driver’s insistence on being paid may not be castigated, but the child who has all through identified with Tecla will not agree with anybody who does not sympathise with his/her heroine. The apprehension of the young man and the recovery of Tecla’s ‘kiondo’ and purse are a great relief to the children interviewed. Through the ironic discovery that the smartly dressed young man is the thief and the unsympathetic behaviour of the taxi driver, **Fine Feathers** offers an important source of awareness of possibilities hence contributing to the child’s social development.

High Adventure is different from the other seven (7) books. In this book, Alembi explores the theme of ambition. He artistically uses fantasy to explore how children can sometimes be carried away by their dreams to an extent that the fantasy becomes real to them. The imagination takes them into different worlds. Cass observes that the word fantasy has its origin in Greek and if

translated literally means 'a making visible' (1967: 27). She goes on to argue that fantasy makes visible to the inward eye concepts that the creative imagination has given birth to. Through fantasy children's dreams are fulfilled. By travelling into different worlds children imitate adults and fantasy enables them to actualise their ambitions in life.

In **High Adventure**, Philip's strong ambition of making and flying his own plane compels him to make a toy plane to fulfil his ambition. He imagines that he is flying in the plane and the experience delights him. Sadly, the plane develops a mechanical problem and crashes in the skies. Philip finds himself hanging on a cloud close to the young girl who initially had declined talking to him. After the crash they become friends and the young girl saves Philip by giving him her magic magazine to read. She tells him "it has power to protect all those who read it from danger" (p. 11).

The children respond to the issue of 'magic' differently. Most respondents from standard four (4) argue that it is possible for a magazine to save a person in danger. Irene Aluoch of Korondo Primary School agrees: "Yes. If it has magic, magic can save". Lillian Mwihaki of Gatina Primary School recalls seeing "a magician" in Nairobi turning "newspaper cuttings into handkerchiefs". She says: "it is very possible. Yes, magic is powerful". However, respondents from standard five are sceptical. Most of them argue that Philip's experience is 'just' his imagination. Mbiki Waweru from Kilimani

Primary School supports them, “Ah, it can’t happen. It is just a dream”. These responses confirm that fantasy appeals more to young children particularly those below nine (9) years. To them, fantasy can be real. Their dreams come true through fantasy.

High Adventure deals with the theme of ambition and how children can fantasize about their ambitions. Through fantasy Philip is able to deal with experiences and situations in his own way. In fantasy young children act the grown-up world discarding the rules and regularities invented by adults. In

High Adventure, Philip’s ambition finds fulfilment through fantasy. This is because as a young child, there is no other way he can realise his dream of flying his own plane. Fantasy enables Philip to act as an adult. Tucker gives some important observation on the importance of fantasy to the child:

The function of fantasy for a young child is very often to enable him to travel in years in his imagination and practice at being a grown-up - usually in the most romantic sense (in Fox et al 1976: 182).

Tucker’s observation on the importance of fantasy to the young child is significant for it helps us understand Philip’s ambition, which is the main theme in **High Adventure**. Philip’s fantasy can be traced back to his real experience which has given birth to his ambition. We learn from the book that Philip’s mother had told him stories about flying, and even taken him to the airport to see planes. Thus it is true that Philip’s ambition is linked to his real experience in life.

In **High Adventure**, a minor theme of friendship is developed. Philip's relationship with the young girl after the crash is quite significant. As the respondents said, it is hard to make friendship when one meets a person for the first time. When Philip meets the girl on the plane, he smiles at her but she does not smile back. This reaction from the child is understandable, for children tend to hold back when they meet a stranger. However, when the plane crashes, Philip and the girl find themselves with the same predicament and so become friends. The respondents interviewed argue that friendship is a virtue that should be encouraged and that it is through Philip's relationship with the girl that he is saved. Joseph Thairo, a standard five (5) pupil at Gatina Primary School argues that if Philip had been angry at the initial reaction of the young girl to him, then he would not have been saved by the girl. In **High Adventure**, Alembi uses fantasy to explore themes of ambition and friendship. As proved in the field, Philip's fantasy inspires imagination and gives some sense of wonder to the child reader.

In **The Cry of a Goat**, Alembi adapts traditional tales to suit children's needs. The book contains three stories all of which are appropriated from well known narratives from western Kenya. In all the stories evil is punished at the end. Bettelheim argues that both realistic stories and traditional tales have an important place in the life of a child (1977: 54). While a traditional tale may contain many dream-like features, its advantage is that it has a consistent

structure with a beginning and a definite plot that moves towards a satisfying solution which is reached at the end. In **The Cry of a Goat**, Alembi uses the traditional tale to explore different themes.

One of the stories in the book, '**The Cry of a Goat**', deals with the theme of selfishness and how it manifests itself in relationships. Leopard and Goat are introduced as friends. We are told that they were good friends and even worked together. Coincidentally, they even had children at the same time. This story is both a trickster story and an etiological myth in which Leopard is portrayed as selfish. She tricks Goat by stealing Goat's kids to take them to her mother as a present. While on the way to see Leopard's mother Goat becomes suspicious of the basket that Leopard is carrying. Goat plans a counter-trick and succeeds. She runs to the bush with the basket only to find her kids there. From there she runs to Leopard's house and replaces the kids with Leopard's cubs. After this she brings the basket back to Leopard and they proceed to see Leopard's mother. Leopard presents the basket with the contents to her mother as a present. Leopard's initial trick backfires when the mother drops the basket's contents into boiling water only to discover that they are her grandchildren. She cries, "My grandchildren! I have murdered my grandchildren! I've murdered them!" (p. 8).

Leopard's selfishness backfires on herself. Her cubs are killed. Most respondents interviewed argue that since she is the one who first planned to kill

Goat's kids, the death of her cubs should be blamed on her. They also justify Goat's counter-trick arguing that it is necessary. This response confirms what McDowell (1973) calls the child's "moral scheme" where evil is paid with evil, an eye for eye. At the end of the story, the child gets to know why goats and leopards cannot stay together. This makes the story an aetiological one. The story warns the child of the repercussions of being selfish and thus contributes to his/her moral development. The child identifies with the weaker character, Goat, and thus rejects selfishness, which is crystallized in the character of Leopard. Bettelheim has noted the importance of the child's identification with his/her protagonist and it is worth quoting him on this:

The child who throughout the story has been invited to identify with one of its protagonists is not only given hope, but is told that through developing his intelligence he can be victorious over even a much stronger opponent (1977: 43).

Goat's victory becomes a victory against selfishness. While the child's sense of justice is satisfied by Goat's counter-trick his/her feeling of fairness is satisfied by the punishment Leopard receives.

The second story in **The Cry of a Goat**, "**Monkey Business**", further explores the theme of selfishness. Monkey is portrayed as selfish and mean. Tortoise's daughter, Pambo, is sick and Tortoise goes to borrow some money from Monkey to meet the medical bill. Monkey lends Tortoise twenty (20) cowries with a warning that the money must be paid back with interest. Monkey says

“just pay me back with another five cowries three weeks from now. That is all” (P. 12). Monkey is portrayed as unkind and selfish. After three weeks, Monkey is furious about his money and the child reader is both entertained and informed by Monkey’s many trips to Tortoise’s house. Tortoise puts up many tricks to keep Monkey away and make him take the twenty cowries without the interest. These tricks land Tortoise in many problems. On the other hand, they serve to highlight Monkey’s unkindness and selfishness. The child reader identifies with Tortoise in all her tribulations as Monkey bangs her door every morning. On one of the occasions, Tortoise pretends to be a grinding stone and lets her daughter grind grain on her back. When monkey enters the house, he is so annoyed that he goes directly to the grinding stone. When he tries to pick the “grinding stone” Pambo stops him. This angers him and he flings Pambo into the air. After this he picks the “grinding stone”, throws it into the tree branches and leaves for his house. These actions help in bringing out the themes of selfishness and unkindness vividly. The child reader starts identifying with Tortoise.

Tortoise drops from the tree and her back is broken into pieces. Both daughter and mother have now to patch up their broken backs. This ending explains why tortoises have a shell made out of pieces and why monkeys stay in trees. The themes of selfishness and unkindness are highlighted through the contrast in characterisation. Monkey’s greed for money makes him not think about the welfare of other animals. The author brings in Ostrich to enhance monkey’s

evil character and thus develop the ideas in the book. Ostrich's kindness is contrasted with Monkey's selfishness. While carrying Pambo to the medicineman, Tortoise meets Ostrich who immediately offers to help Tortoise carry Pambo. Ostrich carries both mother and daughter to the medicineman. When Tortoise asks how much to pay for the service, Ostrich says, "What for? It's a pity I can't do a good turn more often than this" (p. 14). These words are a great contrast to Monkey's abusive language and unkindness. At the end of the story, Tortoise puts the twenty (20) cowries on the floor of her house and leaves with her daughter for the grasslands where we are told she still lives while Monkey jumps from tree to tree looking for the "grinding stone" that had his money. The respondents have varying responses to the tricks and counter-tricks in the story. However, most of them blame Monkey for being selfish and unkind. Some argue that Tortoise should have honoured the agreement she had with Monkey. John Rochio of Gatina Primary School says, "Tortoise is wrong. She agreed to pay. She should pay." These responses reveal how children respond differently to the ideas propagated by authors of children's books. Most of the respondents identify with Tortoise but blame her for failing to honour her promise.

Bettelheim (1977) has observed that myths and related religious legends offer material from which children form their concepts of the world's origin, purpose, and of the social ideals a child could pattern himself after. One of the greatest assets of simple folk tales is that at the imaginative level they can

introduce young children to different issues. As Cass aptly puts it, animals serve the useful purpose of symbolising for children their parents or some other heroic frightening character, and they can be both loved and hated, rejected and accepted (1967: 29). Thus in “**Monkey Business**” Monkey represents the human vices of selfishness, unkindness and ruthlessness, while Ostrich and Tortoise represent human virtues like caring and kindness. These virtues are essential to the social and moral development of children.

“**One Drought in Sabalu**”, the last story in **The Cry of a Goat**, deals with the theme of greed which is contrasted with that of love and caring. The story is set at a time of drought and serious famine. Hyena and Hare are good friends and have both been affected by the famine. Hyena suggests that they kill their mothers and eat them. His argument is that mothers “are just extra mouths to feed. Their only function is to provide for us until we are old enough to look after ourselves” (p. 23). He adds that after the mothers have provided food for their children, they become “useless” and ought to be eliminated.

Hare cannot believe his friend. However, hours later Hyena enters Hare’s mother’s house choking from eating his mother. He chokes to death and falls in front of Hare and his mother. The theme of greed is contrasted with Hare’s love for his mother. Hare kisses his mother and promises to take care of her. In turn the mother says, “That is a nice thing to say, my son. If we all help each other and share what food we can find, we shall live to see the rains return and

enjoy a time of plenty” (p. 26). This moral imparts to the child reader the value of sharing, and also caring for their parents and other people.

The Cry of a Goat deals with concrete events rather than with abstract discussion. The emphasis in the book is on action. The children interviewed prefer the action in the book and most of them tend to judge characters, particularly Monkey, from their surface acts. The three stories in the book explore the theme of selfishness from different dimensions. This is contrasted with kindness and caring. Watson has argued that through thematic concerns, a writer of children’s books can impart to the child “ways of experiencing and behaving which conform with the society’s values” (1965: 75). In **The Cry of a Goat** Alembi uses thematic concerns to encourage love, caring and kindness whereas selfishness is punished.

Selly deals with the theme of the child’s love of animals - in this case a bird. Throughout the book Peter’s love of birds is shown through his troubles in keeping Selly. Peter’s love of birds is a theme that is environmentally friendly and discourages children from wanton destruction of their surroundings. In the book Alembi succeeds in imparting to the reader the positive value of being friendly to animals or birds. Despite Peter’s troubles in looking for Selly, there is a happy ending as Selly is found, hence restoring some hope to Peter and the child reader who identifies with Peter. Peter’s troubles and his final rescue from the marsh go into explaining his love for Selly. Children are called upon

to identify with their hero who finally comes out victorious.

A book's theme should be one that contributes to the child's development.

According to Hazard good children's books should be books that:

... give them respect for universal life – that of animals, of plants; that teach them not to despise everything that is mysterious in creation and in man ... (1944: 42).

In **Selly** Alembi calls upon the child reader to respect life. In the book Peter is presented from a child's point of view; his fears, wishes and behaviour are basically childlike. This creation enhances the child reader's identification with Peter. Peter's father, who is introduced at the end of the book, is also understanding and gives Peter a hundred shillings to buy a pigeon. However, Peter's Selly is found and brought to him by his brother.

The opposition between good and evil is prominent in Alembi's books. As noted earlier this juxtaposition of good and evil is appropriate for the child learns through identification with characters and events. Piaget (1932) argues that a child believes in things working out according to sound moral law, with rewards for the good and punishment for the bad. The juxtaposition of evil and good in children's literature helps the child reader identify easily with his/her chosen protagonist. This contrast is also necessary in imparting to the child positive values while discouraging vices. This function is normally fulfilled at the end when bad characters are punished while good ones are rewarded.

In **Mistaken Identity**, the opposition between evil and good is explored. The main theme in the book is that of kidnap. The story is built around Simon's kidnap. Simon is mistaken for Toto, the son of a village tycoon and is kidnapped by three rough men - Odosh, Masha and Dick. The three men represent the evil force in the book; indeed, they are described as "rough, mean-looking men who smoked pungent tobacco" (p. 4). Both in description and dialogue, the men are portrayed as agents of Satan. As most respondents reveal, the theme of kidnap helps to enhance the child's awareness. The child learns that one can find himself or herself in an unexpected situation needing use of one's intelligence. However, in **Mistaken Identity**, the evil force is so powerful that Simon alone cannot overcome it. At the end of the book, adult characters are brought in to help Simon overcome the evil force.

The policemen are brought in to apprehend the three kidnapers and save Simon. At the end Simon is received by his parents. In this book meanness is contrasted with kindness. At the beginning of the book Simon is anxious to reach his school and share what he has with his friends. We are told, "so Simon always shared what he had with his school-mates and they did the same with him" (p. 2). Sharing things with friends is a minor theme that is introduced to tell the child the kind of character Simon is. Thus in the middle of the plot, there is a big contrast between Simon's kindness and the cruelty and meanness of the three kidnapers. Simon's kindness makes him an innocent victim in the

hands of evil forces. The child reader's identification with Simon is enhanced by this contrast.

Most respondents argue that Simon is saved by "God" at the end of the book. Indeed Simon's prayers to God are portrayed by the author as having a hand in his rescue. Throughout the book Simon prays - a virtue that he has been taught by his mother. Thus we are told, "sitting quietly, his lips moving silently, he repeated his prayer over and over, putting himself in the hands of God" (P. 7). Simon's faith in God enhances the contrast between him and the kidnappers. His faith in God is revealed as being a virtue inculcated in him by his mother. This is proof that there is a strong inter-relationship between social values and literature. A child's socialisation in a particular culture will very much depend on what the culture calls good and what it perceives as bad.

Literature is one of the most important medium through which a people's cultural pattern is transmitted. Rosenblatt correctly notes that literature may play an increasingly important role in helping the individual assimilate the superstructure of attitudes that he must erect on the basis of his fundamental human principles (1968: 189).

Simon's faith in God, though portrayed from a child's point of view, as he questions God's delayed justice, is based on the adults' beliefs. His parents are shown as believers and at the end of the book after Simon's rescue we are told,

“Two policemen drove Simon and his parents back home in the patrol car and they sang hymns of praise to God all the way” (P. 22). Most respondents argue that the book teaches the readers that “it is always good to believe in God.” This response is understandable given that almost all the selected respondents come from a Christian background.

In conclusion, theme is the most important “take home value” of any story. It contains the message being passed to the reader. In children’s literature, theme needs to teach and inform the child. It is through theme that a writer of children’s books can impart social, educational and religious values to the child reader.

Alembi’s eight (8) books deal with themes that are crucial to the moral and social development of the child reader. Morals such as obedience, honesty and love for nature are explored using a simple language that can be understood by children. The author’s Christian background comes out clearly in his books. In many of them his heroes/heroines are portrayed as believers in the saving powers of God. Ian Watt says:

Every individual’s social experience is idiosyncratic in many ways, and if he is a writer this colours the selection and presentation of every social detail in his works (in Davidson et al 1978: 127).

Watt’s observation points to the fact that literature has a strong relationship with society. Literature reflects society but with various degrees of selectivity

and indirectness. Thus Alembi's Christian background, which was revealed in our interview with him, colours most of his books. In **Mistaken Identity**, Simon's rescue is attributed to the power of God. In **Selly**, Peter's wish to own a bird is realised and he says, "Now God has answered my prayers and given me Selly." (P. 2). In **Fine Feathers**, after Tecla's stolen 'kiondo' and purse are found and she is taken to her father, the father says, "Praise be to God that you are safe" (P. 26). In **Settling the Score**, after Ojango's rescue from the five masked men by the policemen the mother says, "Thank God for His Mercy!" (P. 26).

Inglis argues that the influence of what he calls "the heavy moral fumes given off" by some authors is quite significant in the development of the child (1965: 52). Our field research proves that children prefer books that entertain and inform them at the same time. Children's responses to thematic concerns in books is culturally based in the sense that they will always reject what their society condemns and go for what the society upholds as good. The respondents reject vices such as cruelty, unkindness and selfishness which come out clearly in the writer's books. Virtues such as kindness, love and sharing appeal to most of them.

The writer does not confuse the child reader by introducing many themes in a single book. Most of the books deal with concrete events and concentrate on a particular theme. Even when the author uses the traditional tale, the theme

stands out clearly. In **The Cry of a Goat**, the stories contain definite themes developed through simple plots.

Cass has argued that theme needs to be appropriate to the target readers (1967: 82). She also argues that the author should avoid moralizing and yet help give children a sense of values and purpose. Alembi writes from the child's point of view with everything portrayed as the child would view and feel it. He avoids moralizing and makes the books more attractive to the children. Adults play minor roles in his books and in most of the story books adults are introduced at the end. By keeping adults at the periphery of the stories, he succeeds in avoiding adults' prejudices which tend to preach to children in their story books. In **High Adventure**, Philip delves into the world of fantasy while in **Don't be Long, John** John tastes stagnant water on his way to the shop. By avoiding adults' prejudices in his books, the scholar concentrates on themes that inform the child, hence contributing to his/her socialisation.

CHAPTER THREE

STYLE

3.0 INTRODUCTION

Style is the way in which language is used in a given context, by a given person, for a given purpose. In writing, the reader should be taken into consideration. This is because language is used as a medium of communication and has to be appropriate for the target audience. Style therefore becomes crucial in children's literature. Such elements as diction and imagery are significant in the evaluation of children's books: for these are what create the communication effect. Cass poses the following questions in relation to style in children's literature:

Does the style fit the story and the subject matter?
Is it clear and understandable, with dialogue
suitable to the reader? Is there an exciting and
imaginative use of words and a richness of
expression? (1967: 822)

Such questions highlight the important elements in the analysis of style in children's literature. Any style a writer employs should be one that fits the story and the thematic concerns of the book. To be able to communicate to the child effectively, the style should be precise and simple. Children usually seem

to prefer a style that uses a high percentage of direct speech and a less complex vocabulary. The style has to be simple without being introspective.

3.1

PLOT

Plot is a narration of events arranged in the sequence of causality. It is an ordered, organised sequence of events and actions. E.M. Forster differentiates ‘story’ from plot (1927: 103). While the story asks the question “what happens next?”, the plot wants to know ‘why’ it happens. Whereas the story appeals to the reader’s memory, plot appeals to his/her intelligence. Plot gives the story a meaning and purpose hence it satisfies human curiosity and intelligence. Although children are more concerned with ‘what happens next’, the sequence of events must be logical for them to comprehend the story. The plot is constructed in a certain manner to draw attention to certain issues and provide a specific effect upon the reader. For the child reader, the cause-effect sequence in plotting is crucial for it communicates the values the author intends to pass on to his readers.

In children’s literature, plotting is crucial in communicating to the child. Piaget (1932) argues that young children tend to see the workings of the universe in terms of what he describes as ‘imminent justice’ whereby everything is thought to work out according to sound moral law, with rewards for the good and punishment for the bad. An author of children’s books is thus compelled to offer a more comprehensive world of cause and effect, simplified towards a minimum of explanation.

Alembi's books present the child with simplified plots with a beginning, middle and an end. The plots are fairly simple yet vigorous enough to capture the child's attention. The plots are linear with the fabric of the story unwinding to the climax, followed by a swift conclusion.

In **High Adventure**, the plot is based on the ambitions of Philip. The beginning introduces Philip to the reader. Philip is presented as a young boy with the ambition of flying an aeroplane. We meet him making a toy aeroplane. However, Philip's ambition is not just a contrivance. The author tells us that Philip had been told stories of how people fly by his mother. He had also been taken to the airport by the mother. This introduction prepares the child reader for what comes in the middle of the story. Most respondents observe that Philip's ambitions and his final dive into fantasy are based on what he had seen at the airport and also what his mother told him.

The beginning presents us with a main character with a mission to fulfil: his problem is that of flying. In the middle of the story, Philip's imagination takes him into the world of fantasy. He imagines that he is in an aeroplane with a young girl seated beside him. The initial reaction of the girl to Philip is condemned by most of the respondents. For instance, Kennedy Kamau, a standard four (4) pupil at Gatina Primary School thinks that the girl is unfriendly since "Philip smiles to her but she does not smile to him". This

judgement by the child is justified for, as Tucker aptly puts it:

The type of moral judgement they (children) can most easily share and understand will tend to praise or condemn characters for their surface acts alone... (1981: 9).

While Kennedy Kamau condemns the girl from her 'surface act' the same boy likes the girl when the aeroplane crashes in the sky and she assists Philip.

Aristotle, argues that the middle of the plot should present a complication arising from the initial stage (cited in Dorch 1965: 41). In **High Adventure**, the aeroplane's crash presents a complication in the plot. After the crash, Philip finds himself hanging onto a cloud. The readers are interested in knowing what happens next. How is their hero going to solve this problem? In this book, the girl is introduced to help Philip solve his problem. For the first time they become friends and the girl gives her magic magazine to Philip to read.

Bettelheim has noted the importance of the child's belief in magic (1977: 24). He argues that tales of magic feed the child's imagination and stimulate his fantasies. Philip and the girl are saved by their belief in the magic magazine. **High Adventure** ends with the introduction of the adult character, Philip's mother. She comes in and interrupts Philip's fantasy. Philip picks up his toy aeroplane and sadly follows her to the house. This kind of ending is quite significant in children's literature. Like in real life, when children are playing, it is actually the adults, mostly parents, who interrupt their games and fantasies.

Most of the respondents from standard four (4) argue that Philip's mother should not interrupt Philip's fantasy. Their responses show that children below the age of ten (10) enjoy fantasy and thus their identification with Philip.

In **Mistaken Identity**, the beginning presents Simon waiting to board a bus to school. He is well described and we know he is anxious to go to school and meet his friends. The mention of Toto, Simon's friend, is vital in explaining Simon's kidnap. We learn that the two resemble and thus Simon's being mistaken for Toto is not a coincidence. The link between the two characters is important in the child's identification with Simon. Throughout the book, the child reader follows Simon's predicaments and wishes that his "innocent hero" would be rescued or even set free for he is not Toto. Humphrey Ndegeo, a standard five (5) pupil at Korondo Primary School argues that "Simon is innocent. He did nothing, I don't want to see him suffer."

The middle of the book presents the reader with many complications in the plot. Simon is kidnapped by three "rugged men" [sic] and driven away in their car. Most of the respondents express shock at this experience and show interest in knowing what happens to Simon. Three significant incidents complicate the middle of the book. First, the kidnapers' car gets a puncture; secondly there is a heavy downpour, and thirdly the Jumbo fight. These three incidents serve in delaying the kidnapers' journey and thereby enhancing Simon's chances of being rescued. The pupils interviewed express delight at every incident arguing

that they wish for a “saviour” to appear and rescue Simon. Dorothy Akoth, a standard five (5) pupil at Korondo Primary School even wishes for the annihilation of the three kidnappers so that Simon could escape. This response shows to what extent some of the pupils identify with Simon. The jumbo incident is read and experienced with anxiety as all the respondents wish for Simon’s rescue. They follow the plot with curiosity as their hero move from one obstacle to the other.

Mistaken Identity concludes with a solution to Simon’s problem. Even though it is desirable that children solve their own problems in their own way, certain problems are beyond the child character’s ability. Thus in this book, Alembe brings in adults to solve Simon’s problem. A police search is made and Simon is finally rescued by policemen. The kidnappers are apprehended. The plot is logical enough and the child is able to follow the action without any difficulty. The events are arranged in cause-effect sequence hence satisfying the child’s moral view.

The plot in **Settling the Score** is the same as that in **Mistaken Identity**. It is linear and based on causality. In the beginning, Ojango and Tito are playing football and forget about the goats. This is typical of children in the thick of games. The goats walk away and one of them is carried away by the five men. Tito reports this to Ojango who promptly pursues the men.

Ojango's bravery lands him in the hands of the five masked men. The middle of the plot explores Ojango's harrowing experiences as we follow him from one experience to another. This part of the plot seem to frighten some respondents, particularly beatings Ojango is subjected to. The snake incident is the most frightening in the book and this is made worse by the illustration of the incident. We will discuss this later under "illustrations".

Settling the Score concludes with Ojango's rescue by policemen. The five men are arrested. This is a vigorous plot that is action packed. The respondents show a great interest in the action as they follow Ojango from one experience to the other. The cause-effect sequence in the plot is crucial in communicating to the child the thematic concerns of the author. The child learns that no evil goes unpunished.

Yellow Mangoes has a plot that is similar to that in **Mistaken Identity** and **Settling the Score**. As in the other two books, the plot in **Yellow Mangoes** is vigorous with an initial situation that develops into what consists of the middle of the plot. The author follows the cause-effect sequence in this book, with the three boys' decision culminating in all the problems they face. This plot can be presented as in the table below:

Beginning	Middle	End
Dan, Fraser and John are introduced playing draughts. The game ends in a fight. Fraser suggests that they go and steal Nabakwe's mangoes.	The boys go to steal Nabakwe's mangoes. They are caught and Fraser is beaten up as the other two escape. Fraser finally runs away and joins the two. They run into the forest. Their experiences in the forest.	A search is organised by the villagers. The boys are found and warned against stealing. They are forgiven.

This plot communicates to the child reader effectively in its stress on the effect of what the characters do. The decision to steal mangoes lands them in untold trouble. Fraser is the first one to face this trouble. He is caught and beaten up by Nabakwe's son. Most respondents have no sympathy for Fraser whom they blame for suggesting that the three go and steal mangoes. Myra Wambugah of Kilimani Primary School thinks that Fraser should receive more punishment because "he misled his friends". This response from the child can be understood by taking into consideration the child's conception of himself/herself and the image he/she forms of the world is influenced by the culture he/she is brought up in. Thus the child's image of stealing is strongly contextualised. What culture condemns forms the base of what type of image the child forms from reading books. What is upheld as virtue is absorbed by the child as positive.

At the end of **Yellow Mangoes**, the three boys are forgiven by the chief. However, even though they are forgiven, the child reader learns that certain decisions may be detrimental to children and the chief warns the three against stealing. The chief's forgiveness of the boys can be understood by his recognition that the boys have suffered a lot in the forest, which is a big lesson to them.

Fine Feathers presents a simple plot based on Tecla's journey to Nairobi from the rural area. While on the train, her 'kiondo' and purse are stolen. In the beginning, Tecla is presented with all the fears and anxieties of a young girl. She is anxious to visit her father in Nairobi but at the same time regrets leaving the family behind. On the train, Tecla meets a smartly dressed young man who seems kind and friendly. Tecla's 'kiondo' and purse are later stolen when Tecla is asleep. This theft complicates the middle of the plot as the real thief cannot be immediately identified.

Fine Feathers ends in the unravelling of the mysterious thief, who later turns out to be the smartly dressed young man confirming the book's title which is taken from the proverb, 'Fine feathers do not make fine birds'. The ending of the book communicates to the child the consequences of stealing as the 'smartly dressed man' is pursued and arrested by the police. Some respondents blame Tecla for trusting a stranger she meets on the train. Ismael Abdi of Gatina Primary School thinks that Tecla should not have "trusted the young man".

Some of the pupils interviewed attribute the theft to Tecla's trust in the stranger. However, the young man's arrest is a delight to the respondents who identify with Tecla. Cass says that children demand justice in their stories (1967). The evil must be punished and the good be rewarded. Tecla is rewarded indirectly when all her stolen things are found and she is escorted by policemen to the father's house.

In **The Cry of a Goat**, Alembi turns to the traditional tale. However, the author seems to believe in T.S. Eliot's (1932) assertion that mere repetition or copying is not creativity. In the three stories in this book, the author manipulates the narratives from his community to suit the needs of his target audience. Thus the three stories are shortened and the endings changed to conform to the child's needs.

The three stories - '**The Cry of a Goat**', '**Monkey Business**' and '**One Drought in Sabalu**' have simple repetitive plots with clear endings. In each story there is an initial situation which develops into the final climax in the stories. The first two stories, '**The Cry of a Goat**' and '**Monkey Business**' can be called aetiological stories since they seek to explain why certain things are the way they are. '**The Cry of a Goat**' explains why the goat and the leopard cannot stay together while '**Monkey Business**' tells us why the tortoise lives in the grasses while the monkey lives on trees.

The stories in **The Cry of a Goat** are based on the traditional tale and like the traditional tale the plots are straightforward and in most cases predictable. The plots answer the child's most important questions as to why certain things are the way they are. The stories help the child reader in forming what Bettelheim calls "concepts of the world's origin and purpose" (1977: 24).

The last story, '**One Drought in Sabalu**', has a simple linear plot with the greedy Hyena dying at the end after feeding on his mother. It is significant that Hyena dies in front of Hare and his mother. This death highlights the contrast between Hare and Hyena. While Hyena feeds on his mother, Hare offers his mother love and shares with her the little food they have. Hyena's action leads to his death. This death is significant in communicating the themes of greed and unselfishness to the child. Hyena's greed kills him while his friend, Hare, is satisfied with the little food his mother gives him and promises to love her.

Don't be Long, John is an exciting story showing how children can be carried away in their curiosity towards nature. The plot is precise and the reader follows John on his way to the shop. The plot is developed around John's fascination with nature. He even drinks from stagnant water on the road. When he loses the money with which he is sent, John's fears and behaviour are typical of that of a young child. The plot of this book is constructed strictly from a child's point of view, with the child being portrayed in his environment. As Zolotov (in Burack 1983) observes, children do not have the prejudices of

adults, they can taste anything that the adult calls 'dirty'. John finally gets the lost money and runs to the shop and back home. The book ends with John's mother's warning that it is not good to play on the way when one is sent. This plot appeals to most pupils in standard four (4). Their identification with John's fears and curiosity is manifested in their facial expressions as we read the book in class in most schools. In other schools, most of the respondents identify with John and this is particularly evident when John loses the money.

Selly is the story of a young boy's fascination with nature. In the book, Peter's wish to own a bird becomes a reality when he catches a bird which he names Selly. The book's plot is simple with a beginning, middle and an end. Peter's love for Selly lands him in problems when Selly flies away. The middle of the plot creates a complication as Peter is mistaken for a thief as he pursues Selly into the trees. The book ends with Peter's recovery of Selly and his rescue by his family when he gets stuck in a marsh. Peter's love for Selly is shown in his struggle to find her. Kingston says that children use love for an animal to fill the void in their lives (1974: 145). In **Selly**, Peter cannot understand why Selly cannot reciprocate his love. Peter's love for Selly is the cause of the problems he faces. However, this should not be misconstrued as discouraging children from loving birds. At the end of the book, there is celebration as Peter dances with Selly in his hands.

E.M. Forster puts emphasis on the importance of plot in any literary work

(1927: 103). He contends that plot gives a novel coherence. It does this through drawing parallels and resemblances between characters, situations and events. In children's literature, plot becomes crucial in the child's understanding of the story. While the story tells the child 'what happens next' plot gives a logical relationship between the events in the book by revealing 'why' certain things happen. Children prefer dramatic plots and are primarily interested in action. They want to know how the people or animals in the story will behave under certain circumstances. A writer of children's books is therefore compelled to offer a comprehensible world of cause and effect.

Alembi's books present us with dramatic plots. The hero/heroines are always involved in some action. The action is set in a definite plot with a beginning, middle and an end. The author presents to the child reader complications or problems that the child character struggles to solve in his/her own way. Where the forces against the child are so strong, the author artistically brings in the adult character to help the child character solve his problem.

At the end of the stories, there is a winding up of all the action presented. This confirms Tucker's assertion that:

There is a strong wish, usually reflected in children's literature, that the stories should always be quite clearly rounded off, with justice more or less seen to be done ... (1981: 10)

In children's literature, the plot needs to be one that stimulates the child's

imagination and at the same time provide him/her with some values. Alembi consciously or unconsciously provides this stimulation by writing about characters and situations in a way that is both fresh and convincing, and which in a child's development can provide the way towards greater insight. For instance, in **Settling the Score** the child reader learns a lot about human character. In the book, Ojango discovers that his father's friend, Pukiki, is among the five masked men who subject him to horrible suffering. Through the well knit plot, children are able to share at a simple level in what Cass calls "fundamental human experiences and emotion" (1967: 18).

3.2 DIALOGUE AND DESCRIPTION

Dialogue can be defined as use of conversation or talk in writing. It is the opposite of description, which is the presentation of a picture in words. Dialogue is mostly used in drama while description falls under prose. However, a good writer of prose can employ the two to reveal character, theme and setting. Hawthorn (1985) argues that dialogue can be employed in prose to reveal character and the thematic concerns of the author. Description on the other hand sets the mood of the story, gives the setting and also reveals character.

Alembi has employed the two stylistic techniques in most of his books so as to communicate to the child effectively. In many of his books dialogue is used to portray character. Through dialogue the child reader is able to learn a lot about

the characters and even the concerns in the books. Most respondents condemn Fraser in **Yellow Mangoes**, claiming that “his language is rude”. Fraser’s dialogue with Dan and John reveals Fraser as a bully as he persistently antagonises his friends. However, his register appeal to some respondents. He uses expressions that are interesting to the child reader. On page 9 of the book when Dan stains his shirt, Fraser tells him “Toss it to your sisters to wash”. The use of the word “toss” suggests what respondents call “play” and hence interests them. Most respondents claim that the tossing of the shirt presumes that washing clothes “is simple work”. In the book, John is opposed to the idea of treating sisters as “slaves” (P. 10).

Children like expressions and words that are memorable. This is revealed through their repetition of such expressions and even dramatising some of them in their various groups. Alembi employs interesting expressions and memorable words so as to appeal to his audience. In **Yellow Mangoes**, expressions such as, “your mouth’s like a balloon about to burst”, “now your gullet’s in grave danger” (P. 10), appeal to the children as is revealed in their facial expressions and excitement as they read the book.

In other books, the author employs dialogue to reveal character and therefore influence the readers’ response. This stylistic technique is effectively used in **Settling the Score**, **Mistaken Identity** and **Fine Feathers**. In **Settling the Score**, the evil characters are given a special register as opposed to the good

characters. The register of the five masked men is the same while Ojango and the sergeant have a different register. Through dialogue, the five masked men are revealed as brutes. Pukiki is astonished to discover that Ojango knows him. He tells Ojango: “keep your mouth shut or I’ll shut it for you” (P. 20). The author combines dialogue with description to portray the five men whose conduct is like that of ogres. They are portrayed as “wolfing down great, chunks of food” (P. 17) as Ojango watches hungrily and in pain. Ojango says, “They eat like the greedy dogs they are” (P. 17). Indeed the five men eat without uttering a word and the author portrays them as absolutely oblivious of Ojango’s suffering and pain.

In **Mistaken Identity**, the three kidnappers are described as “rugged, rough and mean”. They are murderers. On page 17, we learn from their dialogue that they kill by putting “ones head on a log and use a sharp axe”. On the other hand, Simon is portrayed as an innocent victim in the hands of evil men. Simon keeps on praying to God to save him. When we meet his parents, we learn that they also prayed for Simon’s rescue.

In most of his books, the author presents the child with a polarization of two extremes. The evil characters are on one extreme, while the good characters are on the other. The polarization is done through dialogue and description. This contrast of characters is quite significant in children’s literature for the sake of the child’s easy identification with his/her hero. The child is also able

to absorb the virtues expounded by the hero. In adult literature, the polarization of characters and situations may not be necessary since the adult does not go for snap judgements like the child.

Luthi (1987) observes that the presentation of two opposing characters helps the child follow the story easily without being confused by the events. The child is able to take sides and this helps him/her in the type of image he/she forms from reading the book. In most of his books, Alembi does not confuse the child reader in his/her identification with the hero/heroine. For instance, in **Yellow Mangoes** he presents the child with three main characters but succeeds in differentiating them. Thus the characters stand out as individuals. This individualization is significant as it helps the young reader choose his/her hero easily. In **Yellow Mangoes**, most respondents interviewed like John while Fraser is condemned. Kevin Mwangi of Kilimani Primary School, like many other respondents argue that John is his hero because right from the beginning of the book John is opposed to stealing. Even after stealing the mangoes John is ready to go and ask for forgiveness from the mangoes' owner.

Through dialogue the action is enhanced and the child reader's curiosity to discover what happens next is heightened. Most respondents dislike the language of the three kidnappers in **Mistaken Identity**. Mbiki Waweru of Kilimani Primary School says that "their language shows how mean they are".

3.3

CHARACTERISATION

Hawthorn (1985: 2) observes that prose has characters, action and a plot. Prose involves people who do things in a total context ruled over by some sort of connective logic based on cause and effect. One of the difficulties in writing stories for young children is to make characters come to life so that what they do is the result of what they are. Huck (1967) concedes that the credibility of characters will depend upon the author's ability to show their true natures, their strengths and their weaknesses. The technique of creating credible characters is important in children's literature in order to impart to the child a balanced view of people's personalities.

Children demand heroes they can identify with, hence the technique of characterisation becomes crucial to the child's social and moral development. In most of his books, Alembe presents the child reader with familiar characters involved in things that are familiar to the child. As Kahenya says, in children's literature the heroic character is normally one the children can easily identify with (1992: 22). In **Yellow Mangoes** the three boys, Dan, Frazer and John are introduced playing draughts. In **Don't be Long, John** John is sent to the shop by his mother. The characters are involved in concerns and situations with which the children are familiar. The heroes are familiar with desires, motives and traits common to the child reader.

The hero/heroines are presented with conflicts to overcome. In **Settling the Score**, Ojango's desire to get his father's goat from the five masked men lands him in trouble. The middle of the plot shows Ojango struggling from one obstacle to another. By presenting his heroes/heroines with difficulties, the writer enhances the action in the books hence holding the child's attention.

Arbuthnot and Sutherland have correctly noted that:

children want heroes who have obstacles to overcome, conflicts to settle, difficult goals to win. It is the vigorous action in pursuit of these goals that keeps young readers racing along from page to page to find out how the hero achieves his ends. But achieve he must in some way or other (1947: 27).

The hero/heroine has to overcome the difficulties and win his/her goals so as to inculcate positive values in the child reader. In most of the writer's books, the hero is presented with conflicts that are beyond his capability but at the end of the book he overcomes them indirectly through the introduction of adult characters. In children's literature the clearing of obstacles by the hero/heroine is an affirmation of human potential. As Kahenya (1992) puts it, the solving of problems confirms that it is humanly possible to succeed in both practical and emotional ways.

In cases where the author presents the hero/heroines with problems that are beyond their powers the child reader still identifies with the heroes/heroines in their bravery and determination to solve them in their own way. In **Mistaken**

Identity and Settling the Score, the heroes fight against evil forces and they are helped by adult characters to finally overcome the powerful forces. Their strengths lie in the fact that they do not give in to such evil forces however powerful they are. Ojango's words at the very time the five masked men carry away his father's goat reveal him as a brave boy: "Those are my father's goats ... you can't have them." (p. 6). He is portrayed as a hero whom children can imitate as a model of bravery.

The author contrasts the characters in his books. This style in characterisation helps the child in identifying with his/her protagonist. The juxtaposition of goodness and wickedness, stupidity and cleverness, beauty and ugliness recur and are seen frequently. Bettelheim (1977) argues that, by identifying with his/her, the child learns a lot from a story.

In **The Cry of a Goat**, cleverness and stupidity are contrasted. In one of the stories, '**One Drought in Sabalu**', Hyena feeds on his mother and dies from choking. In contrast Hare does not feed on his mother.

In most of his books the writer presents the characters from the child's point of view. As McDowell says, the schematic moral view of life is essentially childlike (1973: 146). From a child's point of view not only is such a view safe and reassuring, it is also optimistic. The child believes that good has to triumph and evil has to be punished. Alembe creates heroes who are rewarded at the end

of the book while evil characters are punished. Punishing evil helps the children learn the consequences of such vices.

The writer presents round characters hence enhancing the child's understanding of human nature. E.M. Forster (1927) gives a demarcation between 'round characters' and 'flat characters'. The former develop in the course of the story while the latter remain the same. In children's literature, it is important to present characters who develop and show some maturity as they move from one experience to another. This helps the child reader to learn with his/her protagonist. In **Settling the Score**, **Mistaken Identity** and **Fine Feathers**, the main characters are faced with many obstacles to overcome. As they pass through different experiences, the child reader learns with them upto the end of the book.

The child's hero should never be presented as 'flat', if the child has to learn from the story. McDowell has stressed this:

If the hero emerges substantially the same as he began in the book, then the story has very little but romance to offer (1973: 152).

In **Yellow Mangoes**, the three boys' experience in the forest makes them learn that stealing is a vice. John blames Fraser for misleading them. By the end of the book they have all learned a lesson and emerge as different from how they began in the book.

We have asserted that optimism, both in plot and characterisation is an important tenet of children's literature. This is because emotional growth is usually linked with this optimism. What needs to be recognised is that this optimism is part of the cultural context in which the book is set. Children's literature cannot afford to be depressive. This is because children's books need not just entertain the child but must also help children in the process of growing up by moulding them both socially and morally. Respondents in the field show this need and tend to like protagonists who propound certain values which are considered positive in the society. Faith Mwaisaka, a Standard Five (5) pupil at Kilimani Primary School identifies with John, as her hero in **Yellow Mangoes**. She says, "John is opposed to stealing. Stealing is bad. John is good". Lucy Njeri, a Standard Four (4) pupil at Gatina Primary School has this to say about John. "John is disciplined. He tells his friends that stealing is bad". In **Mistaken Identity** the hero, Simon, is portrayed as a religious boy. When he is kidnapped, he keeps on praying for his rescue. The respondents who identify with him argue that Simon is "a good boy who fears God."

3.4

HUMOUR

Children's books need to entertain the child reader. Humour is perhaps the best stylistic feature employed by authors of children's books in order to amuse. Ray contends that apart from adventure, humour is perhaps the most essential ingredient in popular and successful children's fiction (1970: 17).

Children expect to be amused in their recreational reading. The writer employs humorous expressions and situations that amuse and hold the attention of the children who read his books. There was a loud laughter at Mukuyu Primary School as we read **Mistaken Identity** in class. When we inquired why the children were laughing, the pupils said that Odosh's expression, "The road is terrible and it's raining cockroaches and ants" (p. 12) is quite amusing. In **Yellow Mangoes**, the manner in which the three boys pluck the mangoes and eat them while on the mango tree is quite humorous as they jump from one branch to the other. The boys' conversation while on the mango tree is also humorous. They make jokes about their parents as they pick the mangoes. For instance on page 9 of the book, Fraser says, "You must have heard your mama saying how she loves mangoes just now, Dan. All you need to do is take some home to her. ... she'll forget about the animals." The writer infuses a lot of humour in his books through dialogue. The reader's attention is held as he/she reads the books and is interested in finding out what happens to the characters.

The author uses humorous and memorable names. Most respondents found the names of the three kidnappers in **Mistaken Identity** quite interesting, particularly that of Masha and Odosh. In **Settling the Score**, memorable names are used for the five masked men - Pukiki, Ifukho, Njuki, Kaji and Gaji. One standard four pupil at Korondo Primary School, who looked very excited as she read the book revealed that 'Ifukho' in her mother tongue refers to the 'mole'.

Children like songs. A good children's writer tend to include music in his/her stories so as to amuse the readers. Alembi has this need in mind and tries to satisfy it in some of the children's story books. In **The Cry of a Goat** Hyena sings after his decision to go and eat his mother. He expresses his excitement through song. In the same book, Tortoise sings to express happiness. In **Don't be Long, John**, John sings as he goes to the shop. On the way he is fascinated by the singing bird on a tree.

Children's choice of books can sometimes be influenced by titles. It is therefore important for an author to choose an original title that is memorable or amusing to the child reader. This need by the child reader is confirmed in the field when the pupils are asked to choose one title from the eight (8) books presented to them. Most respondents choose **Mistaken Identity**. Atakan Merdin of Kilimani Primary School explains this choice by saying that the "title looks adventurous".

The illustrations in the books make them more amusing. They capture the mood of the books by providing expressive visual details thus adding to the humour. Alembi's expressive descriptions enable those who illustrate his books to capture the mood of the text. The illustration on the cover of **Mistaken Identity** shows Simon being kidnapped by the three kidnapers. In **Yellow Mangoes** the cover illustration shows the three boys, Dan, Fraser and John, eating mangoes on a mango tree.

3.5

STRUCTURE

The structure of a book is quite significant in children's literature. This is because it tells the child reader who the main character is, what problem faces him/her and gives the setting of the story. Apart from these, the structure also tells the reader the time of the action and why the action is taking place. Hawthorn says that "structure encompasses the work's total organisation as a piece of literature, a work of art". He further adds that structure involves plot, thematics and form; it refers to the overall organisation and patterning of a work of art (1985: 54). This patterning and organisation is very important in the work's communication to the child reader. Children may not accept works that are not chronological in their presentation of the action. This, as we have explained elsewhere, can be attributed to the child's moral schematic view. The child keenly follows the action in a book and is interested in the cause-effect pattern. As explained earlier, events in the writer's books follow a chronological order and thus the structure in the books enhances the children's understanding of the ideas expressed.

The image the child forms is basically influenced by the structure of a book. Alembi's linear presentation of the action does not confuse the child reader. His thematic concerns are also a result of realistic happenings either to the characters or the context. The plots are based on the cause-effect pattern with each plot having an introduction, middle and conclusion. The events follow

each other logically and there is a clear rounding at the end. This kind of structure contributes to the coherence and consistency in the books.

3.6 **VIEWPOINT**

Viewpoint is an important aspect of children's literature. It enables the child to absorb the values in a book and identify effectively with his/her chosen protagonist. Thus, the form of narration must be one that takes into account the needs of the child. Most scholars of children's literature recommend that children's books should have a single viewpoint. This is particularly important for children below the age of twelve (12) years. A single viewpoint is able to establish and sustain a sense of identity between the reader and the main character. This is important to the child who needs to identify with the main character and even internalize concepts and values propounded by the protagonist. Even when using the third person narration it is important for an author of children's books to maintain the single viewpoint.

The author's eight (8) books are written from the third person narration with a single viewpoint being maintained in every book. The narration is thus natural and realistic. All the children interviewed show a clear understanding of the stories. By use of third person narration the heroes are developed and stand out clearly.

The single viewpoint is used to concentrate on the story of the main characters. This further enhances the readers' identification with the characters. The

writer's heroes/heroines are closer to the super-hero in that they solve their problems in one way or the other. Kingston has this to say about children's heroes:

Heroes of children's are closer to the Aristotelian concept than to any other, aligned as they are with forces that must largely be termed good (1974: 170).

Heroes in Alembi's books are not only striving for self-realization but their conflicts are with forces that must be classified as 'evil'. For instance, in **Settling the Score** and **Mistaken Identity** the heroes struggle to free themselves from evil forces crystalized in the five masked men and the three kidnappers respectively.

3.7

FORMAT

Format refers to the total appearance of a text. Cass (1967) considers format to include print of the book, illustration, paper used and also the appropriateness of the chosen form to the content. Format is therefore crucial in the child's understanding of a book.

Akoleit argues that a book's format is "crucial for the young readers who are largely influenced by the visual impression of a book" (1990: 47). She considers format to refer to a book's size, design, print, quality of paper, binding and colour. Our field findings prove that children are very much

interested in the format of a book. Their interest is both in the external appearance of the book and in the internal print and illustrations.

Alembi's books are rectangular in shape. In **Mistaken Identity** the print is big. In **Yellow Mangoes** small print is used. The children interviewed do not show a particular preference to the shape of the books. This is perhaps, as Akoleit (1990) observes, that the African child, especially in Kenya, has not widely been exposed to various book formats. The bold print in **Mistaken Identity** appeals mostly to standard four (4) pupils. Joseph Ochieng of Korondo Primary School has this to say, "it is easy to read, I like it." Indeed most respondents do not find any difficulty in reading the books.

3.8

ILLUSTRATIONS

Illustration is the presentation of words in pictures. Illustrations attempt to capture the mood of the text by providing expressive visual details. They therefore play an important role in books for young children by illuminating the text. Apart from making a book more attractive, illustrations help in highlighting the main ideas. The visual presentations in children's books are important for they help readers of different abilities to understand the book. Benton and Fox say that illustrations,

... are a great unifier in mixed ability classes - a point that indicates one of their main teaching virtues in that the combination of visual and narrative appeal allows children of different

abilities to enter the stories in their own way and at their own level (1985: 70).

Alembi's expressive descriptions help the illustrators to capture the mood of the texts and thus attract the child reader. Although a single picture offers the child reader the aesthetic experience of colour, line and shape, it is also part of a narrative sequence. The illustrations thus influence children's responses. The books are therefore capable of giving the child reader an aesthetic experience while at the same time informing him/her.

Coloured illustrations are found in **The Cry of a Goat** and in **Fine Feathers**. The rest of the books have black and white illustrations. Coloured illustrations are used on the covers of all the books. The colour illustrations on the covers of the books help attract the children to the books. Some of the cover illustrations tally very well with the title of the book as in **Yellow Mangoes** where the three boys are shown on a mango tree eating mangoes. In **Settling the Score**, Ojango and Tito are shown playing football. This illustration seems to confuse most respondents. Most children interviewed do not understand its symbolic meaning until after reading the book. The illustration is symbolic of the score that the policemen have to settle with the five masked men. Even though the book starts with Tito and Ojango playing football the story changes after Ojango's father's goat is carried away by the five masked men. From then henceforth, the plot traces Ojango's experience in the forest as he is subjected to horrible pain by the five men. As proved in the field, the illustration

confuses the child as he/she expects to read a story about football.

Our respondents show no particular preference to colour or black and white illustrations. This can be explained in the fact that the writer uses vivid expressions and descriptions that hold the reader's attention. He also employs a strong sense of suspense which makes the child reader curious to know what happens next. Most respondents are curious to follow the action in the books and the illustrations seem secondary to the text. Leving Okumu of Korondo Primary School has this to say on **Selly**: "very interesting, you can't put it down till you know what happened to Peter and Selly". In most of the books, the main character moves from one hurdle to another, creating suspense and enhancing the readers' curiosity.

Illustrations are crucial to children's literature for they can either attract the child's attention or detract his/her concentration. Writers of children's books have to be aware of this and let whoever illustrates their books take it into consideration. The snake incident in **Settling the Score** is illustrated in what some respondents termed "unbelievable" and most of them claimed that the picture of a snake curled around Ojango seems to frighten them. Illustration in children's books must be credible so as to appeal to the readers. In **Yellow Mangoes**, most respondents dismiss the shooting incident (p. 24) arguing that it is "unbelievable and dangerous to Dan". Matabell Auma of Korondo Primary School says, "one cannot shoot an arrow directly into the mouth of a snake. It

is cheating!” This response confirms that the child is no passive reader: he/she is capable of criticising what is presented to him/her. As Smith (cited in Davies 1973) says, children will defend themselves against encroaching mediocrity in their books. For illustrations to contribute to the child’s understanding of the book, they have to be credible. Sometimes it is important not to illustrate certain events in the book. The text can be enough for the child to follow the action. Smith et. al. say of illustrations in children’s books:

They should not dominate a book and rob the text of its vitality, nor should they be so subsidiary to the world that they merely decorate. On the other hand, a neutral position where the picture literally repeats the text is wasteful (1970: 310).

A few flaws notwithstanding, illustrations in Alembi’s books serve in helping young readers understand the stories. Most of the children interviewed agree that the illustrations are attractive and help them in following the story of their hero/heroine. The illustrations are vital in the child’s understanding of the books and thus contribute to the child’s image-formation.

3.9

CONCLUSION ON STYLE

We have argued that the scholar writes from the child’s point of view. This style limits plot and characterisation to the level that can be understood by the young readers. The language he uses in all the eight (8) books can be understood by children. Our field findings confirm that children between the ages of 9 and 11 years have no problem comprehending the stories.

In all the books, the images and symbols employed are derived from the Kenyan child's immediate environment. These familiar images and symbols enable the children who read the books identify with the characters.

The simplicity in diction enables the young readers to follow the stories without being confused. The plots are linear with clear beginnings, middles and ends, and present events chronologically, based on the cause-effect pattern. This simplicity in plot enhances children's understanding of the stories. The children we interviewed say that the books "have no complication in language and are easy to understand". The author writes with the child in mind, hence the simplicity of diction, plot and characterisation.

CHAPTER FOUR

4.0 CONCLUSION

Children's story books can have a great influence on the child's social development and even his/her felt perception. This study is based on the assumption that Alembi's children's books have influenced the moral and social development of children who read them. Rosenblatt argues that the printed or written word offers the child a source from which to base his/her world view, social attitudes and even felt perception (1968: 191). Ngugi puts this in other words:

our whole conception of ourselves as a people, individually and collectively is based on those pictures and images which may or may not correctly correspond to the actual reality ...(1986: 5).

Children's story books become important stores of cultural transmission which in turn contribute to the child's social and moral development.

This thesis seeks to achieve two main goals. The first aim is to demonstrate how Alembi's children's books may be crucial in shaping the Kenyan child's moral and social development. We also seek to analyse Alembi's style and

discover its potential influence on the children who read the books. Our findings prove that the books are essential to the moral and social development of the children who read them. This can be attributed to the fact that literature is a product of a particular society. Thus whatever an author writes has much to do with the realities existing in his/her society.

Alembe's children's story books deal with thematic concerns that are pertinent to the development of the children who read the books. The author consciously or unconsciously, influences the Kenyan child's moral and social development by presenting themes that inculcate positive values. The child's moral development is influenced and shaped through such themes as kindness, sharing and obedience to parents. In **Don't be Long, John**, the writer captivates the feelings and anxieties of the child through the character of John. Written from a child's point of view, the book finally calls upon the child reader to be obedient to his/her parents particularly when sent. At the end of the book John is warned by his mother against playing on the way when sent on an errand.

The child's socialisation into the society is quite important for his/her future as an adult. Through the author's books, the child reader learns values that are necessary for his/her socialisation in the society. Virtues such as sharing, as shown in **Mistaken Identity** and love for the universal life, as shown in **Selly**, contribute in shaping the moral and social development of the Kenyan children

who read the books.

By presenting opposition of vices and virtues, the author provides the child with an opportunity to choose what to identify with. Our findings prove that the author uses style to influence children. Through dialogue and characterisation, Alembe gives a clear demarcation between evil and good.

The child's world view is very much part of his/her images of his/her society and also the image he/she may have of himself/herself. If an author persistently portrays his society as cruel and ruthless, the child may crystallize and internalize such vices as forming the basis of his or her society. In cases where the ruthless and the thieves go scot-free or are portrayed as heroes, the child reader's view of his/her society may also follow what the author upholds as good. The writer consciously or unconsciously influences the Kenyan child's world view by discouraging vices such as theft and selfishness. The discouragement is done creatively by punishing evil characters while rewarding the good ones. Apart from conforming to the child's moral schema, this style is appropriate in shaping the child's moral development and his/her world view.

The author also influences the children who read his books through characterisation. He presents heroes/heroines involved in things and situations that are familiar to children. All the heroes/heroines are presented with a problem to solve. The heroes/heroines' involvement in conflicts enhance the

action in the books. Most of the heroes propound virtues that can be emulated by children who read the works.

Critics of children's literature argue that it is desirable for the hero/heroine to solve the problem in his/her own way. Contrary to this argument, Alembi's writings create child characters who are helped by adults to solve their problems. Apart from **High Adventure** and **The Cry of a Goat**, all the remaining books bring in adults to solve the hero/heroine's problem. This is justified by the fact that the problems in these books cannot be solved by the child character alone. However, the author does not present heroes/heroines who are dormant when faced with a problem. In **Settling the Score** and **Mistaken Identity** the heroes try to solve their problems until the arrival of the adult characters. The heroes' struggle against the powerful forces gives hope to the children who read the books and thus imparts in them a positive self-image.

Most of the author's books end with the heroes/heroines being rewarded. The ending gives hope to the children while at the same time showing them that it is possible to overcome obstacles in life and that evil has to be punished.

This study deals with one Kenyan writer of children's books. We have examined eight (8) children's story books written by him. Our aim is to investigate the influence that the books may have on the Kenyan child's moral and social development and his/her world view. The study reveals that

Alembi's books have the capacity to influence the child's world view. They have the potential to influence the Kenyan child's moral and social development.

A study of this nature can be done on other Kenyan writers of children's books. Such a study may aim at finding out the type of values propagated by the authors and their real and potential effect on the Kenyan child who reads the books. The study will help publishers and writers to produce suitable books for the Kenyan children. Such a study may sensitize writers on gender issues and thus guide them in the writing of books for both girls and boys.

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APPENDIX I

A SAMPLE OF THE INTERVIEW SCHEDULE
WITH THE PUPILS

- A
- (i) Do you read story books?
 - (ii) Name some story books you have read.
 - (iii) Did you enjoy any of them?
 - (iv) What did you learn from the story? Explain.
 - (v) Did you agree with the lesson? Why?
- B.
- (i) How many books by Alembi have you read?
 - (ii) Did you enjoy any of them?
 - (iii) Which one(s) did you enjoy? Why?
 - (iv) What did you learn from it (them)? Explain.
 - (v) Which book(s) didn't you enjoy? Why?
- C
1. Name the characters you did not like in the following books. Say why you did not like them.
 - (i) **Yellow Mangoes**
 - (ii) **Settling the Score**
 - (iii) **Fine Feathers**
 - (iv) **Selly**
 - (v) **Mistaken Identity**
 - (vi) **The Cry of a Goat**
 - (vii) **High Adventure**
 - (viii) **Don't be Long, John**
 2. Name the characters you liked in the above books. Say why you liked them.
 - (i) Did you like the ending of the stories you read? Explain.
 - (ii) Did you enjoy the stories in **The Cry of a Goat**?
 - (iii) What did you learn from it?
- D.
1. Did you like the illustrations in Alembi's books? Explain.

APPENDIX II

INTERVIEW WITH ALEMBI

The following interview was carried out on February 26, 1999 in Room L22, Kenyatta University.

Interviewer: Mr. Alembi, when did you start writing for children?

Alembi: I began writing for children when I was still in school, that is in 1979.

Interviewer: Do you have any particular age in mind as your audience?

Alembi: I write for children, sometimes I write for a specific child. For instance, I had my brother's child in mind when I wrote **High Adventure**.

Interviewer: Why do you write for children? Do you have any particular aim in mind?

Alembi: Well, I want children to have fun, the world around is quite depressing. I want to make the child enjoy and also learn.

Interviewer: Mr. Alembi, your story books seem to end in a similar way. In the end there is some celebration. Why this kind of ending?

Alembi: I want children to be happy. I want to give them some hope. If you make the ending pessimistic you simply kill the child's future.

Interviewer: Some of your books deal with evil and good. For instance, **Mistaken Identity**, **Fine Feathers** and **Settling the Score**. Why this contrast?

Alembi: At a stylistic level, evil and good generate conflict. I want children to learn from this conflict.

Interviewer: I have also noticed that you put adults at the periphery of your stories and concentrate on the heroes/heroines who are children. Do you have any particular reason for doing this?

- Alembi:** Well, yes. I want children to live in their own world. I don't want the adults to take over the story. I want children to be children and create their own world.
- Interviewer:** Mr. Alembi, do you have any lesson(s) you want the children who read your books to learn?
- Alembi:** Well, I don't want to preach to children but the stories deal with values that the child can learn from. These values can also inform the child about situations and people.
- Interviewer:** Mr. Alembi, I have noticed that in almost all your books success is attributed to the power of God. Why this religious moral?
- Alembi:** Well, I am a Christian. I believe in the powers of the Almighty.
- Interviewer:** Thank you Mr. Alembi. I hope to read more children's books from you in future.
- Alembi:** Exactly! Thank you.

APPENDIX III

ABOUT ALEMBI

Ezekiel Alembi was born in 1960 at Ebwiranyi Village, Bunyore, in Western Province of Kenya. His parents, Mzee Musa Alembi Otwelo and Mama Selfa Moche, moved with him to Ziwani in Taita Taveta where his father worked on a sisal plantation. He started going to school there in the early 1970's. In 1974 he left Ziwani while in standard three (3) and moved back to Bunyore where he completed his primary school education in 1977. In 1978 he joined Kakamega High School and did his 'O' Level examination in 1981. His interest in writing started while in Kakamega High School. He was also actively involved in school and church drama.

Between 1982–1983 he did his 'A' Levels at Kangaru High School in Embu. While in Kangaru he started writing stories and drama scripts. His career as a writer flowered while teaching at Goibei Girls High School as an untrained teacher. He wrote many drama scripts including his play '**Shadows of Men**' which was later refined with the help of Prof. Francis Imbuga. It later became the winning entry at World Interplay in Sydney, Australia in 1987. Alembi became the first African to be invited to the World Interplay in Sydney, Australia in March 1988. In 1989 he was nominated Africa's Interplay representative, a position he holds to date.

Alembi studied for his first degree in Kenyatta University between 1985–1988. It was while at the university that his interest in children’s literature developed. He acknowledges having received a lot of inspiration from Dr. Nyambura Mpesha, an expert in children’s literature. In 1990 he was employed as a Graduate Assistant in the Literature Department at Kenyatta University. This enabled him to register for postgraduate studies. His M.A thesis was on children’s poetry.

Alembi’s interest in children may be traced back to his rural background in Bunyore. Having been born in a large family of eleven, and having been brought up in the rural area, he interacted more with children. He also attributes his interest in writing story books to his mother who told him a lot of stories when he was young. He says that he grew up in a “tough environment” where every boy fought for his own survival. He met many characters some of whom he says appear in his children’s story books. Fraser in **Yellow Mangoes**, the three kidnapers in **Mistaken Identity** and the five masked men in **Settling the Score** are all created from his childhood experience. His Christian background, which colours most of his books, can be traced back to his childhood. He was actively involved in church drama and even attended the Sunday school sessions in the local church.

Alembi has written eight (8) children’s story books together with many other academic books including the following: **A Guide to the Winner and Other**

Stories (1997) (co-authored), **A Guide to Looking for a Rain God and Other Short Stories** (1998), **Understanding Poetry** (1999), A paper “Narrative Performance in a Changing World: The Case of the Story Tellers in Kenya” in **Traditional Storytelling Today: An International Sourcebook** edited by Margaret Read (1999).

Alembi's children's books have won prizes in literary circles. In 1997 he was awarded the Jomo Kenyatta Prize for Literature. His story book, **Mistaken Identity** won first prize in Evangel Publishing House Writing Competition.

In 1997 he was admitted to the prestigious Folklore Fellows Summer School in Finland and appointed an honorary member. From then he has attended meetings organised by the organisation in Beijing, China, Gottingen, Germany and Mysore in India. He has also been invited to give lectures in New Zealand and in Australia at Murdock University and Eddith Cowen University. He has also taught at the Aboriginal and Islander Music and Dance School and at the Swan Theatre Company in Australia. He is currently studying for his Ph.D. at Helsinki University, Finland. He is also a Lecturer in the Literature Department, Kenyatta University.