

INSEPARABILITY OF FREUD'S PSYCHOANALYSIS FROM AFRICAN LITERATURE: INTERPRETING EAST AFRICAN SOCIAL VISION THROUGH DRAMATIC TRIPARTITE PSYCHE

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Abstract

Uzoma Esonwanne, in the article "The 'Crisis of the Soul': Psychoanalysis and African Literature," argues that psychoanalysis and African literature have long maintained a studious, if not wary, distance from each other (140). The interpretation of this is that psychoanalysis as a theoretical approach does not, or cannot apply to African literature; a claim which – in the view of this paper – can only be the consequence of a misreading of African literary works, whether deliberate or not. Of course, many literary works by African writers can be subjected to a psychoanalytic determination. The aim of this paper is to disabuse Esonwanne's claim by demonstrating that, and how, in fact psychoanalytic approach is core and inescapable in the full understanding of the motivation of some of the actions by a majority of the characters in African literary works. We are bound to turn to psychoanalysis as we attempt to unearth the social vision that the characters represent and, in particular, what drives them. The paper carries out this task using selected works by some of the leading East African playwrights; namely Imbuga and Ruganda, as a case study. The paper endeavours to apply the psychoanalytic "tripartite psyche" to interrogate four of some of the most prevalent concerns of East African drama, namely: abuse of power, amassing wealth, social injustice and sycophancy cum betrayal. Through the application of the tripartite psyche, the paper discusses the four identified vices, arguing that indeed these are part of the motivators for the rampant destructive instincts witnessed in the works, including murder, corruption, incarceration of perceived dissidents, clinging to power and ethnic cleansing, among others. The paper relies on textual analysis, employing qualitative descriptive and comparative research designs.

Key words: *African literature, East African drama, psychoanalysis, tripartite psyche, character motivation and drive, social vision.*

Introduction

As I purpose to apply psychoanalysis in this paper, I remain alive to the criticisms that have been directed towards it as a theoretical approach and some of the objections to its application. For

instance, Kohut, 1971, in his analysis of the narcissistic character dismisses psychoanalysis as incapable of bringing together his interests in neurology and literature. Meanwhile, Eagle in his 2003 and 2007 critiques on psychoanalysis, draws a long list of scholars who argue that what the theory stands for may have been true years ago, but the thinking has since changed. But though

Eagle himself differs with Freud on a number of the latter's claims, he nonetheless refuses to agree with the scholars' argument that the thinking has changed and no longer favours psychoanalysis. Indeed in an observation that appears to give psychoanalysis the benefit of the doubt, Eagle points out that perhaps the primary division in either supporting psychoanalysis, or opposing it, may all have to do with the different paradigms, or different world views. He particularly acknowledges the fact that psychoanalysis is adaptable to different disciplines and this can greatly determine its admissibility, or rejection. Apparently the strongest opposition to the theory appears to be on the basis of its lack of empirical evidence which arguably is the reason many modern psychologists are unable to reconcile it with certain modern situations.

However, the objections to psychoanalysis notwithstanding, the voices for the theory are equally loud. One notable voice, for example, is Nobel laureate, Eric Richard Kandel, who, in his 2016 publication argues that psychoanalytic theory offers the most comprehensive understanding of the mind. Kandel illustrates how science, through the process of reduction can inform the way we experience a work of art and seek to understand its meaning, and in particular how we may relate to emotions such as fear, anger, guilt, curiosity, anxiety, self-preservation and the like. Indeed the said emotions have often been evidently expressed through art, literature, music and dance, a fact that attracts me, in this paper to employ psychoanalysis as a vehicle that could explain the emotions that drive the characters in my selected works for analysis to behave the way they do. I specifically employ the psychoanalytic strand of tripartite psyche to analyze how the characters in the works relate to the emotions of fear, anger and guilt.

The tripartite psyche involves the interaction between the id, ego and superego, as stipulated in Sigmund Freud's 1923 personality theory as the three parts of the psyche. Freud presents the id as representing our instinctual dark desires basically targeting the individual's pleasures without regard to consequences. The super-ego on the other hand assumes the criticizing and ethicizing role, while the ego is the coordinated, pragmatic bit that intercedes between the demands of the id and the super-ego, thereby serving as the individual's conscience. Defined within the confines

of the philosophy of African socialism, the African superego (i.e. what represents moral and virtue in the African context), in a traditional African way demands for a sharing of economic resources in a manner that empowers all, while ensuring a democratic and brotherly coexistence. The rationale of this, we may say, is to help build a sense of a cohesive society anchored on societal togetherness. If the African philosophy stands as it does then, what is it that brings about some of the representative antithetical actions that have often been portrayed by some African playwrights? In other words, if the said African philosophy is anything to go by, then the situations as portrayed in a majority of the plays by African playwrights are a travesty of African socialism, a philosophy which as pointed out emphasizes equal sharing, brotherly coexistence and societal togetherness. This then raises the question of why matters may be as they are, as reflected in the plays sampled in this paper.

East African playwrights – represented in this paper by Francis Imbuga and John Ruganda – address many subjects, some unique to the individual writers, or individual texts, while some appear to be shared concerns. In the attempt to demonstrate the applicability of psychoanalysis to African literature, contrary to Uzoma Esonwanne’s claim above, this paper deals with some of the issues that appear to be common to plays by the two leading playwrights. The themes singled out for discussion in this paper are: abuse of power, amassing wealth, social injustice and sycophancy cum betrayal.

Theatre in East Africa and Reality

Mugubi (2003) argues that literature and society have an intimate relationship, while as Wa Thiong’o (1978) had earlier put it, literature results from the conscious acts of men in society, which assertion is interpreted to mean that literature reflects the society that produces it. This being the case, we can logically posit that the plays written by East African playwrights are in fact a drama of the situation in the region. We could explain this by visiting some of the prevalent concerns of East African drama listed earlier as abuse of power, amassing wealth, social injustice and sycophancy cum betrayal, then relate this to what is on record about actual occurrences in the East African region, initially Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania, but now including Rwanda, Burundi and South Sudan, with DRC Congo having applied to be incorporated.

Abuse of power, for example, is a prominent theme in the plays from the post-colonial East African context, of course as in many other African regions. One type of abuse of power is monopolizing power, or clinging to power as is commonly referred to. This theme perhaps targets to reflect what has been a common practice in a majority of the East African countries. Kenya, for example, started with Jomo Kenyatta who died in office when he was already in his sixteenth year in office, while his successor, Moi, ruled for twenty-four years. Tanzania's Julius Nyerere, a man considered to be quite liberal and democratically minded, still ruled for twenty-one years, while Milton Obote and Idi Amin Dada in the neighbouring Uganda, had both to be forced out of office. Yoweri Museveni who took up the reigns in 1986 still remains in office to the time of this paper. By the time the term he secured in 2021 ends, he will have served forty years in office and there are no indications yet that he will not be running again. Paul Kagame of Rwanda, having taken over power in 2000, is now twenty-one years in office and nobody is talking of his possible retirement. Mobutu Sese Seko of Congo Kinshasa ruled for thirty-two years, while Omar al-Bashir of Sudan (which later gave birth to South Sudan, a member of the East African Community) ruled from 1989 until he was overthrown in 2019. Meanwhile, Pierre Nkurunziza of Burundi, pushed himself in 2015 to run for a third term against the provisions of the country's constitution. He had already served the first and second terms totaling the ten years that the constitution allowed. The above is evidence of the leaders in the East African countries trying to hold on to power. This is perhaps the situation that is often reflected in the works of some East African playwrights. For instance, Boss in Imbuga's *Betrayal in the City* and later *Man of Kafira*, represents leaders who consider themselves the only people in their countries who can lead. These leaders, therefore, cannot allow the position of leadership go to someone else. Similarly, the head of state in Ruganda's *The Floods* (also referred to as Boss) and the German rulers in Hussein's *Kinjeketile*, reflect leaders unwilling to cede power. They instead, want to cling onto power and use their positions to amass wealth (another concern of the East African playwrights), while denying their subjects social justice (yet another theme). In a majority of cases, the leaders become dictators who attempt to work themselves towards absolute power. To do this, they use nepotism to bring in their people, whom they put in strategic positions to safeguard their interests while being sure of total allegiance. They can then loot the country's economy through their well placed lieutenants. Boss in Imbuga's *Betrayal in the City*, for example, uses his cousin, Mulili, to get anything he wants, while Bwogo in Ruganda's *The Floods* also serves as the Boss' right hand man, prepared to do the latter's dirty work which may

include silencing those that appear to be anti-establishment, the way Adika in *Betrayal in the City* is killed in cold blood for demonstrating against Boss' government.

Since the rulers have their people everywhere, they can then oppress and exploit their subjects at will without fear of reprisal or resistance. Besides, for the rulers to make sure they achieve total success in their oppression and exploitation of the masses, they create a culture of sycophancy and betrayal in a way that their followers will do anything in the name of their rulers. The sycophants are prepared to steal on behalf of their bosses, though also doing so for their own sakes. Meanwhile, the sycophants will be falling over each other as they struggle to be the ones to catch the benevolent eye of the boss. In this regard betrayal plays a key role because the boss wants information on possible saboteurs of his/her schemes. For instance, Odie's betrayal of his brother Wak, in Ruganda's *Shreds of Tenderness*, to the bosses is considered an act of patriotism because the latter (Wak) is seen as a threat to the establishment. Of course the act is actually self serving, just like when Mulili, in Imbuga's *Betrayal in the City* betrays Kabito to Boss so as to get the milk tender.

The Manifestation of the Tripartite Psyche in East African Drama

Before I can demonstrate how the tripartite psyche is reflected in the drama of the selected playwrights from East Africa, it is perhaps necessary to shed more light on how it operates. In *The Ego and The Id*, Freud postulates that mental life is dependent on three drives: the id, the ego and the superego. While the id is explained in terms of unorganized, often unreasonable instinctual trends, the superego assumes the criticizing and often stifling, restrictive ethicizing role, as the ego remains the coordinated, pragmatic bit that mediates between the demands of the id and the superego. Meanwhile, in *Civilization and its Discontents*, Freud asserts that the id is a very powerful drive, because it represents the 'pleasure principle' which is the programme that decides the purpose of life. Indeed the very preoccupation of humanity is to seek pleasure and preservation of life. Of course the id's pleasure principle can be overwhelming if the programmes of the ego and superego, represented by the 'reality principle' and the 'morality principle', respectively, were to be ignored. This implies that the id, ego, and superego, though all domiciled in the same individual, mostly operate in conflict.

I wish to demonstrate the reflection of the drives above in selected works of drama: *Betrayal in the City* and *Man of Kafira* by Francis Imbuga and *The Floods* and *Shreds of Tenderness* by John Ruganda. I will base my demonstration on the conflicts as exerted by the characters in the works. In particular, I want to focus on how inclusively conflicts impinge on the lives of the characters in terms of the social, political and psychological identities. The conflicts appear at the internal and external levels. At the internal conflict level, I explore aspects of internalized anger, fear and guilt; while at the external conflict level I interrogate revenge as a manifestation of overindulgence in pursuit of justice and rebellion as a reaction to political repression.

Tripartite Psyche and Internalized Fear

I wish to argue that the aspect of internalized fear plays a major role in driving id's programme of pleasure principle. The character fears that lack will impinge their access to pleasure and self-preservation, thereby poking the death instincts. To avoid death and preserve oneself the character must do all it takes to ensure safety: the safety that comes with dominating power and protecting control, as well as having enough wealth, of course always fearing in case what one has gets depleted. I submit that Boss' uncontrollable desire to dominate others and to cow his critics (in both *Betrayal in the City* and *Man of Kafira*) is the genesis of tyranny and injustices in Kafira. His repressive tendencies can be seen as driven by his id, the part of the mind that Freud in *The Ego and the Id*, posits as using every means to avoid pain and to seek pleasure. Boss' id-ridden fear turns him into a despot and a tyrant. Of tyrants, Socrates once observed: "Once a tyrant has attained a position of power, he must guard it jealously. He must live in fear of everyone, having behaved unjustly to everyone. His domination becomes a prison in which he himself is bound." (Hall, 45). Of course domination goes hand in hand with economic, social and political power.

Indeed the dominant theme in the selected works is the desire for wealth and domination by those in power, which turn out to be the root cause of injustice in society. The id, and in particular its programme of the pleasure principle is the underlying drive for the said desire for wealth and domination. In the absence of the superego to filter socially unacceptable urges, the ego of the regimes in power are defenseless against the demands of the id. In Imbuga's *Betrayal in the City* and *Man of Kafira*, for example, the government officials are depicted as selfish and

manipulative graft lords whose dishonest and corrupt dealings have not only degraded the social values but also dehumanized the masses. Boss in *Betrayal in the City* is depicted as a character out of control, whose personality, we may argue is overridden by the uncoordinated demands of the id. His uncontrolled desire to impress his foreign visitor makes him become ready to sacrifice not only the country's meager resources but also the lives of the citizens. He deals ruthlessly with the students who try to demonstrate against his dalliance with foreigners/expatriates at the expense of the citizens. Similarly, driven by the pleasure principle, Boss throws all care to the winds in his sexual pursuits; his desire for Regina blinds him to the fact that he is first a human being, a husband and also a respected head of state. He attempts to rape her in total disregard of decorum and the lady's own feelings, leave alone what everyone else would say. This portrays not only the degradation of social values but also dehumanization of the people, women in particular. It is indeed the very selfish interest and lack of consideration for the feelings of others that leads Boss in *Man of Kafira* to have Regina kidnapped and forcefully taken to him in his exile in Abiara.

Boss' associates are not any better. Driven by the id of self-gain, Mulili, for example, plans Kabito's death because the latter is standing between him and the milk tender. Mulili, whose very place in government is due to nepotism – Boss is his cousin – peddles every kind of falsehood against his colleagues so as to win the favour and trust of his cousin. The cousin himself, conceited, self-serving and keen to stay in power at all costs, his ineptness notwithstanding, believes his (Mulili's) propaganda. He then uses this to justify the oppression of the people and the necessity to stash the looted cash in overseas accounts – perhaps to cushion himself against scarcity in future, thus, a threat to his pleasure. Meanwhile, out of the need for self-preservation, Mulili too does not hesitate to betray his cousin when he realizes that he could be shot during the botched rehearsal.

John Ruganda, too, presents id driven characters in *The Floods* and *Shreds of Tenderness*. Bwogo in *The Floods* kills in the name of the Boss and the ruling party. He will in turn be promoted and become the head of National Research Bureau, a murderous arm of the government. In order to win accolades from his boss, Bwogo becomes ruthless. He is prepared to liquidate the entire population in a well choreographed impending danger in the form of floods. Incidentally, Nankya, a supposed intellectual upon whom the people's redemption depends, also

appears to sometimes act in dalliance with Bwogo, perhaps for self preservation, or perhaps due to forces beyond her. Meanwhile, the id of pleasure and self-gain pushes Odie in *Shreds of Tenderness* to betray his brother Wak to the agents of the country's tyrannical government. Making it look like a patriotic gesture of helping the government deal with dissidents, it later turns out that in fact it was simply a self-serving attempt to get rid of his brother so as to remain the sole heir to his father's wealth, a sure way of enjoying the life of plenty in future.

What comes out from the few instances highlighted here, of course out of the numerous similar occurrences in the selected works is that fear, driven by the id programme of the pleasure principle leads the characters to wanting to sacrifice others for their own self-preservation, which psychoanalysis views as the fear of death. Boss's fear of his critics and by extension losing power, leads him in *Betrayal in the City* and *Man of Kafira*, to tyranny, murder, corruption, nepotism, embezzlement of funds, incarceration of dissidents and other ills against humanity, perhaps as a way of trying to assuage the fear of his own fall. He becomes delusional after experiencing bouts of fear and resorts to silencing anyone who dares to criticize him. The labeled dissidents - Jusper, Jere, Mosese, Lum Lum, Regina, Kabito, Tumbo and others, are all made to suffer different afflictions, including death for some, on account of Boss's fear of the threat to his desire to remain in power. On the other hand, the dissidents' passion for liberty and justice is mocked and turned into humiliation by those controlling the power structures.

Tripartite Psyche and Internalized Anger

The lead characters in the works under reference, for instance, Bwogo and Nankya in *The Floods*; Odie in *Shreds of Tenderness*; Jusper, Boss and Regina in *Betrayal in the City* and *Man of Kafira*, are depicted as being mentally deranged. The derangement in all the cases appear to come as a result of overindulgence: if not being drunk with power (Boss and Bwogo), it could be overzealous desire to please the bosses (Bwogo, and Mulili in *Betrayal in the City*), or the greed of owning/amassing wealth (Odie, Boss, Mulili). Derangement could also be caused by great anger due to injustices in society, which then leads to unbridled passion for revenge (Jusper and Regina). In the latter case, for example, Jusper suffers derangement due to the repressed anger and bitterness. He appears to suffer from acute distress. His condition worsens when Boss wipes out his entire family and as his late brother, Adika's ghost appears to ask for revenge. Besides, Jusper is already hurting at the fact that his girlfriend Regina has been taken by Boss, who later murders his associates such as Mosese. Jusper is, therefore, on the verge of total madness. His anger and bitterness appear to take away his very humanity and his consciousness.

Discussing anger from the Freudian world of id, ego and superego, it is my view that the instinct (anger) is an id, ego and superego at the same time. As a superego, anger could be said to be a criticism, or disapproval of what appears to be a travesty of the acceptable norms. It is perhaps a reaction that attempts to draw attention to the fact that a character is transgressing, or tampering with the rights of others. It is the accumulation of displeasure about what the conscience disapproves. So anger serves as the voice of reason that demands for a change of the status quo. It is a kind of protest that seems to shout, "I am not happy." Juser, for example, is angry with Boss and his entire government because the establishment is insensitive to human suffering and keeps trampling on the rights of the people. The people are not permitted to mourn their dead (who have in fact been murdered by the very establishment). Adika's parents cannot perform burial rights for their loved one while Regina is prohibited from attending her brother's funeral. Meanwhile, anger could also be an id that serves the pleasure principle. Anger, for instance, tempts one, urging them to revenge so as to get even. Apparently, Juser's main preoccupation is to take revenge on Boss. His (Juser's) psychic redemption appears to reside in the possibility of assassinating Boss. Boss has become his id whom his superego in the form of his late brother's ghost demands must be eliminated. Bwogo too in *The Floods* tries to revenge on Nankya and her mother. What he touts as impending floods is merely a hoax deliberately planned to be used to execute the murder plot. Revenge is indeed for self-gratification, meaning that it goes to serve one's id. Of course the one planning revenge often tries to justify the action by positing it as serving the greater good. Juser, for example, sees revenge against Boss as justice for the citizens of Kafira. The truth, however, is that Juser himself carries much personal grudge against Boss and the latter's fall would serve greater gratification for him (Juser) himself. It is the latter's id that would actually benefit from such an eventuality. Incidentally while anger at id level (pleasure principle) desires revenge and the superego (morality principle) appeals to guilt to institute reparation, the ego's reality principle disillusiones the actors on the prevailing circumstances. For instance, Juser's intense desire to bring Boss and his regime down comes face to face with the reality of the futility of hoping to fight the tyrannical system empty handed, moreover, perhaps alone. In Uganda's *The Floods*, Bwogo too, finds himself confronted with the fact that his plan to kill Nankya has to deal with the love he feels for the latter. On the other hand, Nankya's own dislike for what Bwogo does has to reconcile itself with her very desire to be with him; to partake of what he is able to offer; to love him; and so on – perhaps a typical case of the ego mediating between the id and the superego.

Jusper is also angry at the number of deaths that have occurred under Boss' regime. Lamenting the latter's atrocities in *Man of Kafira*, Jusper counts on his fingers the people killed: Mosese, Tumbo, Archbishop Lum Lum, my parents, Chief Chenyisa and Zozi, he killed them all. Yes, Boss killed the cream among our people," (64). Such senseless killings of people dear to one are indeed enough to make anyone go mad. What, however, hurts even more is the fact that, other than get angry, one can do nothing else about it. The helplessness that Jusper in *Betrayal in the City* suffers when his girlfriend is taken by Boss and the inability to act in any way is not only dehumanizing but also emasculating to the man. So, anger as a superego is in a way saying, "that is wrong. I don't like it".

Tripartite Psyche and Internalized Guilt,

Guilt is a consequence. In *The Ego and the Id*, Freud contends that "the tension between the demands of the conscience and the actual performances of the ego is experienced as a sense of guilt" (37). In *Man of Kafira*, for example, Boss experiences psychological turmoil because he contradicted moral codes during his leadership in Kafira, where he killed to assert personal supremacy over his life and to affirm his resolution, identity and power. In his rage, he spares no one: peasants like Doga and Nina, to members of his cabinet; nemesis to friends; students to intellectuals. Although Boss manages to suppress or disguise his guilt all this time, his gods appear to desert him when he murders his friend Archbishop Lum Lum. As it turns out the guilt of Lum Lum's murder comes to haunt him to the point of "becoming unable to perform". He encounters absolute ignominy and masculine frailty. The haunting guilt confines him to squashing paranoia, a state that makes him unable to sleep. His wives have to lull him like a baby before he can fall into sleep, albeit with frightening dreams.

Apparently, Boss' behaviour conforms to Freud's assertion that guilt (which the victims often try to suppress from the conscious mind), surfaces in unconscious symptoms such as nightmares and madness, (Gay 582). Gay further argues that although a person may repress his conscience, the guilt is merely displaced to another part of the mind and must return. I may in this connection argue that the ghost of Lum Lum represents Boss' superego, i.e. the moral anxiety that he must experience for contradicting the moral code. It is a revelation of his inner struggle with guilt for his crimes against humanity. One catches this in Boss' words during the dream: "Thank you, Archbishop; your visit brings me much comfort to my troubled heart. I wish others would understand too... What can I do to prove to them that I am a changed man?" (*Man of Kafira*, 45-46). It looks like guilt brings Boss to regret his past. The retribution of guilt on him makes him

yearn for atonement of his sins. Perhaps this is what guilt does to someone. We see a similar reaction in *Shreds of Tenderness*. Unable to face himself and unable to forgive himself for his past atrocities against his brother, Odie surrenders himself to any retribution that will come his way. In a tone of self-surrender he says: “Let me do my penance, if need be. If the forces that be are rounding up all SRB spies, so be it. Let them. I’m not scared of the law. I will serve my term and keep my dignity” (134). From the conversation that precedes his giving up himself for punishment, one realizes that Odie in fact wishes for some sort of retribution against him. Perhaps that is the way he can come face to face with himself and possibly forgive himself; only then can the tension between the demands of his conscience (superego) be reconciled with the actual performances of his ego which is experienced as a sense of guilt of betraying his own brother.

Psychoanalysis and African Literature

Having identified abuse of power, amassing wealth, social injustice and sycophancy and betrayal as among the concerns of East African playwrights, one understands the concerns of the region, for as already mentioned, literature mirrors society. It is then the work of the playwright to artistically articulate the very identified concerns to reflect what we come to perceive as the region’s social vision. Leading dramatists, Imbuga and Ruganda, have done this, perhaps choosing to craft the vision by engaging the psyches of the characters involved. This way, it helps the reader to decide, not only how the social vision is executed but also what drives the abuse of power, amassing wealth, social injustice and sycophancy and betrayal as among the concerns of East African players involved in the very execution. Specifically, the playwrights help the reader to enter into and interrogate the moral fabric based on the philosophy of African socialism. The playwrights through their writing take us through this expectation, while according us the opportunity to adjudicate society’s conscience. By exposing us to characters such as Boss, Mulili, Jusper, Regina, Bwogo, Nankya, Odie and Wak, among others, the playwrights manage to empower us, not only to socialize with the characters but to also appraise their performance in relation to the identified social vision and pitted against the society’s superego. To this end, there would have been no better tool of measurement than the tripartite psyche. The tool of the tripartite psyche has helped us understand what drives the characters in the execution of the society’s vision. We can perceive their hopes, fears, aspirations, perceptions and even their struggles. On the part of the playwrights, they have constructed for us the

characters through whom they execute the society's vision as they perceive it, but in a way that allows us to make our own judgment.

We are now able to ask ourselves questions of whether the constructed characters represent our own hopes, fears, aspirations, perceptions and struggles. Where do we, as members of the real world converge with the psychological characters in the world constructed in the selected works by the two playwrights?

Conclusion

The thesis of this paper was to disabuse the claim that psychoanalysis as a theory is not applicable to African literature. Such claims as propagated by scholars such as Uzoma Esonwanne (2007), when he asserts that "psychoanalysis and African literature have long maintained a studious, if not wary, distance from each other," are misleading because African literature like every other literature is open to such theoretical interpretation. The paper has attempted to unveil the application of the tripartite psyche of the id, ego and superego in the works of two playwrights' crafting of their social vision. The paper explains how the drives of the id lead characters into selfish actions such as corruption, misrule, violence against fellow human beings and other social ills. Meanwhile, the superego serves to check society's excesses, though if overindulged can be as oppressive as the id, because it could also encourage oppression in its bid for reparation. Meanwhile the ego mediates between the excesses of the id and the restricting morality of the superego so as to create a more realistic world. Discussing leading characters in Ruganda's *The Floods* and *Shreds of Tenderness* and Imbuga's *Betrayal in the City* and *Man of Kafira*, the paper has attempted to unravel the playwrights' perception of our world as presented and represented in their dramatic works. The final voice is that psychoanalysis is as much applicable to African literature as any other and the theory should be more regularly applied so as to better understand the psyche of African literature in general and East African literature in particular.

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