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Crisis, Cruelty and Absurdism in John Ruganda's the Floods and Shreds of Tenderness

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John Ruganda is categorized as an African writer whose writing is marked by the expression of post-independence disillusionment and the transference of anger and blame from foreign to indigenous leaders, yet he has received very little critical attention as an artist. The study examined the aesthetics of the absurd drama in John Ruganda's plays. The rationale for the study gestures to the need to study Ruganda's dramatic texts as representative of a historical, cultural and social trajectory through the less studied body of drama. This study discusses the state of social and psychological crisis, cruelty and absurdism of life in drama. The study used Ruganda's two plays, namely The Floods and Shreds of Tenderness. The various modes through which absurd drama appeals to the aesthetic sensibilities were examined. The study employed descriptive research and used purposive sampling. Data were analysed qualitatively by describing the findings of the study to arrive at inferences and conclusions. In his plays, Ruganda depicts a society full of misfortunes and suffering and where no one has peace. Each person is seen as a problem that eats up the mind and body. Many people have lost their lives because of a cruel society. The effects of cruelty are also depicted through the fragmentary nature of the characters' lives and their minds. The state is violent to its subjects, and subjects are violent against one another.

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INTRODUCTION

Theatre of the absurd is a designation for particular plays written by a number of primarily European playwrights in the late 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s, as well as to the style of theatre which has evolved from their work. The term was coined by the critic Martin Esslin (1991), who made it the title of a 1962 book on the subject. Esslin saw the work of these playwrights as giving artistic articulation to Albert Camus' philosophy that life is inherent without meaning, and so one must find one's own meaning as illustrated in his work *The Myth of Sisyphus*.

'Theatre of the Absurd' is thought to have its origins in Dadaism, nonsense poetry and avant-garde art of the 1910s-1920s and is often traced to the avant-garde experiments of the 1920s and 1930s, its roots, in actuality, date back much further. Absurd elements first made their appearance shortly after the rise of Greek drama, in the wild humour and buffoonery of Old Comedy and the plays of Aristophanes in particular.

The morality plays of the Middle Ages may be considered a precursor to the theatre of the absurd, depicting everyman-type characters dealing with allegorical and sometimes existential problems. In the nineteenth century, the acknowledged predecessor of what would come to be called the theatre of the absurd is Alfred Jarry's "monstrous puppet-play" *Ubu Roi* (1896), which presents a mythical, grotesque figure, set amidst a world of archetypal images (Jarry, Keith, & Legman, 2003). Despite its critics, this genre of the theatre achieved popularity when World War II highlighted the essential precariousness of human life.

The playwrights grouped under the label of the absurd attempt to convey their sense of bewilderment, anxiety, and wonder in the face of an inexplicable universe. World War II was the catalyst that finally brought the theatre of the absurd to life. The global nature of this conflict and the resulting trauma of living under the threat of nuclear annihilation put into stark perspective

the essential precariousness of human life. Suddenly, one did not need to be an abstract thinker in order to be able to reflect upon absurdity: the experience of absurdity became part of the average person's daily existence. During this period, a "prophet" of the absurd appeared.

Knapp and Knapp (1985) rejected realism in the theatre, calling for a return to myth and magic and to the exposure of the deepest conflicts within the human mind. He demanded a theatre that would produce collective archetypes and create a modern mythology. To him, it was no longer possible, to keep using traditional art forms and standards that had ceased being convincing and lost their validity. Although he would not live to see its development, the theatre of the absurd is precisely the new theatre that Artaud was dreaming of. It openly rebelled against conventional theatre. It was, as Ionesco called it "anti-theatre". It was surreal, illogical, conflict-less and plotless. The dialogue often seemed to be complete gibberish. Not surprisingly, the public's first reaction to this new theatre was incomprehension and rejection.

Uganda's playwright John Ruganda is categorized as an African writer whose work is marked by the expression of post-independence disillusionment and the transference of anger and blame from foreign to indigenous leaders. Nevertheless, he has received very little critical attention as an artist. This paper argues that Ruganda's dramatic texts are representative of a historical, cultural and social trajectory through the less studied body of drama.

Gikunda (2011) in a literary study of dislocation in Ruganda's plays focused on the question of refugees in Africa. The author argues that dislocation is a product of interlinked variables and that hostile political environment is the main cause of dislocation. In this paper, dislocation is an aspect in the mind but characters seem not to move so much because by moving away, a lot will be lost and because of the hopeless state, running away or remaining at home is just the same. Kasigwa (2011), in *The Death Motif in John Ruganda's Selected Plays*, explores the treatment of the theme of death, its creation, portrayal, use

and significance in John Ruganda's drama. He concludes that John Ruganda uses death and suicide as the ultimate end of human life. A study on Ruganda's plays done by Waliaula (2003) focuses on *Gender Relations in Ruganda's Plays*. Waliaula examines how Ruganda uses characterization to discuss gender relations in the plays. Chesaina (1987) also analyses women characters in East African drama. Chesaina portrays men as violent and abusive characters who solve problems by openly dismissing or fighting women. In these two studies based on Ruganda's drama, the female characters are read as inferior to their male counterparts. In terms of style, scholars have examined how Ruganda uses symbolism in the exploration of his thematic concerns.

Obi (1990), in *Symbolism and Meaning in Ruganda's Plays*, notes that Ruganda deploys symbols to put across his thematic concerns. Characters in the plays do not only speak for themselves but represent and symbolize real characters that we can make reference to in real life. Ruganda uses the old weak characters to represent the oppressed masses while characters that represent power are presented as strong and soldier like to speak about how violence operates within situations of power imbalances. The use of symbols in the plays is useful in this study and is evident particularly in *The Floods* where the characters and the setting are very symbolic. Imbuga (1999) makes a general study of Ruganda's style of writing. In what he calls 'trends and circumstance in Ruganda's drama', Imbuga identifies Ruganda's major target of criticism as the politicians whom he blames for the exploitation of the poor. The politicians are read as a group of selfish individuals who pursue their further embourgeoisement at the expense of the welfare of the poor majority.

Key to this study is Sambai's study of *Violence and Memory in Ruganda's plays The Burdens and The Floods*. Sambai (2008) looks at violence and memory in Ruganda's play. She looks at violence as a tool of performing power in a totalitarian state. The study also examines how memories of

a past lead to a violent present. Since the study is based on plays, the study investigates how Ruganda uses aspects like characterization; the setting and dialogue as the major strategies for exploring the theme of violence in the plays.

The study examines Ruganda's use of memories of violence to narrate the experiences of violence for purposes of pointing out the grave effects of 'absolute power'. From this study, violence in the private space is linked to violence by the state as exemplified in *The Burdens* and *The Floods*. This study borrows immensely from this study since it looks at violence and chaos which characterizes an absurd world and is expressed in absurd theatre. The fact that man has failed to live harmoniously with the environment creates a conflict exhibited in this work.

Statement of the Problem

Absurd drama has come to be seen as one of the most modern literary movements. It especially gained popularity in African literature and particularly among East African playwrights. Despite this, there has not been a critical attempt to investigate and examine the aesthetics, nature and role of this new genre. Therefore, the study sought to investigate the aesthetics, roles and nature of the absurd drama with close reference to John Ruganda's two selected plays: *The Floods* and *Shreds of Tenderness*.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research was basically descriptive in nature. Library research on relevant material formed the basis of the study. The research made use of primary and secondary sources of data. Purposive sampling was used to select the texts. In purposive sampling, the researcher chooses the sample based on who/what they think would be appropriate for the study (Deming, 1990).

It involved a close and critical reading and literary analysis of John Ruganda's selected texts, namely *Shreds of Tenderness* and *The Floods*. Secondary sources were obtained through an intensive and extensive literature search on theatre of the absurd and related journals and magazines. In addition,

libraries such as those of the Kisii University, University of Kabanga, Moi University, Maseno University and University of Nairobi's Jomo Kenyatta Memorial Library were used. E-books and online journals on internet are also useful. The two primary texts were analysed using a content analysis approach. The texts' structure, symbols, meaning and thematic concerns were subjected to critical analysis. This makes the study descriptive in nature.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The theatre of the absurd reflects a human life full of suffering, cruelty and danger. Such existence forms an atmosphere of the devaluation of life in modern society. Facing this atmosphere, human beings lose themselves in it. Gradually, they feel lonely, frightened and despairing. Emptiness, therefore, becomes the true essence of their daily lives. Isolation and absurdity gradually fill their minds. The theatre of the absurd reflects the reality of life in a bleak society. From it, we find that people in their daily lives are tired, hopeless, obscure and aimless. The theatre of the absurd is the product of modern society. People do not know the real meaning and destination of their lives. They value power, wealth and positions more than human life. Ruganda concurs with pioneer absurdist writers.

At the beginning, it was difficult for the public to accept this type of writing. When 1464 people appreciated the Bald Soprano on the stage for the first time, only several people were left in the theatre. With time, more people think highly of this kind of theatre and consider that it is suitable for their lives. Theatre originally is used to show the reality on the stages. Degradation and oppression should ideally form part of the tragic theme, but many playwrights in the theatre of the absurd describe these themes in a happy and comical way.

Crisis and Cruelty of Man

In the theatre of the absurd, playwrights try to explore the crisis and cruelty of human beings. The theatre of the absurd appeared in the 1950s at that time when the economy in the western world

developed very fast. All kinds of new technologies were used in every field. People who wanted to survive must catch up with the step and variation of the society as soon as possible. If they could not keep pace with the speed of society, they would be abandoned and lose themselves in it. In Ruganda's *Shreds of Tenderness*, Odie informs Stella that Wak left them when they needed him most. At that time the country was in total chaos and strife everywhere, he says:

Odie: Worse luck here, Stella, He deserted us when we needed most. Country wreathed in strife and reprisals. Men for a matchstick as easily as for a grocery shop. Looting, raping and all sorts of atrocities. Father dead, mother bed-ridden after an explicable miscarriage, you, like all other kids in school, unable to put your mind to sit for your form six exams. And what does he do?... (Shreds of Tenderness, p. 13).

The world is full of misfortunes and suffering and no one has peace. Each person is a problem that eats up the mind and body. There are many people who lost their lives because of such an unmerciful society. The effects of cruelty are also depicted through the fragmentary nature of the characters' lives and their minds. In *The Floods*, for instance, Kyeyune suffers several hallucinations calling us to question his mental state. Kyeyune exhibits a demented mind presented in the way that he sees what other people do not see. The violence also led to mad-like people and disjointed families. Schepers (2004) notes that "violence can never be understood solely in terms of its physicality; force, assault or the infliction of pain alone. Focusing exclusively on the physical aspects of torture, terror, violence is missing the point" (p. 1).

Following Schepers's argument, it is evident in the plays that violence is affected more than the physical. Nankya, for instance, bears the psychological scars borne from the rape by Bwogo while Kyeyune has had to live with the images of dead bodies in the lake which have imprinted themselves in his mind. This even prevented him from fishing for fear of meeting the dead bodies in the river. According to Sabatini

(1999), victims of torture do not have memories but have hallucinatory representations of the cruel past because experiences of horror disable the psyche and alter the work of memory. The violent moment gets frozen around the traumatic events and hurtful memories. Violent experiences fix the mind to the violent event so that the victim hallucinates and sees that violent event recurring. Seemingly, the memory of the violence, which one has been a victim and or a witness to, becomes fixated around the brutality of those experiences.

In the regime represented in the play, Nankya and Kyeyune remember how the people who were thought to be against the state were sought after by the State Research Bureau (SRB) and later murdered by the security agents. Kyeyune who witnessed these agents of the state picking people keeps hallucinating about being tracked by the 'security agents.' At one point he sees them coming for him and he asks to be protected from them. Kyeyune: They will. They will. The ambassadors of darkness. I saw them. Tell them to leave me alone (*The Floods*, p. 37). This underscores the fact that victims have horrible memories that keep returning. In as much as Bwogo tries to use violence (for instance shooting at Kyeyune) in order to prevent him from speaking, most of the time, Kyeyune drifts into these memories unconsciously. The use of violence to suppress memory is because memory works as a threat to the agents of violence by exposing them and their activities. Another situation where the people's memories are further repressed in the play is when the violent regime chooses to conspicuously memorialize the death of Mother Queen.

Her funeral arrangements are given more currency than all the deaths of the common people. In the end, the people get preoccupied with the death of the Mother Queen and forget about the injustices committed against them. It is also evident in the play that traumatic events leave some indelible impression in the victim's mind. Such memory imprints are not erasable.

Crick and Robertson (1999, p. 126) note that nothing stays secret forever. One cannot bury

anything permanently. Memories do not go away nor are they lost. Repressed memories always return. Though they may be suppressed for some time, they end up returning. Memories about traumatic experiences do not come at once but mostly through series of flashbacks that are disjointed and fragmented. Though Kyeyune did not suffer direct physical abuse, the constant return of the dead body not only disturbs his peace but also instils fear in him. This highlights the effects of violence on the victim's psychology. Kyeyune is termed mad because it is noted that after the experience of fishing out the body of the Major General, Kyeyune has become scatter-brained and goes about talking to himself, sometimes to trees and buildings (*The Floods*, p. 35). Kyeyune keeps seeing the image of the dead body re-appearing to him even when others do not see it. In this hallucinatory state, it is the image of a dead body that is fixed in his mind underscoring the fact that repressed memories always return.

Kyeyune: Three stabs. Three nails. The man with three nails his limp body in my net...

Kyeyune: The man with the irresistible beckon. Three nails stuck in his skull. (He looks for reassurance. His fright is abating) (The Floods p. 37).

Some of them were destined to be left and they could not find their status and identification. So, it doomed that their minds were full of crisis and cruelty and usually their thoughts were strange and curious. Some pioneers wrote their minds and thoughts in the theatre of the absurd to reveal their inner feelings. In contrast, traditional playwrights involve more extensive themes, such as politics, economics and culture. Playwrights in the theatre of the absurd regard the crisis and cruelty of human beings as one of its themes (Wang & Yuliang, 1995). Cruelty has posed a serious crisis in human life.

Ruganda in *The Floods* depicts a society where life is unbearable and merciless. The citizens are severely oppressed by the government. They are underfed, unclothed, abused, whipped, raped and even killed. Through the dialogue between Bwogo and Nankya, we are meant to know that

men have been deprived of the land that they fought for and the mercenaries are being used to terrorize the populace. Bwogo, who is the agent of the oppressive government, gives orders to the state research bureau to kill the citizens in large numbers. If anybody dared to cross the path of the government, they are then silenced and thrown into the lake.

Nankya says that the island is barricaded with blood, the lake is bubbling with blood like a cauldron and the mainland is choking of it. All these are signs of the killings that were going on in Uganda, at an alarming rate for that matter. Another instance occurs at the international hotel where an innocent man's life is taken away through Bwogo's orders. Reasons: the man was dancing with Nankya, whom Bwogo was interested in. The newspapers reported that it was a case of the most wanted criminal. This shows the heightened oppression that the people of Uganda had to deal with coming from their government. The government-controlled virtually every sector of the land. They were slaves in their own motherland, even after fighting for 'Uhuru,' Kyambade is innocently killed.

What do the papers have to report? He is an agitator paid by the guerrillas to incite the masses against the government. Nowhere was safe. Men are carelessly arrested of false charges, as was the case with Ssalongo, a humble Christian who is brutally arrested on allegations that he was carrying on dubious trade with dangerous men. He is later on shot dead, why? He was accused of trying to escape. The inhumane nature of this government had no boundaries. Killing people was a joke to the government. They killed for their own convenience. They cared less for the human life of the 'insignificant'.

African masters are mannerless and they end up mistreating their employees. Nankya's mother is forced to resign as an ayah for the simple reason that she could not tolerate her boss who threw her inner clothes which were dirty and her menstrual gear all over the house for her (Nankya's mother) to clean the mess. Bwogo's father underpays her (seventy shillings a month), though is a very hard-

working woman on her job. This meager salary can hardly sustain her, let alone the two of them together. Bwogo father knows this but instead chooses not to care in the simplest way, by adding her a few coins on top. He acts as if he does not have feelings. When Nankya's granny passes on, it is natural that the poor rings, Nankya will mourn her. We expect Bwogo's father to understand this. On three contraries, he insists that he does not want noise, forcing Nankya's mother to slap Nankya whenever she mourned her grandmother.

The government uses the radio to lie to the people about the impending floods. They are lured into getting into the rescue boats which are to take them to a safer place. Given the position of the government, they are supposed to know that the masses look up to them for guidance and leadership and that they will do as told. The government then takes advantage of this fact and lies to them. The sole purpose was for Nankya and her mother to die in the rescue boat. Since they survive, the rest of the people are unlucky and get sprayed on with bullets from the S. R.B boys. This is a very callous act on the side of the government, and only proves the heights of the oppression and brutality that had rocked Uganda under Amin's regime.

Because of the harsh conditions, all that Kyeyune thinks of portrays a lot of cruelty and dehumanizing actions. Men were viciously killed for no apparent reason. The fisherman found a head and three nails on it, with its genitals mutilated. It is apparent that the victim suffered much before he breathed his last. It was like the government was on a killing spree, killing all and sundry. If you posed any kind of threat to the people in the office, you were as good as dead, regardless of the deeds committed. There is no one who could have illustrated this point clearly and drove the point home to all the doubting Thomases, as opposed to the poor guy who posed as a stumbling block between Bwogo and his love for Nankya, for he did not last long before being arrested for being 'the most wanted criminal' Less than three months later he is killed.

The climax of this vice comes knocking when the government under Bwogo decides to kill people, with the intentions of killing Nankya. He organizes the rescue boats that would take the people to safety, but it takes them to their fate. It surpasses the human mind as to how far one can go to assert his/her superiority. If Bwogo wanted to get rid of Nankya, was it necessary for him to take down the whole lot, and ironically the target still escapes the untimely death. This so absurd, and it shows how evil man has become so inhuman to the extent of killing others for the sake of leadership gains. The land is said to have been barricaded with human blood. Through this hyperbole, we get to know just how many killings and suffering have taken place in Uganda. To confirm how the people were killed and thrown into the lake, Nankya says:

“Nankya...this lake can't complain, though. It has been the dumping tomb of many men...lorryfuls of wailing civilians, driven to their deaths, over the cliff at the point of bayonets. The crocodiles have never been more thankful...” (The Floods, p. 19).

Nankya criticizes the state for dumping the bodies by ironically pointing out that:

Nankya: ...let us dump the bloody bodies in the lake. Minimal pollution...And everybody applauded and agreed you deserved the annual antipollution award. That's distinguished service for you. (The Floods p. 35).

Ruganda again here uses irony to condemn the state. A state that sees violence as normalcy and an act worth praising is absurd. While killing in itself is an abhorrent act, it is very interesting that the world, as noted in the above scene, applauded the dumping of bodies in the lake. In this case, murder is regarded as a normal activity that even deserves an award. Ruganda is clearly rebuking the extent to which society has lost its value for human life where, instead of criticizing violence, the people celebrate! The irony here serves to awaken society into detesting violence and acts of inhumanity.

Bwogo is further presented as a tyrant through his romantic/abusive relationship with Nankya. Though they are purported to be lovers, Bwogo's rescue plan to 'save' the islanders from the coming floods was to ensure that Nankya dies in the ill-fated boat. This is because Nankya is said to know so much about Bwogo's involvement with the state killings. The state that should safeguard the lives of its people is solely perpetuating the vice in an honourable way.

Nankya: Nankya and her mother had to be on the boat. Then the pre-planned accident. The massacre in the boat...your hands and conscience would appear clean. (The Floods, p. 67).

To further portray his brutality and cruelty, Bwogo actually roughs up Kyeyune and fights Nankya many times in the play. He pushes and shoots at Kyeyune when Kyeyune seeks refuge at Nankya's house. Bwogo, who is a symbol of power in the play and has the authority to do as he wills. Bwogo expects to be treated as the boss. Kyeyune even calls him 'master' indicating that he must be obeyed yet Bwogo uses this position abusively. Through dialogue, where Nankya is reminding Bwogo of his past, Bwogo turns to the use of physical assault.

Bwogo: Stop it damn you! (He pounces on her. There is a struggle during which Kyeyune enters excitedly. Bwogo who is startled by this unexpected intrusion draws a pistol from his jacket and fires. He misses. Kyeyune has collapsed to the ground....)

Nankya: Bwogo! You have killed him. (Tries to move towards Kyeyune: Bwogo pulls her back)

Bwogo: Don't. (His pistol at the ready)

Nankya: You've killed an innocent man-again. (The Floods p. 36).

Bwogo physically assaults Nankya for having exposed him. The uncovering of Bwogo's violent past leads him to 'fresh' violence. Bwogo gets constantly unnerved and even goes to the extent of shooting. Nankya risks losing her life by attempting to expose the ill-nature of the state and its agents against the people. In such a violent

situation, attempts are made to silence the subjects even when the state should be rebuked.

Bwogo: (Slaps her hard) STOP IT! Nankya: You slapped me because I told the truth. (The Floods, p. 33).

This not only elaborates the state's ability to destroy life at will but also shows how power works to the detriment of the powerless. Those who speak against the state risk being killed. Similarly, in a-play- within-a-play, Bwogo acts the role of an army officer. Ruganda here enacts a scene that portrays the violent and abusive nature of the military men. This scene reflects how the security forces were used by the repressive state to abuse and kill.

Bwogo: I'm hereby warning you that unless you cooperate fully with the law enforcing officers, you will face...

Nankya: Firing squad. Is that it?

Bwogo: ...Place of birth?

Nankya: General ward...National hospital. Floor mucked with faeces and vomit. The walls with blood stains. Every patient choking with the stench.

Bwogo: (His patience has run out. He grabs her and twists her hand behind the back) Bloody bastard. What do you think you are? We have tried to be civil with you... (forces her into a squatting position...gets out his pistol and points at her temple). (The Floods, p. 42).

Ruganda paints the violent situation in the state through the use of a violent officer who represents the oppressive state. Bwogo's ruthless language further characterizes him as a brutal leader who disregards life. Nankya, who is a representation of the oppressed, is forced to give information that would determine whether she lives or dies. The powerful state designs by all means the people's destinies. The people's fate lies in the hands of their leaders whose only language is violence. Focusing on the characterization of the oppressed in the play, Ruganda uses Kyeyune and Nankya to speak about the predicament of the violated subject. The feebleness of Kyeyune lends him to

physical harassment first, by the Headman and later by Bwogo.

Bwogo shouts and hurls insults at him: "Oh! This infernal moron, what are you good for? Wouldn't even be worth the worms" (The Floods p. 65).

Nankya is also later raped by Bwogo. Thinking of the figure of Nankya and her mother as repressed women who were both raped by military men serving the state, Ruganda uses them to make metaphorical reference to the state that uses its machinery to violate its people's rights and to abuse the powerless. Though speaking of a form of violence that most women and girls suffered during the tyrannical regime, the raping is a symbolic reference to how the masses have been raped by their leaders and are denied security and the good governance that they expect from the state.

The world is unsafe to man. The incident that made Kyeyune not go fishing is an element of cruelty. Many people are killed mercilessly and yet nothing significant is done to curb this. Kyeyune: Once upon a time a young fellow, I used to fish mputa twice your size and half as easy as I have just demonstrated. So let me be. Yes, I was the best fisherman in these parts until one day something strange happened to me.

Headman: Are you or are you not moving to the boat?

Kyeyune: (He ignores the question) It was a normal day, by all signs. It was early evening when I set sail..... I knew it was a big catch. Do you know what it was son? A man. A military man dead. Three nails in his head, his genitals sticking out in his mouth. A big stone rolled his neck. His belly ripped open and the intestines oozing out his mouth. I looked at that body, son, and froze with fright. (The Floods p. 13-14).

The death of the military man reveals that the state killed people who seem to be a threat to the national security, criticism and also those who speak against the government. People are murdered and many lived in fear because they are not sure whether they will live to see the next day.

Kyeyune vowed never to go fishing fearing what he saw. This seems to be a tool used by the state to silence the masses, make them submissive and governable. Others were also made great but in that state of pride, they are dealt with accordingly. Geertz (1980) argues that the state “puts on a drama that serves as a symbolic expression of what greatness is” (p. 102).

Although Geertz’s discussion of Negara reveals a state that is governed by rituals rather than by force, the ‘drama’ that accompanies the celebrative events in Bali causing a big scene in the nation-state is what we are likening to the state’s absurdity in *The Floods*. It is noted that Ruganda uses language and a careful choice of words to not only point out the height of violence but also to speak about the sick condition of the state. The mention of the general ward, hospital, walls with blood stains and patients denote a seriously ill and dying nation. The country is represented as being sick and in dire need of an urgent remedy.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes by agreeing with what Esslin (1991) asserts that in plays that are categorized as belonging to the ‘theatre of the absurd’, “the human condition is presented as a concrete poetic image that is at the same time broadly comic and deeply tragic” (p. 337). *The Floods* and *Shreds of Tenderness* are regarded as absurdist because of the presence of the horrific and the severely mutilated bodies that are presented in a comical nature to express the ugly reality. Of great importance is the fact that the absurd is ‘designed to shock [the] audience into full awareness of the horror of the human condition (Esslin, 1991, p. 17).

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