

A PHILOSOPHICAL LABYRINTH: TRACING TWO CRITICAL MOTIFS IN KEZILAHABI'S PROSE WORKS¹.

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Introduction

This study aims at studying one of the most important contemporary Kiswahili writers: Euphrase Kezilahabi. In a way this paper can be seen as a continuation of my earlier articles on the same writer. It is definitely different from the other ones though a certain thread links them: the interest in Kezilahabi's philosophy². In this paper my interest is with two main motifs namely *contemptus mundi* and *carpe diem*. *Contemptus mundi* is a Latin expression for contemptible world, world as a bad place and one that is perceived contemptuously.

Carpe diem is equally a Latin expression, which is a short form of the saying: *carpe diem quam minimum credula postero*, which translates as "seize the day trust tomorrow as little as possible". This particular adage is premised on the philosophy of the ephemeral nature of life, the finitude nature of life. It encapsulates the concept and philosophy that life is too short, a *vita brevis* motif, and hence it is better to enjoy the present day while it is there. This particular message is not captured better elsewhere than in the Babylonian Epic of Gilgamesh where the hero, Gilgamesh, eager to undertake a journey in an effort to attain immortality is counselled thus:

O Gilgamesh why dost thou run in all directions
The life thou seekest thou shalt never find
When the gods created man
They gave him *Death*
Life they kept in their own hands
Fill thy belly
Night and day rejoice
*Make every day a festival*³ (New Larrouse Encyclopedia of Mythology 1959:72, my emphasis)

There is a sense in which these motifs seem to contradict. *Carpe diem* is premised on the philosophy of enjoying life in the world where as the world in question is a contemptible world as the Arabs would say *Al-dunya jifa la yuhibbuhu illa l kilabu*. (The world is carrion that can only be fought for by dogs)

¹ This is an extensively revised version of an earlier paper published as "Contemptus mundi and Carpe diem motifs in Kezilahabi's works" (Wamitila 1997a).

² Wamitila 1991; Wamitila [forthcoming]a.

³ New Larrouse Encyclopedia of Mythology (1959:72); my emphasis.

I intend to explore the said motifs in Kezilahabi's prose works: *Rosa Mistika*, *Kichwamaji*, *Gamba la Nyoka*, *Dunia Uwanja wa Fujo*, *Nagona and Mzingile*. The latter two works are slightly short, lacking the novel length of the other four works. I do not, however, want to entangle myself in the polemics of genre as to what a novel or novella is. I will, however, regard the two as novellas at least by the virtue of their length.

The corpus

I have argued elsewhere that a number of Kiswahili literary critics do not seem to admire and enthuse at the mode of philosophy that Kezilahabi espouses and propagates in his works. His early works abound with deaths⁴. This is an issue that has been taken by some Kezilahabi critics as a marker of structural weakness in his characterisation. It may be important to note that in existentialist literature in which Kezilahabi's works tend to be classified the theme of death occupies a very important, in fact central, position. It is this thematic side that seems to have escaped the critics' views. Kezilahabi's first novel *Rosa Mistika* was banned in Tanzania from being taught under the pretext of its theme which was seen as being discordant to moral values of the society⁵. Commenting on the earlier mentioned death motif Kezilahabi explains:

It is the way I look at tragedy. A death puts a definite end to a tragic development, a point from which you can trace back (Bernarder 1977:49, quoted in Bertoncini 1989:116).

Another noticeable feature in Kezilahabi's works which reaches its apogee with publication of the cryptic novellas, *Nagona and Mzingile*, is the preoccupation with the philosophical, the meaning of life, the place of God in the mechanical cosmos, the place of the Self *vis a vis* the society, the concept and meaning of happiness, death *ad infinitum*. Kezilahabi's critics insist that his portrayal of characters that prefigure the society is pejorative, even negativist, with overt leanings and theoretical basis on existentialism. The writer confessed to me that he has been influenced greatly by existentialist writers especially Martin Heidegger and Friedrich Nietzsche though he himself professes another mode of philosophy which he calls *African philosophy*. It is axiomatic that an ideological influence does not presuppose an influence of the particular writer's experience though it may influence how he perceives or explains his experience.

It may be necessary to note that existential philosophy part of which Kezilahabi espouses eschews thin and oversimplified picture of humanity. Barrett observes:

⁴ See *Rosa Mistika* (Regina, Ndalo, Rosa, Zakaria), *Kichwamaji* (Kalia, Kazimoto's mother, Kazimoto etc.), *Dunia uwanja wa Fujo* (Tumaini, Misango, Muyango, Kapinga, DC, Mugala's husband, etc.) *Gamba la Nyoka* (the reference to the settling of villagers)

⁵ Bertoncini (1992) argues that this novel was seen as a scandal because it handled the theme of prostitution. I however feel making prostitution the central theme in *Rosa Mistika* may be over reading, the work unless the word prostitution is used in a very broad sense.

The Marxist and positivist picture of man is thin and oversimplified. Existential philosophy as result against such oversimplification attempts to grasp the image of the whole man even where this involves bringing to consciousness all that is dark and questionable in his existence (Barett 1962:22)

What most seem to abhor or loathe to in Kezilahabi's works are the "dark" and the "questionable": Life, Death, God, Happiness, Truth, Religious bankruptcy etc. Part of the abhorrence is attributable to the fact that few of us dare to be philosophical, make an attempt at full understanding of ourselves, our total picture. We dread to take up the challenge Socrates, who may have been the first existentialist (Fowles 1980:116), gave to philosophers: *Know thyself*

Much has been written about existentialism but suffice to say it was a movement or philosophy that seemed to express a certain historical mood or better still atmosphere, one of despair and disillusionment. An example of such scenario is captured very well in Germany in the years following the defeat in the Second World War. At such a time the overriding issue, one can argue, was that of survival and hence it was easy to identify oneself with philosophical thinking whose elementary and primary tenets were Anxiety or Dread (*Angst*), Worry (*Sorge*), Failure (*Scheitern*), and being cast down (*Geworfenheit*)

It will be remembered that after 1940 continental Europe witnessed a diffusion of existentialism in a diversity of interests the main having been religious, metaphysical, moral and political. Well could one allude to the same state in Kezilahabi's works most of which are against the background of abysmal failures of Tanzania's *Ujamaa* mode of Socialism? Was the general mood as bad as it is captured by the pervasive pathos in Kezilahabi's works?

The motif of *carpe diem* is traceable to Horace and was once a popular poetical theme among the leading poets. This particular theme is seen in *Odes* 1.11 (a more detailed treatment of it is available in *Odes* 3.29). It is a motif that was easily and symbolically captured by the flower rose. It is on this elemental premise that I would argue that the motif is hinted in Kezilahabi's first by the very title of the work *Rosa Mistika* (*mysterious rose/mystic rose*) which also has an implication of tragedy. In this novel the reader follows the eponymous heroine through her home to school where wanting to break the parental code cage she ends up plunging herself into a different world altogether.

This is a world characterised by indifference, hypocrisy, spiritual aloofness and other equally malevolent forces. The institutions entrusted with rearing and shaping up the individual seem to either have discarded their responsibilities or are simply oblivious of what behoves them. There is not much Rosa can do as an individual, she is tossed here and there by whimsical forces of nature. Her tumultuous life ends tragically in a suicide.

Rosa's father, a dipsomaniac, is the best embodiment of the *carpe diem* philosophy. To Zakaria, life is just but drinking something he does with utmost relish and zest, his every day, his every single day is a festival of sorts as such it does not worry, least of all concern, him to take the money meant for Rosa's education for his drink. It in fact calls for his wife's concern

to save the situation (about Rosa's education) Zakaria is simply seizing the day, enjoying the present day

The strict Zakaria does little to prepare his daughter in life. It is therefore not surprising that when Rosa gets the first chance from home she plunges into immorality- the immoral world coaxes her-which reaches its climax when she is a student at Morogoro Teachers' College. It is while she is here that her moral turpitude is captured by the image of a laboratory. This is an allusive nickname she is given by her college mates owing to her moral decadence. It is here that the writer shows the bankruptcy of Christianity when a Catholic father goes to counsel Rosa but does not make any efforts to address her immediate problems but prefers to dwell on the visionaries of good tomorrow. Like a rose, Rosa's life is equally short though packed with all sorts of happenings. She dies on the same day as her parents. These tragic and coincidental deaths serve to buttress the life- is- short (*vita brevis*) motif. One may easily be inclined to conclude that there is an implicit or covert message by the writer that humanity should make the best of the present day or the day that is at hand. Kezilahabi seems to impress upon us to come to terms with the lives we have despite the attendant frustrations or the labyrinthine chaos. Regina, Rosa's mother, leads a life of mistreatment from her reckless husband, she dies sad and so does her neighbour Ndalo who despite his frantic, even desperate, efforts some of which border on carnival humour, does not manage to get the child her graves for and has to die childless.

Kezilahabi's philosophy rises to a higher plane in *Kichwamaji*. This novel examines the concept of alienation and its concomitant effects like the generation gap evidenced by conflicting tendencies.

In this work Kezilahabi shows how the educated have imbibed western values and by so doing immersed themselves in foreign cultural tastes and aesthetic appreciation as shown by Manase's ideas about African and Western music.

The generation gap which ideally has the effect of colonial education as its underlying motivation is well exemplified by the Manase-Old man encounter in the early parts of the novel where the former castigates the latter from his office. We also witness the same thing in the debate between Kazimoto and a man about the existence (or lack of it) of God or when Salima (Manase's wife) faces her cook, an old man, when he comes late for work. In *Kichwamaji*, Kezilahabi addresses the issues of life, its meaning (or lack of it) the place of self and the concept of happiness. Happiness seems to be an elusive reality as Kezilahabi's hero (or is he an anti-hero?), Kazimoto, claims that it is this reality that makes humanity to project the image of heaven where all the ills of this world will be redressed. Here we are reminded of Platonic theory that man escapes the individual confinement imposed by the here and now by his brain, which has the power to contemplate eternity. In a debate Manase reminds Kazimoto of the importance of not preoccupying oneself with the thoughts about death since by that way one's life will be enjoyable; one should enjoy one's present day. He is, I surmise, counselling him to live today and forget tomorrow.

In *Kichwamaji*, we follow Kezilahabi's characters as they wade through the quagmire of life. The villages pervade witchcraft, petty revenges, jealousies, adultery and moral decadence. The towns are not any different; life in the world is portrayed as a frustrating experience to the individual yet something that is there for a very short time. This is captured graphically by the imagery in Manase's compound, which was once exuberant with happiness, hope and anticipation but later creeps into sadness, despair and extreme apathy. The image of a bird residing in his car draws into the mind the images of the desolate Pate after the fall of the once opulent power-wielding Lords. Owls reside where the once powerful Lords were massaged to sleep by *belle dames*. In *Kichwamaji* we actually get the *ubi sunt* formula mood of the venerated *Al-Inkishafi*.

Kezilahabi may actually be warning the readers (as Sayyid Nassir does in *Al-Inkishafi*) of the corrupt nature of the world, it is a raging sea of sorts. It is important to note the archetype of bird in Kezilahabi's novel, which encodes of the very nature of life.

Contemptus mundi is epitomised by a Makonde carving in Manase's house which, as he explains, embodies or symbolises the frustrations endemic in life. Life is seen as a slow death hence as we live or better as we wade through life, the writer tells us, we are actually shedding away some part of our lives. I am tempted to compare this position with that of Fowles' in his *Aristos* who contends that the happiness and the pleasure human beings experience is a product of death. This is definitely a cryptic puzzle. Manase tells his friend Deusdedit (addicted god?) Kazimoto:

tunapoishi tunakufa, kwa hiyo kufa ni kuishi. (Kezilahabi 1974: 206)
as we live, we die slowly, so dying is living

Is Kezilahabi alluding to the axiomatic biological reality? Whatever the case, human life is presented as some incomprehensible labyrinth. The debate between Manase-Kazimoto about death and the meaning of life portrays them as psychotics and sociopaths of some kind. This excessive addiction with the metaphysical has won Kezilahabi a lot of ridicule from some of his ardent critics.

Gamba la Nyoka furthers the *contemptus mundi* by showing the cruelty and inhumanity that characterised Tanzania's implementation of its Ujamaa type of socialism. Besides cruelty and inhumanity, the implementation was riddled with corruption and had a revenge motif as a motivating force. We also notice this particular reality in Mung'ong'o's *Njozi Iliyopotea* in the character of the arrogant and bloated party secretary Lupituko and his cohorts. A similar case is seen in the stylistically inferior *Nyota ya Huzuni* by Liwenga. In Kezilahabi's novel, we see the villagers of Bucho being deployed in moving their counterparts from Kisole to the designated Ujamaa village. As readers we empathise with the villagers of Kisole when they are subjected to humiliation under the scorching sun and when they are dead beat, a District Commissioner pours his hollow rhetoric about Ujamaa in the guise of a political lesson.

Later they are forced to vacate their homes under heavy torrents - a powerful archetypal image. In a nutshell, the writer shows that this particular system was not only poorly implemented but also, by inference, poorly through out. The latter is best exemplified by the debate between the young graduates Mamboleo and Mambosasa on the tenets of Socialism which only serves to show the hollowness of the whole idea which was either too theoretical or /and misunderstood. The graphic image of the bat dangling on the roof while Mambosasa reads some Marxist excerpts is particularly instructive. One cannot avoid noticing the irony in Kezilahabi's choice of names of the young graduates, Mambosasa (Lit. Present affairs/matters) and Mamboleo (Lit. Today's matters/affairs). As a digressive observation, it may be worth noting that Kezilahabi uses a number of allegorical names to buttress his incisive irony and humour.

Gamba la Nyoka also furthers the hypocrisy endemic and pervasive in Christianity through the person of Padre Mandevu (a Catholic father) and one of his faithfuls, Mama Tinda. The latter's uncritical and blind embrace of religion makes her think that her submitting to the will of Padre Mandevu, also allegorically called Emptyhead, is part of her divine obligation. The writer captures religious hypocrisy (or is it spiritual apostasy?) in a cynical and rather comical episode (indeed incisively humorous) when the churchman visits Mama Tinda in her home as he went to something wins the children trenchant innuendoes and poignant ridicule from their peers. The churchman gives her a picture of Virgin Mary with the writing:

Tu solatium et refugium
Virgo Mater Maria (Kezilahabi 1979)
(You are a relief and refuge Virgin Mother Mary)

Mama Tinda might as well be a refuge for the churchman. Later the writer tells us of a situation when a picture of Mama Tinda's naked self drops from Mandevu's Bible. One would suppose that this is an immoral gesture within the confines of morality citadel. We witness all these as Mandevu fights Mamboleo and the impulsive Mambosasa when they confront him on account of his sermon which they feel is against the government's policies particularly the "villagization" policy.

Dunia Uwanja wa Fujo may be regarded as the quintessence of the *contemptus mundi* motif. This is in my view Kezilahabi's most mature novel where he integrates his philosophy, theme, ideology and style to make a good and powerful synthetic whole. The narration is quite forceful and so are imagery and symbolism. A staring symbol is the bird flying with a broken leg when the story opens. Right from the beginning of this novel the writer paints an absurd and contemptible picture of the world; a kind of chaotic circus where humanity writhe in suffering through out its existence. Kezilahabi notes:

Lakini dunia ngumu kueleweka Hakujataokea nukta moja kupita bila mwanadamu fulani kuwa msibani Mtu mmoja anapokunywa pombe ndani ya bar (sic) na wanawake wamemzunguka, mwingine anakufa. Mmoja anapokimbia asipigwe na mvua mwingine analilia tone la maji (Kezilahabi 1981:21)

But the world is a puzzle. Not a single minute elapses without a person being in a misfortune: While one drinks beer in the midst of women another one dies elsewhere. As one runs away from rain, another cries for want of a drop of water.

This is the picture of the world. The villages as in *Kichwamaji* are replete with all sorts of evils: revenges, witchcraft, thefts, mob justice (or injustice) *ad infinitum*. The towns are not spared either. We see revenges for example the case of Tumaini and Makoroboi, Tumaini and the proprietor of *Africans' Royal Bar*. The towns also pervade prostitution, adultery, and wreckage of the institution of marriage, mistrust and exploitation. The debate between Tumaini and Dennis epitomises the motif in question. The latter contends that life in the world is chaotic and nobody seems exempt from that unfortunate reality. The chaotic nature of the world is complicated by the fact that it is virtually hard to attain happiness. This is an important *leitmotif* in Kezilahabi's works. Dennis tells Tumaini:

Tumaini furaha ni wazo tu ambalo linaweza kusukuma mwanadamu mbele ili kumwagamiza ama kumuendeleza. Lakini mwanadamu hatalishika mkononi (Kezilahabi 1981:163)

Tumaini, happiness is just an illusory thought, which may propel a human being forward to destroy or develop him. Unfortunately he will never get hold of it.

The protagonist's, Tumaini, life captures this. He is pampered son of Kapinga, a teacher, and his wife, Muyango. Both parents are later "killed" (through witchcraft!) by Mugala who is avenging her husband's death. Tumaini inherits a fortune from his parents and he plunges himself into a *dolce far niente*- carefree existence. He later flees the village - Bugolola - fearing the wrath of the enraged villagers who can no longer play passive to his amorous and decadent character. Another factor that makes Tumaini escape from the village is the shame of his deceased(!) parents who walk around as zombies naked. When he gets to Shinyanga with his friend John and a girl he had escaped with and who becomes his wife, he continues his carefree life. Later he has to join Dennis in a security job for want of money; this is a job that turns him as it had Dennis, into a *bête noire*, a pariah among his earlier acquaintances. This particular job nearly costs his life; consequently he abandons it and resorts to farming which makes him a rich person after a lot of sacrifice on his part. At the apex of his success, Ujamaa gets a new impetus after the Arusha Declaration of 1967.

The Declaration was an outcome of a party meeting held in Arusha between January 26-29, one would suppose quite a short time to deliberate on the destiny of a nation. The Arusha Declaration preached against exploitation while exhorting Tanzanians to be self-reliant. Tumaini has to surrender what he has belaboured to acquire, as he typifies an exploiter according to a District Commissioner. The pain is however so much for him that he shoots a District Commissioner. Kezilahabi does not go into the encyclopaedic details of the implementation of Ujamaa but zeroes down on Tumaini as a character the general and broad perception in *Gamba la Nyoka* tapers down to the individual in this novel. I must hasten to note that the approach in *Dunia Uwanja wa Fujo* is microscopic enough to capture the general

mood. At the end of the novel Tumaini is killed in front of his country's flag. We are left posing on the place of the Self in the society. Maybe Tumaini was overcome or intoxicated with *amour propre* or what Ohly calls extreme selfishness (Ohly 1981:27)

I have observed that Kezilahabi's philosophy reaches its climax in his two novellas, *Nagona* and *Mzingile*. These two works differ from his earlier works in a number of ways. The mode of narration is quite different and so is the characterisation, it is rather difficult to identify characters in the traditional sense of character analysis. It is actually possible to say that we have a case of cancelled characters in these works, a character is exposed as a textual function.⁶ A critic used or wont to the traditional methods is likely to run into an analytical impasse approaching Kezilahabi's characters in these two prose works. In these works the writer furthers the theme of the meaning of life by focusing on a number of human attempts to comprehend the base and the central meaning of it symbolised by the ability to get hold of the elusive lady or enter the hermeneutic circle. In pursuit and development of this motif the writer focuses on some of the ills that pervade human life: killings in the world, religious hypocrisy and deaths brought about by human beings' failure to grasp the logic of existence. In *Nagona* the writer comments on economic plunder in the world and the role of capitalist countries, Hitler's nazism premised on the super race notion, American Red Indians' hecatomb, imperialism and atheism. Kezilahabi examines some of the human efforts to understand life and to perfect human existence: psychoanalysis, philosophy, Marxism, religion and mythology.

He however seems to underscore the chaotic nature of the efforts. The chaotic nature on the world is captured by the struggles of Marx, Hegel, Freud and their African counterparts. The writer is here implicitly telling us that all the ideologies and the many *isms* in the world are primarily geared towards one thing: interpreting reality and understanding our Being. There is a sense that Kezilahabi is also trying his hand at the ever simmering debate about the role of Africa in world civilisation and one that has been given a forceful articulation by Osabutey - Aqedze in his polemical *Principles underlying African Religion and Philosophy* (1990).⁷

Mzingile furthers the motif of search or quest for meaning of life and /or being symbolised by the elusive lady, a symbol borrowed from Friedrich Nietzsche.

This novella has the myth of Kakulu that I have argued elsewhere could as well be an examination of the concept of God (see Wamitila 1991:62-67). If we were to regard it as such then it would be expedient to note that from the onset Kezilahabi seems to question, maybe even disregard, and the First Cause argument about God.

In this work the writer paints a picture of a world bedevilled by hypocrisy, revolutions, chaos, anguish of here and now, plunder and lack of order and love. This situation seems to

⁶ I have raised this point in Wamitila [forthcoming]b.

⁷ D. G. Maillu, one of the leading African popular literature writers, has also tried his hand at this debate focusing on political aspects in his polemical, and maybe controversial *African indigenous Political Ideology*. 1997

shake the very axis of the world, the *axis mundi*, on which human life hinges. The result of this is fear or better still dread of destruction of human life. This epitomises some key elements of existential thought clothed in African mythology and pastoral images of gazelle. Indeed, this bipolar approach (of European existentialist thought and African philosophy) is the central pivot of Kezilahabi's philosophical fascinations (see Kezilahabi 1985).

Some observations on *Nagona* and *Mzingile*

It is fairly hard for one to say a last word on *Nagona* and *Mzingile* but one thing can be observed with certainty; most readers of Kiswahili novel or prose feel that Kezilahabi has escaped their mental grip. These works are heavily steeped in symbolism and imagery.

Maybe future critics of *Nagona* and *Mzingile* may have to resort to eclectic approaches in order to be able to address the many thematic and varying stylistic elements in these two powerful works. It may be possible to approach the works from a psychoanalytic or mythopoetic point of view in view of the number of mythical structures or formulas and a number of motifs like dream, journey, circle, desert and valley. It is possible to read the process of the development of the consciousness from the archetypal unconsciousness to full maturation in the career of the heroes of the two works in the two works.

The experiences the heroes undergo in the duo can be seen as the struggles of the Ego (consciousness) to separate itself from the uroboric state with the Self yet maintaining its link with through the Ego-Self axis.

The tribulations and struggles can also be symbolic of the various stages of this development. There is alienation for example something that is central in the process of individuation which in its *maturation* is marked by what Carl Gustav Jung called mandala symbolism in the form of a square or circle. The presence of a father and a mother figure becomes important in the initiation of the hero. The same can also be said of the darkness that envelops the hero in *Nagona* and the journey seemingly to the unknown in *Mzingile*, a transformatory stage something close to Jonah-in-the-stomach-of-the-whale episode.

If we follow this approach we can therefore observe that the penetration into the Circle is the apex of the process of individuation, the independence of the Ego yet their cordial link through the axis. Jungian analytical psychology contends that every human being is essentially androgynous in nature; he has both the female and the male elements in him. The female in man is *anima* while the man in the woman is *animus*. The lady who guides the hero in *Mzingile* and at times subjects him to some trying times moments may be his *anima*. The gazelle and the bird that the hero strives to get hold of may be projections of human ambitions. In the two novellas there is a journey from point A through to B and C back to A. This may be a cyclical representation of the process of *maturation*; the end of which one understands oneself fully as Socrates advised. The case of this particular approach is made strong by the mythical elements in the works. The writer actually insists that the core of these works is Ukerewe folklore. I do

not intend to pursue this Jungian approach further here since it is a subject of a different paper (Wamitila 1997b).

One issue that has to be mentioned here is that it does not seem fair to criticise these two works just on the basis of their failing to stick to traditional structural forms. Indeed one of the qualities that one notices with many world literatures is a kind of transformation or a stylistic shift from the chronological straight forward story taken as a prototype of depicting human life and character to methods that are marked by complexities of plot and narration. It is possible to see the two as the best examples of modernist and postmodernist works in Kiswahili literature. If this is the case it may actually be said that Kezilahabi's earlier works do to a certain degree portray him as an incipient modernist or postmodernist. It is also possible to argue that a number of issues in these two works easily calls to mind the concept or movement of expressionism initially associated with visual art and one which springs from some form of a violent anti realism and is premised on the refusal to imitate or repeat or even reproduce what already exists. As the Germans who are associated with this movement would say *Die Welt ist da. Es wäre sinnlos, sie zu wiederholen* (The world is here, it would be senseless to repeat it).

Expressionists therefore tended to abstract from reality. Literary works that can be classified as expressionist tend to have a dynamic use of imagery, some kind of discontinuity of thought and action. An expressionist writer occupies him or herself with the fate or destiny of man who finds himself in a world that is on the verge of disintegrating. A number of these tendencies are actually apparent in Kezilahabi's *Nagona* and *Mzingile*. A close scrutiny of these two works exposes elements that are associated with magical realism. First, one feels that the writer explores and transgresses ontological and generic boundaries as well as fusing spaces, worlds and systems that in would otherwise not be fused. Second, we do notice situations in which fantasy is interwoven in the structure of the works with hallucinatory scenes as well as phantasmagoric characters, in the heroes of the two works.

The Oral-Written Interface in *Nagona* and *Mzingile*

A close scrutiny of these two works reveals pervasive oral literature elements. One of the most explicit markers is Kezilahabi's concept of time in the two works. As I noted in an earlier paper, Kezilahabi does not use time in the conventional manner as one notices in his earlier works or as commonly seen in novels written within the realist mode or episteme to use Michael Foucault's term. This concept of time, mythical time, I surmise is a common feature of oral literature. However, the most glaring element that focuses our attention to the Oral written interface is in characterisation. Kakulu, as a fictional character in *Mzingile* is clearly premised on oral epics. In his creating this character Kezilahabi certainly assimilates oral epic elements revolving around the ancestry of the hero, the birth hero, initiation and magical or extraordinary endowments. The observable parallel between him and Oral epic heroes

immensely reinforces Kakulu, as a fictional character. There is a use of a hyperbolic and ornate style in the two works that is very much in consonance with the heroic of Oral poetry.

The description of the person of Kakulu, his special talents which endear him to the villagers, his physical appearance as well as his nearly awe inspiring feats is pre-eminence that is a feature one associates with oral epic heroism. The following extract qualifies this assertion:

Walimwita Kakulu Sasa bado tunamwita Kakulu na wajao watamwita vivyo hivyo Ukweli wake unazingirwa na ukungu wa kisasili. Hakuna mtu aliyewajua barabara wazazi wake. Kuwako kwake kulianza kama mzaha. Yasemakana kuzaliwa kwake kulikuwa kwa ajabu. Wakati alipokuwa bado tumboni mwa mama yake alisikika mara nyingi akizungumza. Mara nyingi aliingilia kati ya mazungumzo yaliyokuwa yabnaendelea kati ya mamake na wanawake wengine. (Kezilahabi 1991:1)

They called him Kakulu. We still call him Kakulu and those to come will still call him so. The truth of his being is shrouded by mist of myth. Nobody knows for sure who his parents were. His existence started like a joke. It is said that his birth was mysterious. When he was still in his mother's womb he would be hard talking. Quite often he would intrude in the talks between his mother and other women.

The above draws unmistakable parallels in the character of Mwindo in *Mwindo epic* (see Biebuyck and Mateene 1969). We also notice similar motifs in a number of other oral epics. The departure and the consequent journey of Kakulu into the solitude of the mountain is another motif that is common in oral epics right from *Liongo Fumo* through to Anglo-Saxon *Beowulf*, Babylonian/Sumerian *Epic of Gilgamesh*, and the Indian *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. Kezilahabi's Kakulu embodies the saviour motif associated with epic heroes. Besides these few features, there is several other oral literature elements in these works that would demand a study of their own. In fact one has to take this fact into consideration in any analysis of the two works.

Conclusion

In this paper I have endeavoured to study *contemptus mundi* and *carpe diem* motifs in Kezilahabi's works. From the foregoing, we can conclude that *contemptus mundi*, as a thematic motif is more overriding. This particular motif runs through Kezilahabi's works right from the simple *Rosa Mistika* to the complex *Mzingile*.

The degrees with which the writer articulates some of his ideas varies and actually in some works like *Rosa Mistika* one may even say that Kezilahabi articulates existential thought in a somewhat subtle manner as Joseph Conrad in *Heart of Darkness*, and some of his other works, does. Kezilahabi's later works do however portray the anguish of here and now which is in a number of cases linked to existentialist individualism. This existential thought and the contingency and finitude of man is an outgrowth of ontological nihilism. The powerful mental images of nausea and disgust in *Mzingile* recall to mind Armah's *Why are we so blest*

Kezilahabi seems to echo in a way what Albert Camus, an existentialist, once said: *if you want to be a philosopher write novels* (Camus 1955:12)

A number of critics of Kiswahili novel may accuse, even condemn Kezilahabi of almost killing it while it is still in its formative stages, in its *status nascendi*. Most critics would argue that *Nagona* and *Mzingile* came too early in Kiswahili literature; they would argue that the most immediate thing in African Literature in general and Kiswahili literature in particular is to address the physical first, what is around us then later we could attempt to confront the metaphysical. It may be so, but critics may have to content that the two have the most powerful imagery and symbolism in Kiswahili literature this far. If some readers cannot comprehend the duo others can.

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