

# How Mercy Mirembe Ntangaare Uses Oral Literary Forms to Develop Her Themes and Characters in the Selected Plays

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## Abstract:

The study focused on analyzing the deployment of oral literary forms in selected plays by Mercy Mirembe Ntangaare, specifically 'Lady Will You Marry Me?' (2002), 'The Rat Trap and Other Plays' (2006), and 'Semitego the Famous Hunter' (2011). More specifically, it explored how Ntangaare employs various oral literary forms, including songs, oral narratives, oral poetry, riddles, chants and tongue twisters, within her works. These oral forms are integral to African oral literature, characterized by artistic expression, vivid imagination, and accurate observation. The study was guided by two main objectives that is, to examine how Ntangaare utilizes oral literary forms to develop themes and characters in her selected plays, and secondly, to determine the role of these forms in enhancing the entertainment and memorability of the plays. The study employed a qualitative approach, involving the extensive reading of the three Ugandan plays and secondary texts related to the topic. Data analysis was conducted through qualitative textual analysis, grouping data into relevant categories aligned with the research objectives. The study was underpinned by the intertextuality theory to analyze the interdependence of the three selected texts. Intertextuality explores how texts refer to, recycle, and draw from pre-existing texts, providing a framework to discuss the role of oral literary forms in shaping themes and characters within Ntangaare's works. The findings revealed that, Ntangaare primarily employed vivid description, characterization, and point of view to integrate oral literary forms into her plays. The key tenets of intertextuality are instrumental in interpreting and discussing these findings. As a recommendation, the study suggests further research on the use of oral literary forms in the three plays under study, contributing to a deeper understanding of their significance in African literature.

**Key Words - How, Mercy Mirembe Ntangaare, Uses, Oral Literary Forms, Develop, Themes, Characters, and Selected Plays**

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## INTRODUCTION

The oral form is the earliest form of literature across the world. Like African literature, Western literature developed from oral narratives as well. For instance,

Greek and Roman myths or legends like that of Oedipus, Ulysses and Aeneid inspired great works of classical literature. In the same way, the oral forms influenced early Nigerian writers as they attempted to

represent their African experience through the novel or the short story medium. For two decades now, she has been at the center of learning and knowledge transfer as a University lecturer and now Associate Professor of Drama/ Theatre at Makerere University. Currently, she teaches dramatic literature and analysis, folklore (cultural identity studies), and arts marketing. She has conducted research and published a number of scholarly articles in referred journals and books. As part of the requirements for her academic qualifications, Mirembe Ntangaare did a research project on the traditional marriage rite of the Banyankore in South- Western Uganda for her Bachelor of Arts Degree; a Dissertation titled, "The Influence of Uganda Folklore on Ugandan Drama" for her Master of Arts in Literature Degree; and a Thesis titled, "Theatre and the Market in Uganda." for her Doctor of Philosophy Degree. Mirembe Ntangaare has written over 15 plays. She produces and presents theatre particularly with and for young people through her Company, MEBO Theatre Documentaries Ltd, where she also documents culture and ethnic arts. Her current research interests are in cultural identities and e-publishing, particularly audio books, e-books and drama portals. Ntangaare's plays have had a longstanding presence in the literary world, firmly grounded in African oral traditions. Consequently, they wield considerable influence as potent instruments capable of profoundly shaping the manner in which they are both conveyed and embraced. While it is evident that Ntangaare extensively employs various oral literary forms, such as proverbs, songs, oral narratives, tongue twisters, and chants, in her plays, there is a remarkable absence of comprehensive studies that investigate the profound impact of these forms on the development of themes, characters, and the overall entertainment and memorability value of the plays. Literary style is a fundamental aspect of any work of literature, and Ntangaare's unique style, characterized by the prolific use of oral literary forms, demands scholarly attention. The challenge lies in the fact that, despite

their prominence in her writing, the precise influence of these oral forms in plot intricacies, thematic richness, and character depth remains unexplored. This study seeks to bridge this critical gap by examining how Ntangaare's deliberate utilization of oral literary forms shapes the themes and characters and how these forms make her selected plays both entertaining and memorable, thus contributing to the overall artistic and cultural significance of her works.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

In this study, the researcher used only the theory of intertextuality. The definition of intertextuality was created by the French semiotician Julia Kristeva in the 1960s. She created the term from the Latin word *intertexto* which means "to intermingle while weaving." Kristeva argued that all works of literature being produced contemporarily are intertextual with the works that came before it. As she stated "[A]ny text", she argues, "is constructed of a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another. All the definitions under this theoretical framework will be coined under the same scholar Kristeva. The concept of intertextuality dates back to the ancient times when the first human history and the discourses about texts began to exist. As a phenomenon it has sometimes been defined as a set of relations which a text has with other texts and/or discourses belonging to various fields and cultural domains. All texts are intertexts because they refer to, recycle and draw from the pre-existing texts. Any work of art is an intertext which interacts with the other texts, rewrites, transforms or parodies them (Julia, 1990). Intertextuality suggests a range of links between a text and other texts emerging in diverse forms as direct quotation, citation, allusion, echo, reference, imitation, collage, parody, pastiche, literary conventions, structural parallelism and all kinds of sources either consciously exploited or unconsciously reflected. By so doing an intertext transforms or reproduces the texts preceding it. Kristeva argues that the basic tenet of intertextuality

is that the texts contain elements of diction, syntax, structures, themes, ideas and plots that can be identified and imitated in other texts.

## METHODOLOGY

The research study was descriptive. The researcher identified the oral literary forms that were reflected in the three selected texts in line with the given research questions. The kind of description helped me to vividly describe the data that I collected. The researcher used the data qualitatively dwelling on explaining the oral literary forms that Ntangaare uses to develop the plots, themes and characters, and also exploring the effectiveness of the same forms in making the plays entertaining and memorable. In this study, the researcher used positivism paradigm. The deployment of the oral literary forms as reflected in the three selected texts was viewed in terms of reality that is in consonance with societal norms. The fact that the researcher had identified the research topic, a close reading of both the major texts and other relevant works such as articles, newspapers, magazines, journals research reports, accompanied by note – taking around the key events and ideas in each text was employed. The main sources of Data included: “Lady Will You My Me?” (2004), “The Big Flight” (2006), “Semitego – The Famous Hunter” (2007). Journals, relevant texts and research reports were sought from Bishop Stuart University Uganda Christian University, Makerere University and other Universities in the vicinity. Some other information attained from the internet. The key method the researcher used to obtain data was a close reading of the texts. These texts included the Primary texts (East African Plays being researched on) and the secondary texts (other relevant works from other scholars). The data was collected under headings guided by the research objectives. The study involved document review guided by a textual checklist as major research instruments. The checklist comprised of aspects that would help me to internalize the key valuable which is oral tradition. Data was categorized

into themes and sub-themes derived from objectives of the study. The data analyzed would be categorized and edited to suit the set objectives. Such information would then be interpreted and discussed. This would be done and the conclusion would be made whether the research study has achieved the set objectives or not. The researcher used textual analysis technique to interpret and categorize the collected data. During both the analytical and discussion stages, the study particularly considered the quantitative elements of recurrence and frequency with regard to the identified variables initially indicated in the textual checklist.

## RESULTS

### **How Mirembe Ntangaare uses oral literary forms to develop her themes and characters in the plays “Lady Will You Marry Me?”, *The Big Flight* and *Semitego, The Famous Hunter*.**

A number of oral literary forms such as Music, songs, sayings, proverbs, parables, storytelling, and dirges and so on, have been used by the playwright in an attempt to develop the themes and characters. Scholars like Isidore and Finnegan have argued that these are forms of oral literature and they show the type of society that is at hand.

According to Finnegan (2002:504), ‘*It has been well said that a society cannot be fully understood without its songs.*’. There could be several themes that can be identified at a personal gaze, however in my opinion the major themes in the plays include; Courtship and marriage, love, domestic violence, political exploitation and betrayal. In order to expose these themes to surface, the playwright deploys various oral literary forms. These oral literary forms according to Finnegan possess vastly more aesthetic, social, and personal significance than would be gathered from most general publications on Africa. These oral literary forms are again used to develop the characters that are made to behave the way they behave so as to unveil the human character in society.

There are various characters in the plays. Mr. Cat, Lady Mouse, Sister Mouth, Brother Mouse and many others in *Lady, Will You Marry Me?*, then Tortoise, Eagle, Turaco, Crow, Falcon and others in *The Big Flight* and Semitego, Nalongo, Babirye, Kato and Nantabonaboneka in *Semitego, The Famous Hunter*. These characters are clearly understood through the deployment of oral literary forms in Mercy Mirembe Ntangaare's plays. The way the playwright deploys the oral literary forms to develop themes and characters can easily be analyzed as below:

A key feature of oral literature is its performance. This is a unique quality which is both emphasized by Okpewho and Finnegan. One feature of oral literary forms which scholars have increasingly explored over the last 25 years or so is their *performed* quality. Margaret Peil while analyzing Okpewho's works argues that;

As Okpewho characterizes oral performance, *'the spoken are only part of a general spectacle designed to please both the ears and the eyes . . .'* For instance, words in describing a fight between two combatants, an oral narrator is apt to tell us of the action of one or the other: *"He stabbed him, and stabbed him, and stabbed him."* Part of the background to the repetitiveness of that statement comes from the fact that the narrator repeatedly stabbed his or her own hand (or perhaps head) while making the statement. Writers . . . simply write something like *"He stabbed him many times."* (pp. 48-9).

This is clear indication that where there is oral literature, there is performance. The authors of all literature dwell a lot on the action in their works. This is in line with Jane Nandwa's and Okot's definition in which they define oral literature as those utterances, whether spoken, recited or sung, whose composition and performance exhibit to an appreciable degree the artistic characteristic of accurate observation, vivid imagination and ingenious expression.

Ntangaare uses oral narratives to portray various themes in her plays. The play *Lady, Will You Marry Me?* is folktale inspired by a German folktale by "The Brothers of Grimm". Mr. Cat was once great friends with Mr. Mouse and the two came to share a lot in common, including food. Unfortunately for them, there were seasons when severe famine used to strike their land. But like the clever animals that they were, they decided to keep a piece of cheese to fall back to when these hard times came. Together they hid the cheese inside the roof of the church where they were *corc* sure it was safest.

From this folktale, it is clear that the theme of love is developed. The two love birds are in a serious relationship and it is because of this that they plan and work together as members of the same household. But most importantly we learn of this from a folktale which is an oral literary form. This is something from another literature. It proves that the theory of intertextuality is at play in this instance. According to Anna A. Ilunina, the concept of the world as text, characteristic of the current cultural situation, implies that every text, be it literary, historical, social, turns out, regardless of the author's will, involved in interaction with other texts, both created before him and at the same time and written later. So the play, *Lady, Will You Marry Me?* is as a result of an older folktale.

This folktale is easily understood through storytelling. It is told that the two animal families are not friendly as one is always hunting the other but they strike a deal and get married. Story telling is an oral literary form which Ntangaare uses to develop the themes in the play. The story of how Mr. Cat woes and wins the heart of Lady Mouse is so enticing but the disappointment that comes with it is what is strange. This brings out the theme of betrayal that is prevalent in Ntangaare's plays.

In my opinion, the playwright uses this folktale through Mr. Cat to let known the audience believe the

cultural norms that were hitherto accepted in the Cat's family long time ago. The folktale helps us understand the theme of culture as shown in the play, *Lady Will You Marry Me?* Instead this was mere propaganda for Mr. Cat already knew what was going to happen ahead of time. By the end of the play, the equality that was preached before the marriage between the mouse and cat all changes, instead Lady Mouse is strangled and eventually murdered, a clear indication that speech is different from actions. This is so because culturally, the cats and mice are natural enemies. Culture is part of the key features that makes intertextuality valid. This brings in the idea of intertextuality. Maria Jesus Martinez argues that;

*While all authors re-write the work of predecessors, many contemporary writers consciously imitate, quote, plagiarize, parody ... extensively. As Heinrich F. Plett (1991, 27) puts it, ré-écriture dominates écriture in twentieth-century literature: the image for writing has changed from original inscription to parallel script, and writers think less of writing originally and more of re-writing. Even if, as we have said, intertextuality is by no means a time-bound feature, it is obvious those certain cultural periods incline to it more than others and that our century has already witnessed two such phases. In the modernist era, intertextuality is apparent in every section of culture: literature (Eliot, Joyce), art (Picasso, Ernst), music (Stravinsky, Mahler), photography (Heart field, Haussmann), etc.*

This proves that culture is inseparable from literature. Ntangaare dwells very much on culture in Uganda to put forth her play. This therefore proves that the theory of intertextuality is used in the play, *Lady, Will You Marry Me?*

In Ntangaare other plays, *The Big Flight*, it is clear that the oral narrative is presented as a myth. This myth surrounds the theory on how the Tortoise got a cracked shell. Mr. Tortoise travels with birds to pay a visit in heaven but betrays them. They punish him

by not helping him back to the earth and there he jumps and that's why he has a cracked shell. Whereas Mr. Tortoise is friendly to the birds, he cunningly starves them by suggesting that they take new names. He therefore takes on the name, 'Beloved Visitors'. At Falcon's home, they are not aware that the visitors have taken new names and titles and therefore use a general term, beloved visitors which Tortoise takes to be his name and therefore he enjoys everything prepared for the visitors bringing out the theme of betrayal.

This work possibly influenced by other works as no text can exist without other texts. Yi Long and Gaofeng Yu (2020) contend that intertextuality is not only reflected in the level of language and text, but also deeply hidden in the thinking and psychological activities of the original author, translator and translation reader as well as the critics. It is for this theory that the theme of betrayal is understood as one gets to learn that a text exists because of other texts. This betrayal can easily be reflected in the myth studies in various oral literature classes.

Moreover, the play is a fable. The playwright vividly uses the fable to depict the theme of betrayal. In it, he characterizes Mr. Tortoise, a friend to all the birds, who after being convinced to escort the birds' family to visit Falcon to the heavens, he agrees without thought. Mr. Tortoise enjoys popular support among the birds and is elected their leader. Sooner than later, he abuses office because of selfishness and greed. In his greed and selfish tendencies, he disappoints the birds that had trusted him. This is what the whole concept of the play.

The fable is also used to depict the theme companionship. The birds are companions as they pay visit to their fellows as seen when they pay a visit to the Falcon family. This companionship is also seen in the way they are friendly with Mr. Tortoise. This companionship is seen through the fable in the play *The Big Flight*. In the play we learn that being

friendly and in good relationship with others is good and profitable but it is equally important that such should be guarded jealously by the concerned parties. Ruth Finnegan talks of fables that;

*“Characters of African stories also recur throughout the continent. Most familiar of all are the animals, particularly the wily hare, tortoise, spider, and their larger dupes. But there are also many stories about people, ordinary and extraordinary, some about legendary heroes or ancestors, and a few which recount the actions of various supernatural beings. They are also occasionally woven round other personified objects like, say, the parts of the body, vegetables, minerals, the heavenly bodies, or abstractions like hunger, death, or truth.”*

This is true of this particular play. It uses some familiar characters and also talks about some abstract ideas. Therefore the theory of intertextuality is evident. It is clear that what Ntangaare puts forth is based on other works of literature, culture and tradition.

Connected to it being a fable, storytelling which is a key feature African oral literature is used. Through storytelling, the playwright exposes the theme of Patriarchy. This theme comes very much to the fore front because it divides gender relations. The birds, after accepting their inferiority complex as a female (weaker) sex, they believed so much in Mr. Tortoise who became their leader as the head of the family. Even today in the contemporary society in which we live, women are taken to be a weaker sex and have been denied chances of leadership at the fore front.

The fact the Mr. Tortoise was given the authority as the family head; he used the chance to dictate on how his subordinates should conduct themselves at meal time. Instead he ended up starving his fellow guests with whom he had gone. This drives us to yet another theme of greed. Through the playwright we are informed that the tortoise was so greedy in the way

he behaved. First of all he tricked his fellow visitors that in order to avoid embarrassment at the reception, they each needed to own names. This fact comes true through storytelling. It is through the story that we learn that Mr. Tortoise is greedy and selfish after aiming at eating all the food for all Falcon's visitors.

In *Semitego; The Famous Hunter*, still the oral narrative is used to bring out the themes particularly the theme of betrayal as shown in the first two plays. The play brings out a certain fairy tale in Africa. Karooro Okurut in her preface to this play writes that, 'Semitego references a local Buganda fairytale to initiate debate on gender issues, human rights as well as animal rights.' Karooro emphasizes the fact that this play is folktale which brings out the life of Semitego.

As Nandwa and Okot argue when they talk about the performance factor in oral literature, Karooro confirms this by stating that Semitego is presented both visually on paper and on stage, and graphically imprinted on the reader's mind. This oral narrative brings out the theme of betrayal. Semitego is depicted as betrayer as he kills his loving wife because he wants riches from the goddess. Had it that he kept his marriage vows, trouble wouldn't have fallen him. This interpretation is reached at because of intertextuality.

Graham Allen (2000) illustrates the pivotal position of intertextuality and its function in modern literary theory:

*Texts, whether they be literary or non-literary, are viewed by modern theorists as lacking in any kind of independent meaning. They are what theorists now call intertextuality. The act of reading, theorists claim, plunges us into a network of textual relations. To interpret a text, to discover its meaning, or meanings, is to trace those relations. Reading thus becomes a process of moving between texts. Meaning becomes something which exists between a text and*

*all the other texts to which it refers and relates, moving out from the independent text into a network of textual relations.*

So to say that Semitego betrays Nalongo is woven from what theorists put forward. This view is further supported by Ismail Ahmed who argues that the study of literature is the study of intertextuality. This means to understand literature properly, then you use the theory of intertextuality to get those fine details and clear meaning.

Mercy Mirembe Ntangaare uses music to present her themes in the plays under study. In the play, *Lady, Will You Marry Me?* To set the mood, songs are used. To foreshadow what is ought to take place, a pensive song is used,

*KiringayaitaNshemere ...*

*Kanyonyikaryaguruma*

*Yamunagaomumushebeya.....*

*Kanyonyikaryaguruma*

*Yabanzayamubuza....*

*Kanyonyikaryaguruma*

*Ati: N'ompaotunwaninshomaho?*

*Kanyonyikaryaguruma*

*Ompen'akabeerenyonkyeho!*

*Kanyonyikaryaguruma .....*

This song predicts how a king murders his lovely wife the queen. In it a theme of enmity is depicted. Much to the fact that Lady Mouse is married to Mr. Cat, Mr. Cat feels it that at one stage the enmity that exists shall still be seen because cats take mice as food. A theme of suffering is also seen from this

song. Mr. Cat predicts how he would bring suffering to the queen. This song is picked from Ankole region of Uganda. This proves that intertextuality is at play as Ntangaare picks this idea from Ankole songs and poetry. This is evident as MevludeZengin argues that;

*It is important to cite that intertextuality cannot be limited only to the discussions of literary arts. It provides an area of study of influences, adaptation and appropriation of texts into not only the written or literary texts but also the other media or non-literary fields.*

Therefore, reference to Ankole songs and poems is due to intertwining the theory of intertextuality in the plays. The theory therefore helps one to understand the various themes more especially the theme of enmity and suffering.

Songs in *Lady, Will You Marry Me?* are again used to bring out the theme of domestic violence. As the play is ending Mr. Cat ends the life of Lady Mouse. A song is used to show the domestic violence that exists in the text.

*Komireokamushanga hi?*

*Komireomukabira*

*Yarahira: "Tindiriyankoko!"*

*Yagarukayagicwahoo mutwe*

*Ati, "Owange! Enkoko enura;*

*Okusingaekipapakyayo."*

This implies that not all that is promised is delivered. For instance Komire promised never to chicken but ends up eating its wings. This indicates what Mr. Cat does. He promises and harmony to Lady Mouse as the two sworn enemies enter into marriage. But this marriage does not stand to live as finally Mr. Cat goes against his promise and kills his wife.

The above dirge depicts the theme of betrayal. A dirge is used to develop the theme of betrayal. This is particularly true as shown that the love depicted at the beginning of the play is sour by the end of the play and this is expressed through a funeral dirge. In this it is clear that Lady Mouse is being tortured and later killed and this shows the violence that is inflicted on women by the men. The music has a very strong dramatic effect especially as regards building up a sense of foreboding and tragedy.

The tragic event that befalls Lady Mouse shows how the theme of betrayal is developed. Not least of all, Mr. Cat's cruel tune towards the end of the play when he sings of a King killing his Queen! And follows it with an excuse of a 'slip of the tongue' in which he reminisces about the days he and his friends would hunt mice! (Mirembe, xiv). It clearly shows that some animals or even people are never meant to be. Indeed, trying to be can cause various problems. This dirge is related to other communities particularly the communities in Uganda. They indicate how delicious some foods are and therefore have to be eaten putting to lives of others at stake. This proves that tradition is important in literature. Anna Ilunani argues that;

*It should, however, underline the special place that the notion of "tradition" occupies in the postmodernist understanding of intertextuality. Deionizing the values of past eras, postmodernism, nevertheless, as it were, revives in its artistic practice the entire cultural memory of humanity. Attraction and interaction of various cultural layers, their installation is turning into a new means of cultural synthesis, in which their partial destruction is accompanied by a new technique of their reproduction and restoration.*

Therefore, the culture to which this dirge is picked is important in understanding the entire text. This is proved right as shown by the theorists in the intertextuality studies in which it is believed that

every work of art is as a result of another work of art or culture.

The song,

*"Enjangunerira, nerira, nerira.....nerizibwaki?"*

*Neyendaembeeba, embeeba,  
embeeba.....ey'ebishaju!"*

Meaning

*"The cat is meowing, meowing, meowing  
hungrily....."*

*What's the problem? It wants mice, mice, yes, and  
only fatty mice!"*

This song is key to understanding the long-standing enmity that has existed between cats and mice. It is a warning to mice that cats look at them not for marriage but for food especially the fatty mice. It is therefore no wonder that the marriage between Mr. Cat and Lady Mouse doesn't last as Mr. Cat murders Lady Mouse as the play is ending. But most importantly is the fact an oral literary form (song) is used to bring out the theme in the play. This song is playing as background music as the play is opening.

This song is an oral song from Ankole in western Uganda. It was generally used to depict the poor living relationship that existed between rats and cats. Even when Mr. Cat interacts with Lady Mouse first time, the lady is scared knowing that Mr. Cat can easily eat her. So the use of this song at the beginning of the play helps to forecast the predicament that is ought to fall with Lady Mouse trusting Mr. Cat.

According to Derrida a theorist of intertextuality, every text lives among the responses, inoculations of one text on another and proposes deconstruction as a new way of philosophical reflection. Deconstruction aims to reveal in the text (artistic or cultural) traces of its interactions with other texts, non-systemic,



marginal elements that internally undermine its structure. Therefore, this particular text is based on what takes place in certain communities as the song is picked from Ankole of western Uganda.

Music further depicts the theme of betrayal. What Mr. Cat, preaches at first is different from what he does as the play is ending thus developing the theme of betrayal in the text. Ugly scenes and predictions of touching information are all brought using Music. The final song of *Komire* is sad and shows that promises are not always adhered to. The playwright effectively deploys this oral literary form of Music not only to create mood (tragedy) to the audience but also to advance the intensity effect of the play.

This is what is expected with African literature. African oral literature is expected to be performed and to have a great impact on the audiences. Pamela Olubunmi argues that the scope of African oral literature makes no large claims beyond the attempt to crystallize the benefits gained from years of intellectual dialogue and to put the central issues of the subject in much clearer focus. This is further evidenced with the performances that accompany music. Music by nature and in African oral literature is expected to be performed and is always performed. This is what Okpewho and Finnegan suggested in their various studies related to Africa's oral literature.

In the play, Semitego, songs are used to bring out various themes. When Nantabonaboneka sings a love song, the theme of love is depicted. She sings;

*You'll never be the same again*

*It's like you've been born afresh*

*A new kind of life*

*New kinds of dreams*

*New plans, new kinds of hope.....*

*Ntangaare (2011)*

Nantabonaboneka predicts the love that she will have with Semitego but unfortunately this love brings problems to Semitego. It makes him behave strangely and he ends up killing his dear wife in the bid to Nantabonaboneka's love. The above song drives Semitego crazy and he eventually his mind as he thinks on how he can make this princess his wife. But he hardly knows who or what Nantabonaboneka is. She does not only sing about this love but equally performs it. Performance is part of oral literature according to various scholars. Finnegan argues that;

*"A particular atmosphere—whether of dignity for a king's official poet, light-hearted enjoyment for an evening story-teller, grief for a woman dirge singer—can be conveyed not only by a verbal evocation of mood but also by the dress, accoutrements, or observed bearing of the performer. This visual aspect is sometimes taken even further than gesture and dramatic bodily movement and is expressed in the form of a dance, often joined by members of the audience (or chorus)."*

So what Nantabonaboneka does is to perform and this performance moves Semitego and he immediately starts of thinking of how he could make her his wife. It can be concluded that the performance in the song is exactly what makes Semitego get taken up and this proves his love for the goddess. And it is this love that destroys his family after killing his wife in search for lost manhood and riches.

The theme of love is further shown through songs. Semitego sings for Nantabonaboneka out of love. He picks one performed song from kigezi. The song goes;

*E-Zzzi iii -i.... E-Zzzi iii- ii i! (Ululated excitement)*

*Reekankuzanirekanywani ( let me entertain you my friend)*

*Kankuzanirekakyara (let me excite you my dear one)*

*Kankuzanirekarungi ( let me entertain you my beautiful one)*

*Empindueshushaekyebazira (the needle compares to what it sews)*

*E- Zzzi iii –ii I ...E-Zzzi iii –ii ..... (ululated excitement)*

*Aaau – uuuu-aa-uuu-u-uuu-u... (ululated excitement). [Researcher's translation]*

This song by Semitego is performed for Nantabonaboneka. After all his words are just saying let me perform for you. This further proves that oral literature is performed and this performance affects the other party intensively. This particular performance is from the kigezi sub region of Uganda. It proves that Ntangaare uses the knowledge of the Bakiga in this play. This proves the usefulness of the theory of intertextuality in this study.

Songs are used to depict the theme of tradition. One of the songs is picked from the kiganda culture of Uganda. Through the song, one gets to learn of the tradition. The song below shows how culturally one gets a wife to marry;

*Yamusangaanaba  
(he found her bathing)*

*Yasokaokumwekweka ( she immediately hid herself )*

*Nayenakizulamangubwatasobolakwekweka (but eventually could not hide herself)*

*Olwoomutimanegumukuba (because the pressure was too high)*

*Gut-u! Gutu-u! Gutu (Gutu! Gutu, Gutu!)  
[Researchers translation]*

This song is sung by Nalongo. Through it we learn how some culture gets their wives particularly the Buganda. Tradition and culture are inseparable from the human race and the use of this song proves it. This view is supported by Pamela Olubulumi who shows that oral literature is based on culture and tradition. She writes that;

The exegesis of the abundant, carefully selected, illustrative texts reflects scholarly diligence, giving a definitive accounting of the vibrancy of oral traditions in Africa today, from their 'functional or practical values within society' to their creative influence on and survival in modern African literature.

This is connected to what Mevlüde Zengin writes. He argues that;

*"Intertextuality suggests a range of links between a text and other texts emerging in diverse forms as direct quotation, citation, allusion, echo, reference, imitation, collage, parody, pastiche, literary conventions, structural parallelism and all kinds of sources either consciously exploited or unconsciously reflected."*

Therefore this work of art is near or related to other works particularly those from certain cultures and tradition. The song in contention is from the Kiganda culture and the theory of intertextuality is at play.

Another oral literary form used by Ntangaare is proverbs. The study of proverbs is called paremiology (from Greek παροιμία - paroimía, "proverb") and can be dated back as far as Aristotle (Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia). According to Kind strand (1978) & Russo (1983) "the definition of a proverb has caused scholars from many disciplines much chagrin over the centuries. Many attempts at definition have been made from Aristotle to the present time, ranging from philosophical

considerations to cut-and-dry lexicographical definitions" (in Meider, 2004:1)

According to Mieders, "A proverb is a short, generally known sentence of the folk which contains wisdom, truth, morals, and traditional views in a metaphorical, fixed, and memorable form and which is handed down from generation to generation". Proverbs belong to the short fixed forms of oral literature. He also points to some proverbs which refer to the definition of proverbs for example; "Proverbs are the children of experience," "Proverbs are the wisdom of the streets," and "Proverbs are true words."

"Proverbs obviously contain a lot of common sense, experience, wisdom, and truth, and as such they represent ready-made traditional strategies in oral speech acts and writings from high literature to the mass media" (ibid: 3-4.) Mollanazar (2001: 53) has defined the proverb as "a unit of meaning in a specific context through which the speaker and hearer arrives at the same meaning." And the last but not the least Norrick (1985:78) has proposed the following definition for the proverb:"The proverb is a traditional, conversational, didactic genre with general meaning, a potential free conversational turn, preferably with figurative meaning."

Ntangaare uses proverbs with or related functionalities as made by the various scholars. These proverbs are extensively used in the three plays that are of concern in this study. A proverb like, "Where there is a will, there is a way," is used to depict the theme of determination. It is used in inference that whatever one intends to, he or she can achieve it, if ones works hard to achieve it. Whereas cats and mice are sworn enemies, Mr. Cat is determined to bring unity between the two animal families. The proverb is equally used to show Lady Mouse that success is only achieved out of determination of willingness to act. In a study by

Aciro Betty about the Acholi proverbs, she concludes that;

*The Acholi proverbs have been instrumental in passing peace messages. It is in the proverbs that the Acholi people castigate and corrected the family members in order to live in harmony with members in the community. It is through proverbs that the younger children receive wise instructions that protect them from engaging into actions that would cause conflict.*

This therefore proves that for harmony to exist, one needs to use proverbs. The reason that Mr. Cat uses proverbs while wooing Lady Mouse is for the fact that he expects harmony to exist between the two families. This interpretation is arrived after reading. In the theory of intertextuality, the reader is very a crucial person. Ilunina while discussing the works of other scholars argues that;

*Refusing to interpret the text as a purely linguistic phenomenon and extending this concept to non-linguistic semiotic objects, Derrida demonstrates that every reality is textual in its structure: literature, culture, society, history, human consciousness, including the author and the reader. "There is no out-of-text reality at all," (J. Derrida) [4], and Barthes, developing this thought, focuses on the fact that itcollideswith the text itself is in itself a multitude of other texts and endless, or rather, lost codes.*

This means as readers, we play a vital role in giving the work a certain meaning. The proverb above makes us understand the determination the Mr. Cat has. But we understand this determination; we dwell on both the theory of intertextuality and what other scholars say about this particular proverb.

In the same vein, the proverb depicts the theme of love. It is out of love that Mr. Cat understands that nothing can stop a relationship if there is love. The will talked about in the proverb is the love. In other

words, the proverb means that if one has love for something, then one will get a way to achieve in that area. The bible in Proverbs 3:3-4: it says, 'Let love and faithfulness never leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart. Then you will win favor and a good name in the sight of God and man.' Therefore Mr. Cat is right in loving Lady Mouse and that is why he has to do everything in his means to prove so. Moreover according to Finnegan,

*Proverbs are a rich source of imagery and succinct expression on which more elaborate forms can draw.....In many African cultures a feeling for language, for imagery, and for the expression of abstract ideas through compressed and allusive phraseology comes out particularly clearly in proverbs. The figurative quality of proverbs is especially striking; one of their most noticeable characteristics is their allusive wording, usually in metaphorical form. This also emerges in many of the native words translated as 'proverb' and in the general stress often laid on the significance of speaking in symbolic terms.*

Mr. Cat is right and so is Ntangaare since proverbs are ways one can his express in ideas properly. The idea of love and that of determination are clearly seen through proverbs. The figurative nature in which Ntangaare brings out his point is well put forward. These proverbs are closely related to other forms of oral literature. This is what the critics of intertextuality want. They argue that literature is closely related to other literature. Even proverbs are closely related to other forms of oral literature. Finnegan also picks this up when she puts it that, 'The literary significance of proverbs in Africa is also brought out by their close connection with other forms of oral literature.'

In the play *The Big Flight*, Ntangaare equally uses proverbs to portray the main themes in the play. She uses the proverb, 'Never count your chicks before

they hatch,' to bring out the theme of love and companionship. The proverb is used when the birds are preparing to go for a visit at Falcon's home. They are to do this as a sign of companionship and friendship. This proverb is used by crow while warning the Tortoise who is to escort those about the problem of being over ambitious. Crow knows how important it is for one to be patient. This proverb makes us understand the idea properly as Finnegan puts it. She writes that;

*In many African cultures a feeling for language, for imagery, and for the expression of abstract ideas through compressed and allusive phraseology comes out particularly clearly in proverbs. The figurative quality of proverbs is especially striking; one of their most noticeable characteristics is their allusive wording, usually in metaphorical form.*

This therefore puts it clearly that the figurative nature of proverbs makes them communicate beyond the mere words. Whereas the proverb is related to birds, but it naturally refers to other things that we tend to celebrate before we achieve them. even to achieve companionship, friendship and love requires some patience which Crow is calling for. This is related to what some scholars of intertextuality agitate for. In instance, this proverb belong to a certain culture and this implies that literature becomes so, because it is based on a certain culture and tradition Mevlüde Zengin puts it that;

*An intertext has the power of subverting and reacting against other texts in the whole discursive field as in the case of the post-colonial discourses. Another axiom which theorists engaging with intertextuality claim is that the existing knowledge of the reader who is situated in a certain cultural and historical position is a determinant among many others in giving the meaning to the text; thus the reading process is an active endeavor.*

This proverb has and carries meaning because it is based on a certain culture and carries meaning in regard to that culture. This meaning continues to be evident when one considers the context in which a proverb is made. More proverbs spice up the communication as Achebe puts it, that, “*Proverbs are the palm oil with which words are eaten.*”

Another proverb used is, ‘You reap what you sow,’ meaning that the results that one gets are determined by the effort one puts in. This proverb is used to depict the theme of determination. It can easily be used to advise someone to work harder if one is interested in achieving certain success. Crow uses this proverb to put forth two things; first is that success is achieved through the way one works for it and secondly, do good to people if you want them to do good to you. But both angles are showing how important it is to work hard and to be good in order to achieve success. This proverb is bringing out what is expected from an African. Emmanuel Efem Etta and Francis IbeMogu have argued on this in this manner;

*Undoubtedly, within African philosophy proverbs are being presented as philosophy. African proverbs constitute one important and strategic area where African philosophy can be extracted, because ancient African philosophy was not preserved in writing. Consequently, proverbs have been said to be the ancient African philosophy, and are therefore what references and authorities are to the academic. Hence, as certificates provide a scale of ranking and placement in learning, so does knowledge, mastery and appropriate usage of proverbs in traditional societies provide a scale of placement in learning.*

So, the African philosophy of determination and hard work is achieved through proverbs. To them, Ntangaare is looking forward to achieving that effect. This is what makes the play relevant as it draws from a known African perspective as it calls on others to work hard with determination as at the end of the day, *each will reap what he sows.*

The author uses proverbs to depict the character of Tortoise as a selfish being. Proverbs like ‘*it’s not by magic that one grows old*’, are used to show the character of Tortoise. He is selfish and wants to use the proverb to confuse other animals. And he finally succeeds in convincing them to take on new names which become disastrous at the end of the day. He calls himself “*Beloved visitors*” which represents the entire entourage which means that he ends up becoming the only visitor to the Falcon family.

Also the above proverb proves that the rest of the animals particularly the birds are shallow minded. They are dull and can’t easily understand the reasons behind Tortoise’s name. The author is trying to show case that the birds are dull and not bright. Had it that they were bright, they would have seen through Tortoise’s trick which is aimed at eating all the festive alone not minding about the birds that have invited him to escort them.

Proverbs are still evident in Ntangaare’s other play of Semitego. These proverbs help in depicting themes for instance the theme of betrayal. Semitego uses the proverb, ‘*sitting on thorns*’ to prove that his relationship with Nalongo has a lot of hurdles. But ideally such thinking comes in when he gets in touch with Nantabonaboneka. He starts poking holes in his relationship to prove his desire of having another wife. This proverb further proves Semitego’s plan of looking for another wife and leaving by trying to look for Nalongo’s weaknesses. This therefore is search for an explanation. AkinjideAboluwodi asserts that;

*In sub-Saharan Africa (especially among the Yoruba ethnic group in Nigeria) one of the elements of indigenous education is the use of such cultural resources as taboos, riddles, proverbs, myths and folktales to provide a symbolic explanation of the environment. The Yoruba elders use proverbs in such important issues as the choice of marriage partners, entry into business partnership, individuals’ attitudes and conduct in the public and many others. This*

*cultural resource is used to admonish young people seeking, for instance, to choose a marriage partner or to enter into a business partnership to be wary of their actions; hence, it is a call for precaution on choice making.*

This is how vibrant proverbs are. And in using such a proverb, Ntangaare is showing how sensitive the issue of marriage is. She predicts through Semitego that sometimes, marriage is not smooth as it seems as he complains that his marriage to Nalongo has been difficult as it difficult for one to sit on thorns. This is achieved by using the knowledge of intertextuality since it is believed that both narrow and broad approaches to the problem of intertextuality are legitimate.

While a broad interpretation of philosophical generalizations and principles of the functioning of culture as a whole, approach is more important for practical research, it offers specific strategies for analyzing works interms of their inclusion in the dialogue of texts. Thus, be aware of the potential limitless intertextuality of , its ability to generate in the act of reading an of semi-conscious, almost independent from will associations that connect it with the entire set of preceding, created and simultaneously emerging texts. All in all, it is proven that Ntangaare uses proverbs to depict the themes particularly the theme of betrayal.

Another proverb is, ‘*Not all that glitters is gold*’ used by Nantabonaboneka to bring out the theme of lust. In using the proverb, Ntangaare is warning against being overpowered by what we see which usually shows our desires for what we. In the same vein Nantabonaboneka uses the same proverb to warn Semitego who is incidentally overpowered by her beauty. She is well aware that Semitego’s admiration of her can lead to his destruction as seen at the end of the play. Such a proverb is in line with Finnegan’s assertion. Ruth Finnegan asserts that;

*Proverbs are generally marked by terseness of expression, by a from that of ordinary speech, and by a figurative mode of in metaphor. The first two characteristics can be treated together here with illustrations from the Bantu group of languages. There are rules for the formation of Bantu proverbs and particular peoples have their own favorite forms, but certain common patterns are apparent.*

Therefore in using the above proverb, Ntangaare is proving her art in language use and the proverb shows aptly what is intending. In simple terms, the proverb is a caution against what is not expected. It is up to Semitego to hid by it and stop thinking of falling in love with Nantabonaboneka. But the meaning in the proverb is what is important. According to the theory of intertextuality, the identity of meaning or the certainty of meaning seems to be weak. Translation has the characteristics of intertextuality both in appearance and in essence. It can be said that translation itself is an intertextuality activity. So get the meaning is the bottom line of the literary work at hand.

The use of proverbs and sayings as oral literary forms has enabled the playwright to develop some themes in this play. For example there is a proverb used on page 25: *Money is power*. It is emphasized by the saying; *Money is Peace. Money is everything*.

In act 1 scene3: at semitego’s home, before the play begins the playwright gives an overview of the setting plus the highlights. Through story telling Ntangaare narrates the way how Semitego ran mad with money. Because of the behavior shown by the character, this tells the audience how the named oral literary form developed the theme of quest for earthly desires. There are more proverbs or/ sayings that can be traced on different several pages.

For instance;

..... *Not all that glitters is gold*” (Ntangaare, p.17)

... Because an elephant can eat thorns it doesn't mean the other animals should attempt the feat (Ntangaare, p. 19).

Money is power (Ntangaare, p.25).

Had a river ever contemplated the whole purpose of its journey, it would never flow at night (Ntangaare p. 37).

If not by exaggeration, all these proverbs and sayings communicate a million times to the audience in this literary genre.

Ntangaare equally uses the same oral literary forms to depict the manner in which people behave. We therefore understand the manner in which characters behave basing on how they are depicted. The 'how' in this case is represented by the various oral literary forms.

Ntangaare uses oral narratives to depict the characters in the play *Lady, Will You Marry Me?* We learn of the circumstances through which Mr. Cat marries Lady Mouse. Through them we learn that Mr. Cat is a hypocrite who does not stand by what he says. He promises a lot of good things that he doesn't live to satisfy. In the same vein, we learn that Lady Mouse is a patient character who withstands Mr. Cat's hypocritical nature. She does this out of love and trust for him. The way the two characters behave resembles how characters in the Ruth Finnegan writes on the way real world behave. She writes that;

*Characters of African stories also recur throughout the continent. Most familiar of all are the animals, particularly the wily hare, tortoise, spider, and their larger dupes. But there are also many stories about people, ordinary and extraordinary, some about legendary heroes or ancestors, and a few which recount the actions of various supernatural beings.*

The way the Cat and Mouse behave resembles the way real characters in the world behave. The hypocrisy seen in Mr. Cat is the same seen among characters in real world. Similarly, the patience and trust seen in Lady Mouse is equally available among many other characters in real world. This nearness between characters in real world and characters in the world of the story imply that literature is formed out of intertextuality. Zengin confirms this by arguing that the concept of intertextuality dates back to the ancient times when the first human history and the discourses about texts began to exist. He adds and notes that as a phenomenon it has sometimes been defined as a set of relations which a text has with other texts and/or discourses belonging to various fields and cultural domains. Characters are understood from other works of literature.

Through a myth in *The Big Flight*, we learn that Tortoise is selfish character. As the birds are going for a feast to Falcon's home, they move with Tortoise but unfortunately he steals the show by enjoying all the privileges alone. But he does this to the detriment of other animals. What he does is not expected and not tolerable. Rushika Gill believes that for a community and its people to be understood, one has to critically understand its tradition. This tradition is understood through oral literature. He asserts that;

*This literature (oral) through narrative, poetry, song, dance, myths and fables and texts for religious rituals provide a portrait of the meaning of life as experienced by society at its particular time and place with its unique existential challenges. This literature portrays how one is to live a moral life and explains the nature of one's relationships to divinity.*

However sometimes one fails to live the moral life expected. However still there is a lesson learnt from it. One gets to know the unacceptable behavior in our societies and the one gets off from it. The manner in which Tortoise behaves is unacceptable and therefore one ought to run away from it.

Through the use of folktale, Ntangaare depicts Semitego as betrayer. He betrays his wife Nalongo by falling in love with Nantabonaboneka the goddess. In the same manner, Nalongo is depicted as loving wife. This kind of behavior is believed to have been learnt from childhood. What one does depicts the home in which he grows and the manner in which one is parented. According to Rushika Gill,

*Most children grow up hearing folktales from their grandparents or parents and this rich oral tradition is instrumental in shaping their personality in their formative stages of life. It has the role of creating value-based, socially responsible and civil individuals. Similarly, oral literature has played a big role in preserving our culture and in doing so people do not make concerted efforts; they do it by merely living their daily life.*

The tales listened to depict various things including the way characters behave and the way they should behave. Semitego behaves contrary possibly because he forgets what the tradition has taught him and Nalongo behaves in the expected way because she knows and remembers how she is expected to behave as a married wife.

Through songs in the play, *Lady, Will You Marry Me?* We learn that Mr. Cat is a violent character. He sings violent tunes as he destroys the life of his dear wife Lady Mouse. He does not of the fact of his wife asking about his decision. Out of shame he shows his true characters by attacking and killing his wife. In this, one gets to understand that some relationships are not healthy. Enongene Mirabeau Sonpoints out that it is a fact that the humanities teach people to be human and live with other humans in society. This enables both societies and individuals to promote the idea of the community and to foster in it a sense of belonging and identity. However Mr. Cat fails out on this. He decides to live inhumanly and ends up torturing and finishing the life of Lady Mouse. In portraying the characters this way, Ntangaare based

on texts written or unwritten before. Zengin confirms this by asserting that,

*Intertextuality is a way of interpreting texts which focuses on the idea of texts' borrowing words and concepts from each other. Every writer, both before writing his text and during the writing process, is a reader of the texts written before his text. S/he either borrows from the prior or concurrent texts and discourses in the network through allusions, impressions, references, citations, quotations and connections or is affected by the other texts in some ways.*

The depiction of Mr. Cat this way is based on previous characters in the world whom Ntangaare wants the world to understand through her text, *Lady, Will You Marry Me?* Mr. Cat is not created out of the blue. He behaves the way he does because other characters before him have done so. In creating a character like Mr. Cat Ntangaare was trying to show how people behave and how they ought to behave. They have to desist from negative behavior and go with positive behavior.

In a word, Ntangaare fully develops her themes and characters in relation to intertextuality theory with other related texts in the three selected plays. The way the characters behave across the texts helps the playwright to develop her themes. This is vividly brought to surface through the use of some of the oral literary forms such as fables, songs, poetry, proverbs, oral narratives and sayings as discussed above.

## CONCLUSION

The study identified themes and characters from the three selected texts. It is through Themes that the audience draws lessons and these lessons help the reader in learning how to overcome difficult upheavals. The characters in the selected plays are driven by the prevailing forces and are tamed to act the way they do. From the behavior of different



characters the audience is exposed to their traits. It is from this behavior that the reader cherishes or emulates good characters and so to live by their examples but again condemn the bad behaviors that are lived by the culprits or victims of circumstances. The study concludes that oral literary forms make the plays both entertaining and memorable.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Some studies have been done on Mirembe Ntangaare's selected texts, but these studies do not concentrate on the issue of how best they can be reserved in different forms for future references. For *Lady Will You Marry Me?*, though it was published prior to the *Big Flight and Semitego*, very little studies have been carried out on it. I therefore recommend that other scholars carry out studies on these plays and more so, on the topic of Repertoire of oral literary forms.

I recommend that basing on this study; the society should strive to promote accessible archives of knowledge on literature. This can be done through heads of academic centres, community dialogues and talk shows. In the trio dramaturgy, it is clear that some oral literary forms have been vividly employed showcasing how they develop themes and characters yet in other instances the reader is likely to identify gaps in this study. I therefore recommend that the Ministry of Education and sports collaborate with other stake holders in the education department to locate academic centers especially where sources of knowledge may easily be referred.

I recommend that the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development should continue working hard to make the masses understand the dangers of selfishness, greed, domestic violence, betrayal only to mention. In the same way, the ministry should organize workshops in which these vices are made understandable by all the citizens as they are made to equally understand the repercussions thereof.

I recommend that National Curriculum Development Centre and other institutions for higher learning promote these plays as study materials for UCE, UACE, and post-secondary education for instance UNITE (Uganda National Institute for Teacher Education). This would be in the bid of grooming responsible citizens who will live according to the societal norms to promote peace and development in our country Uganda and the world at large.

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