

s.6 Week 8 work

Literature 310/3

1. Ngugi Wa Thiongo; *Devil on the cross*

Read the following passage and answer the questions that follow

‘When the morning speeches had ended, you two left and went your own way. We left soon afterwards, and we said to each other: “Let’s take to the road to look for something to silence our gurgling stomachs. Let’s go to Njeruca for some roast meat; we can’t afford the food in this cave.” We got into my *matatũ*. Then there we were, in the heartland of Njeruca. We went into a small butchery, full of flies. But it had a self-important name, the Hilton. The sign outside read: BETTER EAT AT HIIRITONI. We ordered four pounds of meat. Mūturi paid for one half, I paid for the other. We then went into a room at the back to wait for the meat to roast and to get something to drink. Me, I had a Tusker, and Wangarĩ had a Tatino and Mūturi drank Whitecap.

‘It was Mūturi who started the discussion. He began as if he were picking up the threads where we left off outside the cave. He said: “As Mwaũra said last night in the *matatũ*, I’ve seen many things in this land. I have done all sorts of jobs in Kenya, I have been to many places in Kenya, and I have witnessed many happenings in our country. Once, while working as a watchman at a certain school in Nakuru, I saved a girl who wanted to take her own life. It was quite dark, and I was standing near the school’s swimming pool. I saw her walking along, stealthily, close to a small hedge. When I asked her what she was doing there alone, she said that she was staying with her brother, who was a teacher at the school. Then she went away. The following day I found the same girl standing in the middle of the railway track, waiting for the train to run over her. I was on my way to Bondeni, and I passed her standing on the other side of the line. But God’s case has no appeal. When I had gone a few steps towards Section 58, something made me stop and look over my shoulder. I tell you, I rescued her from the very jaws of death. She fainted in my arms. Luckily, in her handbag I found an envelope on which was written her address in Section 58. I left her there with her family, and I went on to Bondeni. Why am I recalling all this? Because what I have seen and heard in that cave beats all the miracles I’ve ever experienced.”

Gatuĩria and Warĩĩnga looked at one another, inwardly saying: This is a miracle indeed! Mwaũra went on: ‘It was then that Wangarĩ joined in, and she said: “So it really is true that from the womb of

the same country emerges both the thief and the witch? I too have never seen wonders to beat those in the cave."

'I kept quiet, for I know very well that a little stealing here and there is not really bad. And robbery that does not call attention to itself is not bad.

'It was Mūturi who said, "Did you know that a thief or a robber is worse than a witch?"

'There I strongly disagreed, and I told him: "A witch is worse than a thief. A thief only steals your property and leaves your heart beating. Tomorrow you can acquire more property. But a witch takes away your life, and leaves all your property for others to eat. A thief steals property, but a witch steals life."

'And at that point the meat was brought to us on a wooden dish. It was roasted very nicely! I took a knife, and I cut the meat into small pieces. While we were eating, Mūturi told us a story about a thief and a witch.

'A long, long time ago, in a certain village, there lived a very dangerous thief. He had brought misery to the whole village, but nobody could catch him in the act, for he was very cunning. Now in the same village there lived a very dangerous witch, who was also very much feared because his witchcraft was even more potent than Kamīri's. The village elders gathered at the meeting-ground. They decided to invite the witch to cast a spell on the thief that would bring about his death. The witch boasted that that was nothing to him. He collected together his potent medicines and his divining gourds and nuts. Then he lay down to sleep. In the morning, he woke up at the usual hour. He went to check his divining tools. Lo! The thief had stolen everything. The witch gathered up more paraphernalia. The thief crept in and stole it all. The witch was forced to move away from that village. That's the origin of the saying that a thief is terrible for he forces a witch to leave home. And again, a thief even steals from his own mother. A thief is like the white man, of whom it is said that he has no close friends.

'It was then that Wangarī said: "But modern thieves are worse, for they invite foreigners to rob their own mothers and in return receive a few hand-outs. But you two are wrong. A thief is no worse than a witch, and a witch is no worse than a thief. A thief is a witch, and a witch is a thief. For when a thief steals your land, your house, your clothes, isn't he really killing you? And when a witch destroys your life, isn't he stealing everything you own? That is why I say a thief is a witch, and a witch is a thief. Even Gīkūyū knew this. Long ago, the sentence imposed on a thief and a witch was the same. It

carried the same punishment – death by burning or by being rolled down a hill in a beehive.”

‘We ate up the meat and finished it all. I told Mūturi and Wangarĩ that we should hurry up and return to the cave so that we wouldn’t be late for the afternoon session.

‘It was then that Wangarĩ’s madness took wing. She said that she wouldn’t go back to the cave, that instead she would go to the *Ilmorog police station*. To do what? I asked her. She told me: “An agreement is an agreement. A crowd of thieves and robbers like those cannot be allowed to gather and then go free!” I said: “So you were serious about the story you told us last night?” Wangarĩ said that she was a good and loyal citizen, and that she had to join hands with the police force to bring an end to theft and robbery. “If the police arrest pickpockets who snatch women’s handbags in market places, and petty criminals who steal five shillings, and thieves who steal hens in villages, what do you think they will do to these men, who steal from the masses and rob the whole nation?” For my part, I tried everything I could think of to dissuade her: “Don’t ruin other people’s feasts. Have you got enough evidence? Wangarĩ, remember that a lawsuit can turn against a witness.” Wangarĩ disagreed with me, and said: “If every time you see a thief stealing or a robber robbing, you turn the other way or shut your eyes and seal your lips, how will theft and robbery be brought to an end in this land?”

‘I left her to her schemes. The case of a fool remains unsettled. And again, if a wise man argues with a fool for too long, it is difficult to tell the difference between them. A person destined for ill-fortune cannot be diverted.

‘All this time Mūturi had kept quiet, like a hypocrite, listening to the argument between me and Wangarĩ. Can you imagine my surprise when Mūturi entered the fray and said that he would help Wangarĩ to catch the thieves and robbers? I asked him: How would he help? He said that he would go around Njeruça awakening the workers and the unemployed, urging them to follow him so he could show them where all the thieves and robbers of the people’s wealth had gathered to compete to see who had stolen most from the people. The victims of theft were the only ones who could effectively demand the return of their stolen wealth.

‘I reasoned with Mūturi. “Mūturi, you look like a sensible man. Beware of being swept off your feet by the whims of modern women. Remember how Ndaaya wa Kahuria was thrown out of the cave. Ndaaya only steals five shillings here and there to buy himself a few cakes. That shows that the rest of them are very important

thieves and robbers – *Wanyang'anyi Mashuhuri; wao si wezi wa mandazi na kuku* – and they should not be disturbed.”

‘Mūturi shook his head and said: “I, Mūturi, do not believe in the saying that silence saves lives. Wangarī has spoken the truth. If whenever we see theft and robbery, we shut our eyes or look the other way, doesn’t this mean that we support the system of theft and robbery? There is no difference between a thief and him who observes the act, Gīkūyū once said. You say Ndaaya wa Kahuria was thrown out of the cave. Yes, but what does that show us? The truth of one of Gīkūyū’s sayings: that a thief in rags often becomes a sacrifice for the thief in finery. Why did Gīkūyū say that? Because in many cases we point at a thief in rags, forgetting that perhaps he steals because he is hungry and thirsty. In the old days a Mūūgīkūyū never took it out on a thief who stole only to silence a hungry belly. If in the old days you went to someone’s farm and cut down sugarcane and sat down and ate it, or if you lit a fire and dug up enough sweet potatoes to satisfy your hunger and roasted them and ate them then and there, the owner of the farm would never bother you. But these modern thieves, who reap where they have never sown, to the extent of even inviting foreigners to join in the harvest, and who store all the grain in foreign granaries, leaving the owner of the farm dying of starvation, and who slaughter a herdsman’s own sheep, fattening themselves on the stolen meat – have they not shat and farted beyond the limits of tolerance? Let them be arrested by the working people now that they, the thieves and robbers, have congregated in one den to parade their full bellies and to pour scorn on us. Mwaūra, you say that we should wait for more evidence? No. Procrastination destroyed the beehive. It is never too early to go to the market, before the sun scorches the vegetables.

Come one and all,
And behold the wonderful sight
Of us chasing away the Devil
And all his disciples!
Come one and all!

Wangarī, I don’t think you’ll get much help from the police station. But he who has not drunk from a calabash does not know its measure. Go your way, and I’ll go mine. Our aim is the same. We’ll all meet at the cave, each with his own forces.”

‘When Mūturi had finished, he stared at me with eyes that seemed to be challenging me to a fight. But I, Mwaūra, am a man. I looked him in the face and told him very firmly that I would never support

any action that was designed to increase conflict in the land. I told them this: "A person is eaten up by his own mouth. Mūturi and Wangarī, because you know that what is done can never be undone, leave these people alone. A thief who has not been caught is said to be eating his rightful share." Mūturi quickly replied: "*Ndio, ndio*, that's why they should all be arrested"

'That's how the two madmen and I parted company. I thought I should hurry back to the cave to tell you all about it, so that you won't be caught unawares by the drama and the chaos that are bound to follow. That's why I'm suggesting that we should race back to Nairobi now, so that at least we can share the cost of the petrol. I've also been looking for Mwīrerī wa Mūkīraaī, so that he can tell the master of ceremonies to end the feast before everyone is caught by the police and the workers. Those two, Mūturi and Wangarī, are not alone!'

Robin Mwaūra finished his story and stared about him again as if he were afraid that the police and the workers would suddenly appear. Gatuīria and Warīīnga looked at each another. They did not know whether to rejoice or to pity Wangarī and Mūturi.

'There's nothing to worry about,' Gatuīria said. 'Let's go inside and wait to see what happens.'

'Don't you think it would be wise of us to tell the hosts and guests at the feast what is going on?' Mwaūra asked.

'No,' Gatuīria replied quickly. 'Let's leave them alone. Let's leave the two sides alone. We are just spectators.'

They moved off towards the cave. Warīīnga was thoughtful. Is it because of such coincidences that the Earth is said to be round? To come across the very man who twice saved my life – and in a place like this? Who is Mūturi? When they were close to the entrance to the cave, Mwaūra tugged at Gatuīria's sleeve. They both stopped. Warīīnga went ahead and waited for them at the door.

Mwaūra whispered to Gatuīria: 'Listen, although you say that we are just spectators, that we're not here to take sides, I'd like to enter the competition.'

'And leave Warīīnga and me as the only spectators?' Gatuīria asked, checking his laughter.

'That's right,' Mwaūra said. 'But would it be a good move?'

'To give your testimony about theft and robbery, or to abandon us?' Gatuīria asked.

'What I want is a chance to show them cunning to beat all cunning in the art of theft and robbery. Would that be a wise move?' Mwaūra asked again, forcing Gatuīria to offer him advice.

'Well, didn't I tell you that I was a mere spectator? If you get a

chance, by all means jump on to the platform and try your luck. All a competitor is required to do is to show what he has done with his talents for stealing and robbing, and what he would do now if he were given more opportunity by the foreigners But I'm not telling you to do this or not to do that. Do what you want to do. The decision is yours,' Gatuĩria said, like a judge trying to disguise his real position in the struggles of life.

But Mwaũra seemed very pleased with Gatuĩria's words. He spoke up a little. 'There, you have spoken the truth. That's why I always say that education is a good thing, a very important thing. Now, if it had been Mũturi and Wangarĩ, they would have tried to dissuade me. Why? Because they don't have much education. They have no idea what makes the world turn. I can see that you are quite impartial. In Warĩĩnga's case, take care! She seems to pay much too much attention to the words of the two madmen. But you certainly seem to know how to get to the heart of things. And you have put it well. It's not the number of one's talents that one should count. Oh, no, what's important is the quality of one's skills and the use to which one has put them. You say that I should do what I want to do Ha, ha! Do you remember what Mwĩrerĩ wa Mũkiraaĩ told us in my *matatũ* last night? *He also that had received . . . talents came and said*'

Questions

- a) Place the passage in it's context
- b) Discus two major themes in the passage
- c) How significant is the extract in the development of the plot
- d) Discus the character traits of two character in the passage

2. Thomas Hardy; *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*

Chose one question

- a) How effective is Thomas Hardy's use of dialogue in tess of the d'Urbervilles
- b) Discus the character traits of the following charactersin the novel *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*