
Exploring Contemporary Art Performance as a Didactic Mode to Mirror Human Society: Focus on the Drama Film “Mugisha”

Bazimaziki Gabriel^{1*}

¹*Department of Humanities and Language Education, College of Education, University of Rwanda, P.O.Box 55, Rwamagana, Rwanda.*

Author's contribution

The sole author designed, analysed, interpreted and prepared the manuscript.

Article Information

Editor(s):

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Complete Peer review History: <https://sdiarticle4.com/review-history/52256>

Original Research Article

Received 03 August 2019

Accepted 18 October 2019

Published 26 October 2019

ABSTRACT

Art cannot be distanced from society. Contemporary art performance reflects human action over his fellow human being(s). In this paper, the researcher demonstrates that art is a didactic tool to society as produced by society about society for society. How filmmakers use the past and present society to comment on contemporary human situations is an important concern in this paper. The researcher uses the Drama movie “Mugisha” to demonstrate how in the current world challenges and hardships are good trainers in human life. The idea of “one’s future shaped by his hope but not his/her hurts” and the belief that “Patience is bitter but bears sweet fruits” is well illustrated in the present study. Using descriptive literary analysis of characters, particularly the protagonist and antagonists, it is revealed that the story of Mugisha is a message film which conveys the quest theme reflected by human beings’ life hurdles. The story conveys the message of conflicts and hatred among relatives, heroism and triumph resulting from long suffering; patience and fortitude, the culture of coming to one’s help in trouble and so forth. It was demonstrated that one’s destiny cannot be altered by the power of human beings, thus the true contextual meaning of the common aphorism that “Man proposes and God disposes”.

Keywords: Art performance; boon; contemporary society; challenges; didactic; fortitude; hope; Mugisha; patience; protagonist; quest.

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Literature is an art that depicts human beings and the world in which they live. It is a tool used to mirror society through various forms and genres. A dramatic film cannot be excluded from these forms. Krishnamohan [1] opines that films and literature are largely about a narrative. It is about telling a story. Both make use of characters, plot, incidents, action, drama and the general function of entertaining the readers or the audience. In this study, the researcher carries out an analysis of an art performed not lively. Drama and film are mainly concerned with performance of human actions either lively [Drama] or not [movie/film]. These are the important mediums to criticize society through performance of human actions by actors. They are therefore art of performance. Masiello [2] contends that film is an actualization of words by actors on location, enacting events that accompany and inflect those words. The author adds that films can be artworks comparable to great works of literature — poems, plays, novels. In this regard, one can posit that movies or film are not far distanced from literature since they meet in their goal of the reflection of social reality, represented through settings and situations which portray realistic characters. The latter are actually in conflict with themselves, or with other characters or with forces of nature. According to Gallo [3], movies are literature. It is a form of oral literature. If someone tells a story, you hear it, file it in your brain and remember it later. Some movies are recalled much later on because they had so much of an effect the first time. In the same realm, Dirks [4] confirms that dramatic film shows us human beings at their best, their worst and everything in-between. Each of the types of subject-matter themes has various kinds of dramatic plots. Inherently, Benshoff & Griffin [5] discussed the form and content of film and contended that

Many entire books have been written analyzing various formal elements of film, but they can be broken into five main aspects: literary design, visual design, cinematography, editing and sound design. The first aspect of film form, literary design, refers to the elements of a film that come from the script and story ideas. The literary design includes the story, the setting, the action, the characters, the characters'

names, the dialog, the film's title and many deeper subtexts or thematic meanings. Film is capable of many literary devices: metaphor, irony, satire, allegory and so forth. Some films are black comedies.... others are dramas to be taken seriously.... other films try to shock or provoke us with new unexpected ideas. Analysing a movie's literary design is a good place to start when analyzing a film but one should not ignore the four other axes of film form and how they contribute to a film's meaning.

The story of Mugisha falls into this category. It is a film produced, performed and conveyed to the audiences through video cassette, a means by which the researcher accessed it and deemed necessary to critically analyse it with particular interest in its protagonist and antagonist as affected by the quest theme. This dramatic film deals with contemporary societal ills and injustices. They convey messages about how man copes with the ills and mores of life. In other words, drama and film give a picture of how the real-life situation of man stands on this earth. They thus reflect how challenges are part of life. Further, one may learn from film conflicts among sisters, brothers, husband and wives, thus man's sufferings and happiness in his day to day life. In this connection, the present study focuses on the film entitled "MUGISHA" which displays the quest theme often times encountered in genres like Epic and drama.

1.1 Problem Statement

"Hope is important because it can make the present moment less difficult to bear. If we believe that tomorrow will be better, we can bear a hardship today." (Thich Nhat Han). Similarly, one said that "Challenges are part of life" for human life consists of the ups and downs. The aim of literature and art performance is to reflect it through various forms including films and drama. While human beings were created or evolved equally, their life is paved with the hurdles authored by their fellow(s) human being(s). Conversely, the Holy Bible states that "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted (Mathew, 5: 4) and Simone Weil contends that "Human beings are so made that the ones who do the crushing feel nothing; it is the person crushed who feels what is happening. Unless one has placed oneself on the side of the

oppressed, to feel with them, one cannot understand" [6]. Be that as it may, challenges are part of human life and the sweet fruits are more often than not harvested from a tree of bitter patience. Against all this background, analysis of the film titled "Mugisha" reflects the idea that "art is a didactic tool to human society to reflect how human beings copes with the pros and cons of their daily lives in the world around them. Based on the protagonist in this drama film, the researcher uses the quest theme to depict the two world such as the ordinary where life is generally good and the strange world full of tests where the protagonist meets or faces people plotting against them but wins thanks to the helpers' supports.

1.2 Aims of the Study

This study is a literary analysis that is concerned with how dramatic arts are educational mediums to human society. The researcher wanted to further demonstrate how one's successful life is largely associated with his/her socio-economic conditions, be they poor or rich. The paper briefly highlights how poverty militates against one's positive ends while the reverse dictates one's ends. Finally, the researcher wanted to illustrate that the ends justify the means. Thus, despite challenges in a quest for something, one may reach his/her destination successfully and seize the boon. Put another way, the over leading aim of this paper is to throw light on the function of arts - film in particular, as an effective didactic tool reflecting contemporary human society. The researcher seeks to find out answers to the following questions: (1) How far is drama film - related to literature as a didactic tool to society? (2) To what extent is the protagonist Mugisha affected by the quest theme? (3) How does the story of "Mugisha" convey to contemporary society that "Patience and fortitude conquer all things"? To find out answers to these questions, the researcher considered literary analysis as a scientific study and based on Campbell's theory of the hero's journey.

2. THEORY AND METHODS

This study bears qualitative literary analysis and hinges on Campbell's theory of the Hero's Journey. Generally, Campbell's theory of the hero's journey fits for the heroic epics but the researcher deemed necessary to frame this study on it. Not all the stages but some are found

in this study due to the nature of the story. The researcher adapted Campbell's theory of the heroic journey discussed in Bazimaziki [7] as follows: The hero starts in the ordinary world and receives a call to enter an unusual world of strange powers and events (a call to adventure). If the hero accepts the call to enter this strange world, he goes on, the hero must face tasks and trials (a road of trials) and may have to face these trials alone, or may have assistance. At its most intense, the hero must survive a severe challenge, often with help earned along the journey. If the hero survives, he may achieve a great gift (the goal or "boon"), which often results in the discovery of important self-knowledge. The hero must then decide whether to return with this boon (the return to the ordinary world), often facing challenges on the return journey. If the hero is successful in returning, the boon or gift may be used to improve the world (the application of the boon). These stages may be organized in a number of ways, including division into three sections: Departure (sometimes called *Separation*), Initiation and Return. "Departure" deals with the hero venturing forth on the quest, "Initiation" deals with the hero's various adventures along the way and "Return" deals with the hero's return home transformed equipped with knowledge and powers acquired on the journey as outlined in Fig. 1.

Regarding the method, the researcher uses Professor Jenkins Rob's Literary Analysis as a Scientific Method as adapted from Bazimaziki [7]. According to the author, three methods such as observation-drawing hypothesis and then experiment are concerned in literary studies. The researcher in this study concurs with this method and believes that a work of art can be interpreted simply by applying the scientific method as defined above. Actually, Jenkins Rob asserts that reading a text several times, at a slow pace but carefully, the reader is constantly posing questions about the message the author is trying to convey. Besides, as critics, readers must pay special attention to some particular words' meaning and think of how they fit in the work as a whole. In so doing, the author goes on, we begin over- time to come up with a theory of what the text might be about. The real work lies in experimenting or testing the hypothesis. Now experiment starts at the top and test hypothesis against what the literary work actually says. In this study, literary analysis is taken as a scientific method fitting to approach the selected drama.

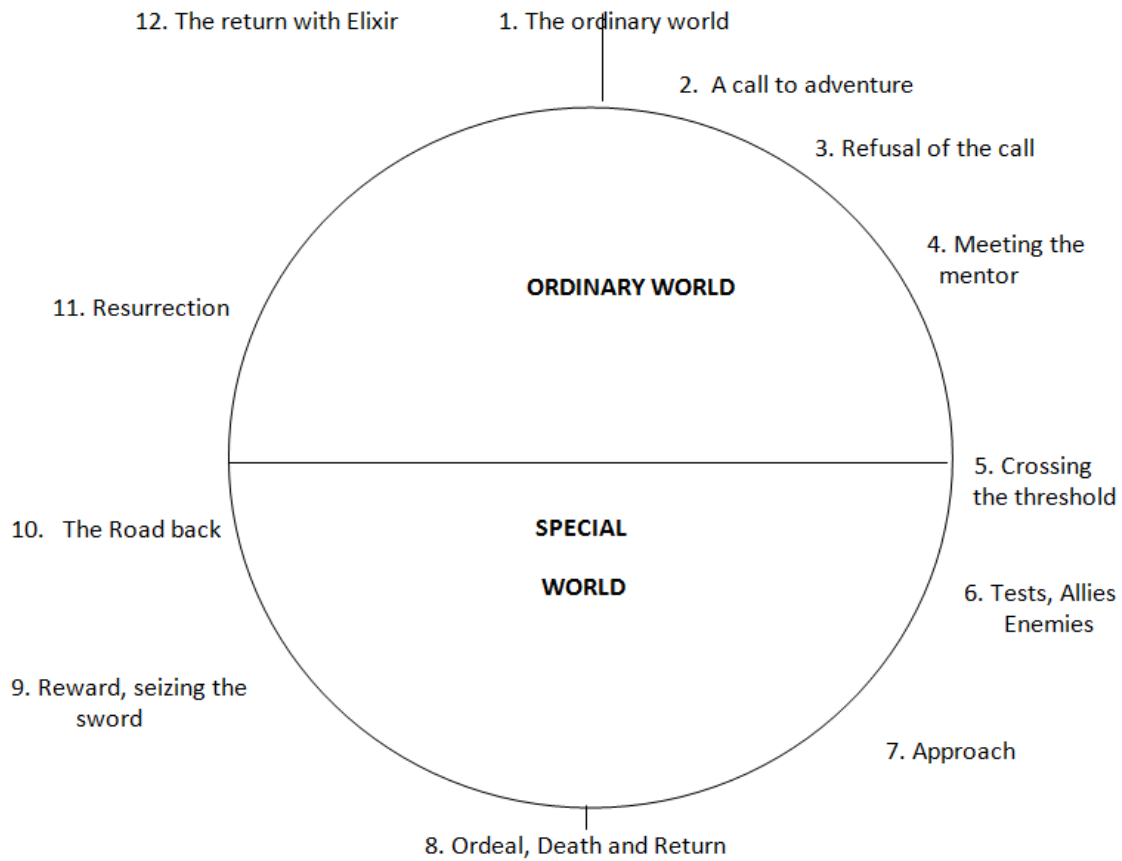


Fig. 1. Different stages of hero's journey
Adapted from Bazimaziki [7]

2.1 The Stages of the Hero's Journey in Line with the Story of "Mugisha"

The Hero's Journey is a pattern of narrative identified by the American scholar Joseph Campbell that appears in drama, storytelling, myth, religious ritual and psychological development. It describes the typical adventure of the archetype known as the Hero, the person who goes out and achieves great deeds on behalf of the group, tribe, or civilization. Mugisha falls under this category of protagonists as he went out of his family, suffered but achieved rank from time to time. From the lowest family status, he is finally a car company manager living a very distant life from his childhood life. The story explains well the idea that the future is a construction supported by man in the present.

The first stage of Campbell's heroic journey is introduction in his/her ordinary world. The protagonist Mugisha is not concerned with this stage as the story does not reveal anything about his birth. Rather, the story starts when he is a teenager helping his sister and their mother

doing household chores. One can say that the story starts with the second stage of the hero's journey meaning - the call to adventure where he faces a problem, challenge or adventure that he cannot escape. His family is poor and he is called to save it. The situation calls him to attend school. At stage three, we are watching him leaving his family to school. He cannot refuse. He is the object of destiny that is leading him. In most of the cases, protagonists balk at the threshold of adventure, facing the greatest fear of the unknown. This is inevitable for Mugisha who is going to spend his secondary studies time at his maternal aunt. He knows well that the situation is hard but has no choice. Now comes the fourth stage.

The hero is encouraged by the Wise Old Man or Woman. This is termed as "Meeting with the mentor". A hero is given advice and sometimes magical weapons. In the case of Mugisha, his mother advises him to be patient, to work hard and to accept all the ills his maternal aunt-Bakunda will do to him. Sometimes the Wise Old Man/Woman is required to give the hero a swift

kick in the pants to get the adventure going. Mugisha is no exception. His mother gave him encouraging words as she put him under God's protection. At the fifth stage, the hero passing the first threshold (Crossing the threshold). The hero fully enters the special world of the story for the first time. This is the moment at which the story takes off and the adventure gets going. The balloon goes up, the romance begins, the spaceship blasts off, the wagon train gets rolling. As far as the protagonist Mugisha is concerned, it is his time of hurdles. He is a houseboy at his maternal aunt besides secondary studies he successfully follows brilliantly as he is clever at school, known by each classmate, schoolmate and his teaches as well. Now comes stage six where the hero encounters tests and helpers (tests, allies, enemies). At that level, most of those protagonists are forced to make allies and enemies. They also pass certain tests and challenges auguring life experience and training. Mugisha fits this situation. He was gifted, his genius and exceptional competences and skills in school subjects and in household works helped him gain enough friends indeed. He has now won popularity and many of his colleagues respect him. Particularly, his Maths' teacher could not stand missing his name from his class. At his maternal aunt, visitors of various kinds are happy with the service that house boy offers.

Unlikely, the hero reaches the innermost cave (approach to the innermost cave). This is, according to Campbell, stage seven whereby the hero comes at last to a dangerous place, often deep underground, where the object of the quest is hidden. His maternal aunt oppresses him to a higher extent. On top of that, his mother falls sick and the situation worsens. Mugisha's sister, Mucyo, takes the mother with her from their far village hoping that this brother would assist and help her take their mother to hospital. Mugisha's boss - maternal aunt refuses him to take his mother to hospital and the patient dies there. Further, instead of helping and mourning together with her step - daughter and son, Bakunda tells them to take away their mother's out of her compound. This is the worst time. Next, the hero endures the supreme ordeal. This is stage eight of Campbell's theory of the hero's quest. At this level, the hero risks his life and faces the possibility of death, a critical moment in any heroic story, an ordeal in which the hero appears to die and be born again. What happens is that the audience has been led to identify with

the hero. We are encouraged to experience the brink-of-death feeling with the hero. We are temporarily depressed, and then we are revived by the hero's return from death. The initiate is forced to taste death and experience resurrection. In the case of Mugisha, the gate man named Birahinduka has already revealed him that his boss – maternal aunt is planning to kill him. The source of this plotting against Mugisha is Karire, a young beautiful lady whom Bakunda wishes to be married to her son Rushatsi. However, it is a forced love. Karire does not love him but loves Mugisha. It is now a love conflict that would cause Mugisha to lose his life. The son and his mother (Rushati and Bakunnda) plan now to kill Mugisha by giving him the poison in drinking water. Fortunately, Mugisha escaped but his-boss maternal aunt and her two children drank it and died. Rushatsi escaped too but became mad as he has lost his three relatives such as his mother, brother and sister. At Stage nine of Campbell's hero's journey, the hero seizes the boon (Seizing the sword, reward). The protagonist Mugisha fits this stage. Having survived death, beaten the dragon, the hero now takes possession of the treasure he has come seeking. Sometimes it is a special weapon like a magic sword or some elixir that can heal the wounded land. Having won the victory over his boss and maternal – aunt plan to kill him, Mugisha is now rewarded. Karire's mother gives him shelter. He continues his studies until he will graduates. In Campbell's term, *the road back now takes place as stage ten*. We are told that at this stage the hero is not out of the woods yet. Some of the best chase scenes come at this point, as the hero is pursued by the vengeful forces from whom he has stolen the elixir or the treasure. Mugisha is not concerned with this situation as nobody pursued him after they died. Inherently, he is concerned with Resurrection which is the last but one stage. The hero emerges from the special world, transformed by his/her experience. Mugisha undergoes that stage. He has completed his studies and graduated. It is then the ripe time to apply his skills. The last stage is called Return with the Elixir. The hero comes back to the ordinary world, but the adventure would be meaningless unless he/she brought back the elixir, treasure, or some lesson from the special world. Mugisha is now happy with his wife Karire. They now have a baby son. He is wiped tears and suffering caused by his maternal aunt. He is working as a manager in a big selling car company. Without any doubt, this is the elixir he was called to fight for all along his journey.

2.2 A Cogent Description of the Story Protagonist

The term protagonist refers to the central character in a story. He is often times affected by the leading theme the artist wants the audience to perceive. Protagonists are heroes of stories. Film protagonists are among these characters. They through which society views a work of art considered as a didactic tool to help them learn some experience. Santiago [8] put it well that

Art can be seen as an instrument for the expression or communication of emotion. Moreover, art provides vicarious expansion of experience, extending capacity to perceive and conceive. It is with such virtual imagination by which the actual experience in certain places of the world become closer to senses. For instance, a film through this art form a person can virtually experience. Moreover, adventures and travel to far places can be felt more artistically through arts. Hence, art plays a significant role in almost all fields of life.

The film “Mugisha” displays some of the above features. It is a story which centers on a young boy named Mugisha, the protagonist of the story. He was born in a poor family in a village far from Bujumbura in Burundi. He grew up in a hard situation. He is an orphan of father and has one sister with whom her mother tries hard to pay fees for studies. Her mother is growing old and weak besides her poor living conditions which could not allow her cope with the problem of school fees for two children. Interesting is that Mugisha is a very brilliant student at school. Even at home he manages to show his hard-working during holidays.

Elsewhere, Mugisha has a maternal aunt, a widow named Bakunda who is very rich and who lives in a town near the school where Mugisha regularly attends classes. As Mugisha is a day student, after lessons he goes to her aunt. Unfortunately, the latter mistreat him to a great extent. Mugisha is taken as a house boy there. Everything must be done by none of his cousins but himself but this does not prevent him from being the first of the class and his classmates know about his situation but have nothing to change except praying for him. Everybody loves him because of his discipline, hard work and help in terms of explaining his colleagues the science subjects. On the other hand, Mugisha's young cousin, named Ruvuto, loves him. He is one of

his classmates. His older brother Rushaki and their sister Iranzi hate Mugisha as their mother does. A situation worsened when the family of Bakunda (Mugisha's maternal aunt) received visitors from another part of Bujumbura City. The visitors are a mother and her unique daughter, Karire. The latter is a young beautiful and kindhearted girl. Now, Rushatsi, Mugisha's older brother (his maternal aunt's first - born son) fell in love with that young lady Karire. Now the conflict between Mugisha and his brother Rushatsi starts.

As pointed out before, Mugisha is mistreated at his maternal aunt's while he does his best to put anything orderly. Since he is taken as a houseboy there, he is now called to help the visitors at the table. A bottle of mineral water fails him and water is poured down when he is trying to pour some in one glass. Her aunt fails to tolerate him and in the presence of the visitors, she insults him that he is a 'Stupid', 'mad', and dehumanizes him saying: “Gifite ibyiso binini ariko ntikibona” Kirundi words meaning (the one/something with exorbitant eyes but never sees). It is such a situation that makes Karire the guest to love Mugisha and decides henceforth to end her life with him, meaning to marry him. When the visit is over, the family (a widowed mother and her daughter) return back home and the host family stays. Rushatsi, Mugisha's brother from his aunt begins then to run Karire so that he will marry her. But that lady does not want, as she said it 'neither to see nor to listen to that so - called sweeter'. When his mother asks him about that matter, the son responds that things go wrong! His younger brother Ruvuto now reveals that Mugisha may be in love with Karire (since that girl has told it to her cousin as a secret, but the cousin fails to keep that secret and tells it to Ruvuto). But Mugisha, from a very poor family from the countryside, realizes that his love with Karire is impossible a situation that he himself calls “The impossible love” only that he underestimates himself and could not believe that a unique daughter from a very rich family would marry an extremely poor boy as Mugisha.

Second, Mugisha is sure that Rushatsi has been running that girl. So, he thinks that if his aunt hears of such a situation, he (Mugisha) would taste death as he said that 'Karire wants to put a millstone round his neck'. But one 'cannot escape from fate'. It is impossible to avoid it. Karire's love towards Mugisha grows stronger and she seeks one to direct her to Mugisha's family and later arrives there thanks to

Birahinduka, the gateman at Mugisha's maternal aunt. She [Karire] does not care about the poor situation of the family. She also shows the mother a kind heart and helps her. Since that mother is seriously ill, she gives Mucyo some money so that they could take her to hospital and she returns back being happy to have visited her mother-in-law to be. Mugisha's sister Mucyo, manages to take her mother to town to meet Mugisha so that they both could take their mother to hospital. Arrived at the aunt, Mucyo asks humbly her to give Mugisha permission but the aunt refuses. This results in their mother's death and this situation bitters Mugisha and her sister. They now become the total orphans but later earn a better life. But "nothing is impossible against God's will". What Mugisha feared happens so. Her aunt's family knew well that Karire wanted to marry Mugisha. Such a situation results in Mugisha's being tortured and expelled from her aunt's family. They attempt to kill him but drink the poison themselves. They all die except Rushatsi who is not around. Though he survived, one may say a 'Living dead' because he becomes mad. Probably that is what he deserves. This is a reward for plotting against the life of innocent people.

Finally, as 'no one can change one's destiny', Mugisha and Karire found a happy family and completes his studies. Her mother in Law (Karire's mother) gives them all her property and tells them to manage it as soon as she kicks the basket. She wishes them a happy life and it happened so. Mugisha is now a manager of a big car company. He brought her sister to live in her family and they are all happy.

3. DISCUSSION

According to Bushra [9] postmodern world is brutal and is full of barriers affecting some people in their journey in quest for successful life as they are driven by available opportunities. The protagonist in this story is not far from these characters of contemporary world. The film titled "Mugisha" reflects well the point that filmmakers use the past to comment on human contemporary situation which is by far characterized by sufferings on the one hand and happy life resulted from bearing hardship on the other hand. The fact that the one who made that film used the protagonist or the hero Mugisha (blessing) is a good point to comment on here. Having been born and grown in an extremely poor family, as a paternal orphan he then attended school and faced a problem of lack of

fees, his situation resulted in being a day student. This is common in our day to day life. In many parts of Africa, if not all corners of the globe, school fees constraints affect greatly children studies and either they suspend or continue their studies in unfavorable conditions. However, if they don't cut morals, they become triumphant and reach their goals hardly. This can teach us the rest of the society not to cut morals in difficulties, particularly as regarding academic issues. Mugisha is not the only one to have faced, or to be facing the hard situation like this. Nor is he the only one to be tortured by the maternal aunt who would secure him and be an answer to his problem. The African family is suffering from such disease of as the "Don't care attitude" which is a current or contemporary problem among families.

Similarly, contemporary problems include hatred and conflicts which are nonsense. Man on this earth is victimizing his fellow innocent. This is what happened to Mugisha suffering from the ills inflicted on him by her wicked maternal aunt. Not only hatred but also love is among contemporary people. Karire can be seen as a helper. She became an answer to all the sufferings of Mugisha. Such a situation about human being having behaviours like those manifested by Karire are there in the contemporary world. One can also talk about the theme of studies and poverty, one being a solution to another. The filmmaker here may have wanted to explain that most of people like face problems of lack of fees due to their family statuses, but later became successful when they complete their studies as it happened to Mugisha who after long suffering is now a respectful manager of a big car company.

The effectiveness of films as pedagogical tools in dealing with human challenges. In order to understand well the extent to which film is relevant in teaching how to cope with human challenges, there is a need to, first of all, have a look at film in classroom teaching. There, it is said that students who are taught through visual aids get the content more effectively than others. For example, Boyd and Wertz [10] report that some films can be strictly entertainment and a means of escape, other types of film can often be an activity that the audience can actively participate in and become emotionally invested in. Films convey various messages as regards social issues, cultural or the like. The film is didactic in one way or another. For example, the audience of the film pointed out earlier may draw from it a lesson that may help them change and

change the world around them. Take for instance Mugisha being mistreated by his maternal aunt. As it is one of the ills in African societies, it is to be banned in that mothers should be generous to their children and take any child as their own. Put another way, films allow the audience to have a critical mind and their reaction may probably cope with the ills reflected in what they have already watched, on the one hand, and copy the mores from what they learnt through film watching. It is in line with the one who argued that "Films encourage feedback from watchers who suggested that film can be a powerful teaching tool if utilized appropriately" and many people believe that movies that receive favorable reviews cannot be received negatively by audiences.

From what has already been discussed, the relevance of dramatic films in dealing with human challenges can be seen in one way or another. If for example one wants to teach about the current challenges among relatives, the wickedness and hatred among fellows and resorts to the film discussed before, he or she will doubtlessly make the point more clear than if he resorted to other methods.

4. CONCLUSION

Art performance focuses on people's life experience and it cannot be distanced from society. Film and drama cannot be distanced totally from literature genres as they both depict societal issues through realistic settings and characters having conflicts with themselves, with others or with the forces of nature. Through these genres, authors depict the ills and mores done on human beings by their fellow human beings. The man coming to his fellow's help; man as a wolf to himself; man as a victimizer to his next doors and similar situations are the leading topics accordingly. Based on analysis of the story of "Mugisha", it was demonstrated that contemporary world is paved with unnecessary hate, jealousy and harmful deeds. One can wonder why we shouldn't as human beings act against the ills and promote fair treatment. The contemporary world is so while there is nothing possible against one's destiny as traced out by the almighty. Taken together, artists and filmmakers aim to shape a bad society into a good one. The relevance of films and its effectiveness in dealing with human challenges lies in that films are didactic materials showing all levels of human beings. Through performance of dramatic films, human beings should eventually

be able to ape the good deeds and transform themselves while blaming the ills done by their fellow human beings. From characters in this study, it is important to note the common aphorism which states that we should "Never cut a tree down in the wintertime. Never make a negative decision in a low time. Never make your most important decisions when you are in your worst moods. Wait. Be patient. The storm will pass. The spring will come" (Robert H. Schuller). Added to this, the researcher cannot conclude without paying tributes to Bushra [9] who said that our life is a race summoning our fears, failures, successes and accomplishments. Accomplishments being attained by our control over our senses. One can add that despite challenges, one can reach his/her predetermined objectives, of course driven by their "senses".

COMPETING INTERESTS

Author has declared that no competing interests exist.

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