



# ***CRITICAL COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF MAJOR THEMES AND CHARACTERS IN SHAKESPEARE PLAY ROMEO AND JULIET AND NGUGI WA THIOGO NOVEL THE RIVER BETWEEN.***

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## **ABSTRACT**

There has been extensive literary research on major themes and major characters in both African and European literature. A lot of this literary scholarship has tended to ignore the critical comparative analysis of both the African and the European texts and how the writers use characters to enhance their thematic concerns in the text. This research will attempt to address that gap by comparing the major themes and characters in "The River Between" by Ngugi and William Shakespeare *Romeo and Juliet*. This research will be guided by three objectives:-To compare major characters and themes in the selected texts, to show the similarities in African and European texts using the selected texts and finally to show the meeting point of African and European texts using the selected texts. This research is encased in five chapters. Chapter one includes the background of the study that highlights the objectives of the study and the research questions addressed by the researcher. Literature review and the theoretical framework are in chapter two, methodology and the ethical considerations are in chapter three. Chapter four includes the research findings and analysis while chapter five includes the summary of findings, conclusions and recommendations. This research has adopted the textual analysis method during the collection and analysis of data. Readers' response theory has been used in the analysis of the data. All the primary and secondary data sources have been well referenced. Ethical considerations in this research have been adhered to in order to give this research originality. This research is important because it will bring forth discussion and argumentation debate on the personal convictions and the disastrous societal convictions. It also calls upon the social agents such as the government, non-governmental organizations, churches and the family to address the issues that affects the society due to what the society holds dear to her members. The research will also enable the teachers and students of literature to appreciate literature beyond the confines of their country.

## **1.0: INTRODUCTION**

Comparative literature is the study of literature from various cultures, nations, and genres, exploring the relationships between literature and other forms of cultural expressions. It serves a role similar to international relations, but its focus is on language and artistic traditions, allowing a deeper understanding of cultures "from the inside." (Sangia, 2018) The concept of comparative literature was introduced in India by Rabindranath Tagore in 1906 through his essay titled "Viswa-Sahitya." (Banerji, 2015a). Tagore derived this idea from Goethe's notion of world literature. (Banerji, 2015b) However, the earliest recorded use of the term can be traced back to Jean-François-Michel Noel's volume "Course de littérature comparée," which included various texts published in 1816. Hutcheson Macaulay Posnert made the term "comparative literature" widely known through his work published in 1886, precisely titled "Comparative Literature." (Cakrabarti, 2012). European literature has consistently highlighted shared themes.

A research conducted by (FO Balogun - Obsidian & 1981, 1982) on the response of “who is the audience of modern African literature a reply” he argues that although African writers claim to create primarily for the African audience, their works is written for the European audience. He gives the reason for this contradiction as that our literary artists are motivated to write not mainly by patriotic considerations as they claim, but largely by economic factors. A critical analysis of characters in most African texts reveal the similarity of the roles the characters play to those of the European texts. There are also similarities in themes. This study will therefore undertake critical comparative analysis of major themes characters using the two selected texts that is

## 2.0 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this study, the reader's response theory has been employed. According to this theory, the meaning of the text is determined by the reader. In the past many researchers had it that the author or the writer is the one who has the meaning of the text. Reader's response theory, introduced by (Rosenblatt, 1982), suggests that reading involves a two-process interaction between the author and the reader. Tyson emphasizes the significance of the reader's response in understanding literature, arguing against the notion of passive consumption of meaning from the text. This theory emerged mainly in Germany and America in reaction to the textual emphasis of early 1940's new criticism. Notable theorists in the reader's response approach include I.A. Richards (1874), L. Rosenblatt (1993), S. Fish (1970), and W. Iser (1978), who proposes that reading is an interactive act between the reader and the text. Each reader interpretation of a text is unique and valid as long as it is supported by evidence. Various scholars, including Beach (1993) and Cagin Tugrul, support the idea that the meaning of a text is shaped with the readers' responses to it. Karimi Joyce (2022) and Ayiekoartich also applied the reader's response theory in their research projects to understand readers' interactions with literary works. In undertaking a critical comparative analysis of the selected texts, the researcher has employed the reader's response theory to provide in-depth interpretations of the texts.

## 3.0 MATERIALS AND METHODS

This research has adopted the Textual Analysis method. Textual analysis has been employed in the collection of information from the texts, analyzing the data, and in the interpretation of these research findings. This methodology allows the researcher to interpret language, symbols, and pictures present in the texts, thus providing insights into how people perceive and communicate life and life experiences. The selected texts. The target population for this research consisted of two selected texts: Ngugi "The River Between" (1965) and William Shakespeare's play "Romeo and Juliet" (1591). According to Creswell (2012:142), a slight variation of the simple random sampling procedure involves using systematic sampling. Sampling refers to the process of selecting a specific group from which data will be collected for a research study. The selected samples play a crucial role as they are used to draw inferences about the larger population which they are chosen. Probably going to give pertinent and important data (Kelly, 2010:317). Since this research is library based the researcher has used the primary and secondary sources that are available in the library. Primary data sources included the use of Thesis, dissertations, scholarly journal articles which are research based, diaries and books. Secondary sources of data included online documents, published research thesis, project. In data analysis Creswell (2014) identifies four essential steps that are used in analyzing and interpreting data.

## 4.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### 4.1 Juliet, Romeo, lord capulets and lord montagues character traits.

The researcher found out that Juliet is a strong female character while she is seen to appear quiet and obedient. She displays inner strength, intelligence and bravery. Juliet consistently overcomes her natural shyness, speaking as freely and confidently as Romeo does in various scenes. Moreover, Juliet displays her inner resilience and independent spirit through her resolve to choose death over marrying Paris. At first Juliet continuous to dispel the notion of shyness in scenes, she speaks just as much as Romeo and with the same degree of confidence. Juliet also shows her inner strength and independence nature in her decision to die rather than marry Paris. “It all else fail, myself have power to die.” By so doing, she takes control of her own destiny instead of allowing her life to be controlled by others, as so many young women in her circumstances at that time would. In order to demonstrate her growing maturity in love Juliet says:-

“Well do not swear – though I say, I have no joy of this contract tonight. It isn't too rash, too unadvised and too sudden. Too like the heightening, which cloth (ease to be) ere one can say it lightness, sweet good night” (Act 2, scene 2 line 123 – 127)

Juliet also says:-

“Three winds clear Romeo and good night indeed if that try banc of love be honorable. They purpose marriage sent the world tomorrow by one that I will procure to come here, where and what time they will perform the rite. And all my fortunes at as fast I will lay and follow the lured turn out the world.”

(Act 2, Scene 2 line 149 – 155)

This shows that Juliet is loving and caring. The researcher established that she really loves Romeo with her heart. Throughout the play she remains focused, confident and determined. She follows her heart and her actions remains true to what she thinks and says. Nothing

is capable of stopping her from loving Romeo. Juliet having not attained the age of fourteen stands between the borders of maturity. As resolute and determined. Her decisiveness is evident when she stages her own death in order to reunite with Romeo. She carefully considers Friar Laurence's plan and chooses to carry it out. The researcher has established that Juliet is also an independent character. When the nurse says all the good things about Paris in act 1 scene 3 she says "I'll look to if looking liking move but no more deal will I in my eye than your consent gives strength to make it fly." It is very clearly from her own words that she won't just give in to Paris but rather make an independent choice when it comes to who she wants to marry. This defiance demonstrates her courage, even in the face of her father's authority. On summation, the enduring success of Romeo and Juliet can be attributed in part to the character of Juliet Capulet. Romeo is presented by William Shakespeare as one of the main character in the play *Romeo and Juliet*. Romeo is extremely impulsive.

This means that Romeo will not be Romeo mortgage if it displeases Juliet. This shows how passionate Romeo is as he is ready to break away from his family and also his Christian name just to be with Juliet. It also shows how serious Romeo is about his love for Juliet. Romeo is changeable character. At the start of the play Romeo declares his love for Rosaline, describing his heart as "heavy as lead." His emotions and feelings change very fast. Soon as he meets Juliet. He says:-

"I have forgotten that and that name woe"

This is clear evidence that Romeo is a changeable character as he is openly stating that he has forgotten his past love, Rosaline. The fact he is not even saying her name to him. The researcher also found out that William Shakespeare has represented Romeo to the audience as a headstrong character just the same as Juliet. Romeo as a strong character he goes ahead to avenge Mercutio death by killing Tybalt. He says:-

"Either thou or I or both, most go with him,"

The researcher further found out Romeo is a handsome and intelligent character. He lives in the middle of a violent feud between his family and Capulets but he is not at all interested in violence. Lord Capulet is protective, at the beginning of the play Lord Capulet is seen as being a protective father. He is. Oppressive and controlling "in *Romeo and Juliet*, Lord Capulet decides his daughter; Juliet will marry Paris without even asking her about it. When Juliet refuses to marry him, her father turns into a violent man and hurts her. Capulet is devoted. He is dedicated to stocking the "ancient grade" between their two houses and ensuring that their descendants continue it on between them.

Montague is a loving husband to lady Montague and a doting father to son, Romeo Montague. He exhibits the qualities of nobility and honor, upholding the tradition and the status of the society. He is affluent- Lord Montague is typically depicted as an affluent and distinguishes a nobleman. He shows a mutual respect and affection with lady Montague and their united front reflects their communication to their families well-being.

#### 4.2. Waiyaki, Nyambura and Muthoni character traits.

At first when Waiyaki asks Nyambura to marry him, she refuses because she knows very well Nyambura as a betrayal to the oath of purity. Nyambura is social and loving; Nyambura falls in love with Waiyaki even though the act was considered unacceptable in the society. She is also presented as being sympathetic, who she sees how the father treats the mother, and she sympathizes with her and reveals that Muthoni fled to the auntie. to her father and the Christian. Nyambura is deeply conflicted. One hand, she would like to remain loyal to her father and the Christian religion. He advocates with all passion, zeal of the convert. She clearly understands that her relationship with Waiyaki is regarded as immoral, yet she still carries on, violating both the native tradition and tenets of Faith. Muthoni decides to follow the traditional paths and finally gets circumcised making her father to disown her. She questions the criticism of her father. Who is also circumcised but was allowed to convert to Christianity. Muthoni exposes the hypocrisy of the Christian leaders who consider circumcision a sin. The researcher also revealed that Muthoni is a passionate and determined character; Muthoni says that:- "I want to be a whole mother..." She is determined to be circumcised to the point of running away from home in order to evade her father's wrath when she defies her.

#### 4.3 Major themes in William Shakespeare Romeo and Juliet and Ngugi novel The River between

##### 4.3.1 The theme of forcefulness of love.

Love is a violent and an overpowering force that is beyond all other values, loyalties and even emotions. The audience is able to realize that it is through love that the young lovers are able to defy their entire social world. Families

"Deny thy father and refuse thy name Juliet asks "or if thou

Wilt not, be but sworn my love, I and I'll no longer be a Capulet,"

Friends.

It is because of love that Romeo returns to Verona after being exiled by the price on pain of death. At certain times love is decided on the basis of religion. This is evidenced when Romeo and Juliet first meets. In the fourteenth line in the play. On the other hand love is described as a sort of magic in the play.

“A like bewitched by the charm of looks” (2 prologue 6) Juliet,  
Perhaps, must perfectly describes her love for Romeo by  
Refusing to describe it. But my true love is grown to such  
Excess I cannot sum up some of my wealth. 11 3-1 (33 -34)”

The researcher found out that the play Romeo and Juliet does not make any specific moral statement that exists between love and society and religion and finally the play instead portrays the chaos and passion of love, violence, death, religion and the family in an impressionistic rush leading to the plays tragic conclusion. Despite knowing it will lead to disaster, Waiyaki cannot help but love Nyambura. He faces the risk of losing his position, yet he courageously chooses Nyambura over his position. The love affair between Waiyaki and Nyambura, Joshua's daughter, leads Waiyaki to visit Joshua's church, which Kabonyi, Waiyaki's antagonist, uses to try to outmaneuver him.

#### 4.3.2 The theme of individual verses society

“*Romeo and Juliet*” play mostly involves lovers struggle against the public and the existing social institutions such as family explicit or implicitly oppose the exercise of their love. Familiar poem in the father, law and the desire for public order, religion and even social importance are placed on the masculine honors. These institutions come into conflict with each other. It is through the importance of such an honor that time and again results in brawls that disturb the public peace.

“*Romeo and Juliet*” is the battle between the responsibilities and actions that are demanded by the existing social institutions and those that are demanded by their private desires of the individual. *Romeo and Juliet* play remains the appreciation of night, with its darkness and privacy, and the renunciation of their names, with its attendant loss of obligation.

#### 4.3.3 The theme of inevitability of fate

In the play “*Romeo and Juliet*” is “star crossed” –this means that the fate of the two lovers is controlled by themselves. The characters seem to be aware of their fate. When Romeo believes that Juliet is dead, he cries out” “Then I defy you stars” this is a clear confession that their love is in a position to dares of their destiny (5.1.24) Romeo’s defiance plays a critical role in their fate, and in the determination to spend eternity with Juliet which results into their death. Lovers. Fate, in this context, is not solely determined by external social institutions influencing Romeo and Juliet's choices; it also emerges from the intertwined destinies of the two lovers themselves. Alongside the poignant timing of Romeo's untimely demise and Juliet's awakening, are not arbitrary coincidences. Rather, they are emblematic of fate, serving as harbingers of the inevitable demise of the young as a multifaceted force, propelled by both societal influences and towards their tragic end. Although the story of *Romeo and Juliet* brings out the question. “Are our lives and destinies pre-ordained? While the audience is able to view and experience a series of coincidences, bad luck and bad decisions, many scholars view the story as an unfolding of events predetermined by fate.

Tybalt death.” Fate is the development of events outside person’s control. At the beginning of the novel Chege tells Waiyaki that he is the savior of the people. Chege ensures that he sent Waiyaki to the mission school in order to learn the ways of the white mandate this point the audience knows that Waiyaki will save the people from the white man. Waiyaki finds himself in between two rival factions. The over bearing zealotry of Joshua who leads the Christian group in Makuyu and the hatred and jealousy of Kabonyi who seeks to wrestle the leadership of Waiyaki.. He goes ahead to accuse Waiyaki on several occasions of associating himself with Joshua and the white man at Siriana mission. The accusation is done openly at a meeting.

#### 4.3.4 The theme of defying authority.

“Deny thy father and refusing thy name,” Juliet asks, or if thou will not, be but sworn my love and I’ll no longer be a Capulet.” In the play *Romeo and Juliet* disobedience results into the loss of loved ones and even to their death. It is clear that disobeying authority can be very costly. This is evidenced the characters Romeo and Juliet parents, lord and lady Capulets. It is through their affects their lives and the lives of those around them. Ultimate Romeo and Juliet disobedience to the established social authority results in their grief and suffering. Juliet becomes disobedient to her parents in order to remain true to Romeo. Romeo disregards the counsel of Friar Lawrence regarding their relationship, hastily marrying Juliet, thereby sowing the seeds for future complications. Following their union, Romeo proceeds to commit a grave act by slaying his newly acquired relative, resulting in his banishment and leaving Juliet to grapple with the looming specter of an arranged marriage. In the same manner also Nyambura also defies his father Joshua and go ahead to marry Waiyaki against all the odds.

#### 4.3.5 The theme of conflict

Conflict serves as a pivotal theme in Shakespeare's "*Romeo and Juliet*," with the rivalry between the Montagues and Capulets taking center stage. The deep-seated animosity between these two families permeates through their members and casts a dark shadow over the city of Verona. Shakespeare sets the stage for this conflict right from the outset of the play, laying bare the tensions that simmer beneath the surface between the Montagues and the Capulets. He says:-

“Two households, both alike in dignity, in fair Verona, where we lay”

“Lay our scene from ancient grudge break to new mutiny where civil blood makes civil hands unclean.”

This is a clear indication that the grudge that exists between the two families started long time ago. Shakespeare does this to show that it is an ongoing conflict. He says that the conflict is part of their lives. The researcher established that Juliet is also in conflict with herself. Upon uncovering the true identity of her beloved, she is astonished and finds it inconceivable that she could harbor affection for someone whom she's been taught to despise. She says:-

“That I must love a loathed enemy”

In this instance, Juliet employs the word "must," indicating a sense of inevitability; she finds herself bound to her love for Romeo, unable to alter her feelings despite the knowledge that she ought to. This inner conflict arises from Juliet's realization that her emotions defy rationality, compelling her to love Romeo despite the societal expectations dictating otherwise. There is also a conflict that occurs between Romeo and Tybalt. Tybalt believes that Romeo has greatly dishonored his family when he gate crashes the Capulet party. He decides that Romeo is supposed to pay and offers a deal for Romeo.

The novel begins by signaling the conflict that the audience is to experience or to come across in the novel "*The River Between*." These "two villages" that are "Kameno and Makuyu" are separated and disunited. Ngugi wa Thiong'o brings clearly the conflict by using Waiyaki, Nyambura, Muthoni, Kabonyi, elders and Nyambura. Muthoni is in conflict with his father Joshua and the Christian community for going against teachings and undergoing circumcision against the will of her father. Due to that her father disowns her. Waiyaki conflict with the elders is based on his love for Nyambura. After Waiyaki took the oath of purity he is not supposed to marry uncircumcised girl, whom the community considers her as impure. By marrying Nyambura. Waiyaki engages himself within a conflict with the elders. "The River Between" depicts the plight of lovers torn apart by the clash between Christianity and traditional beliefs, hinting at the futility of attempts to reconcile a culturally divided community through Western education.

#### 4.4 Similarities of the play *Romeo and Juliet* by William Shakespeare and Ngugi wa Thiong'o novel *The River Between*.

There are a number of similarities that are evidenced; the audience is informed of the rivalry that exists between the two villages that is Kameno and Makuyu. The narrator says:-

“When you stood the valley, the two lions ceased to be sleeping lion united by their common source of life. They became antagonists. You could tell this by not anything tangible but by the way they faced each other, like two rivals ready to come to blows in a life and death struggle of this isolated region.”

This means that the rivalry existed and could easily turn out to be disastrous. The audience is not informed on the main cause of this rivalry although they are informed that it existed for a long time. The narrator says:-

“It began long time ago. A man rose from Makuyu. He claimed that Gikuyu and Mumbi so journeyed there with Murugu on their way to Mukuru wa Gathanga. As a result of that story he said, leadership had been left to Makuyu. Not all the people believed him for he had it not always been whispered and rumored that Gikuyu and Mumbi had stopped at Kameno? And had not a small hill grown out of the soul on which they stood south of Kameno? And Murungu had told them.”

Though the narrator talks about leadership having been given to any of the villages. It is not still clear the main source of the rivalry. The rivalry between Kabonyi and Waiyaki is also evidenced in the play although this rivalry is based on Kabonyi jealousy. The both text signal the indication of the rivalry at the beginning of the texts. Secondly "*The River Between*" novels by "Ngugi wa Thiong'o" talks about Nyambura defying their parents due to her love interest who turns out to be Waiyaki. On the other hand Joshua considers all that which is tradition bad. He preaches against the societal traditions and this brings a lot of conflict between the Christianity and the elders. When Nyambura decides to marry Waiyaki she invites herself to the conflict with the elders since she is not circumcised. Love in "*The River Between*" becomes the driving force that would determine the fate of the two main characters that is Waiyaki and Nyambura.

Romeo just like Waiyaki does not care about the consequences of loving Juliet the two crossed lovers that is Romeo and Juliet lived and died for each other just like Waiyaki and Nyambura. Finally the two texts end in a tragic manner hence they are the literature of tragedy. At the end of the play "*Romeo and Juliet*" by "William Shakespeare". William Shakespeare ends the play by destroying the two crossed lovers that is Romeo and Juliet who commits suicide at the end of the play. On the other hand "*The River Between*" novel

by “Ngugi wa Thiong’o” novel ends in a tragic manner where the two crossed lovers “Waiyaki and Nyambura” are left in the hands of Kiama to decide their fate.

#### 4.5 The meeting point of the play *Romeo and Juliet* by William Shakespeare and Ngugi wa Thiong’o novel *The River Between*.

The theme of love in “*The River Between*” is enhanced through Nyambura and Waiyaki who love each other and later marry each other. On the other hand “*Romeo and Juliet*” love each other despite their families’ feud that has existed for a long time. The theme of love leads the two lovers that are “Nyambura and Waiyaki” to land in the hands of the Kiama to await judgment. On the other “*Romeo and Juliet*” loved and died for each other. The researcher found out that in *Romeo and Juliet* the theme of conflict is evidenced. The two families that is “Capulets and Montagues” have lived for a long time in conflict. The source of the conflict remains unknown to the audience although the audience is informed that it has taken a long time. On the other hand in “*The River Between*” novels by “Ngugi wa Thiongo” there are very many instances of conflict. First the two villages that are “Makuyu and Kamen” are in conflict. Muthoni is in conflict with Joshua due to her defiance. Romeo and Juliet decides to love each other. On the other hand Nyambura and Waiyaki go against the customs of the society to love each other. Though Nyambura has been very loyal to Joshua who is against the societal customs she decides to love Waiyaki against her father’s Christians teachings. This defiance makes Joshua to disown her. On the other hand Waiyaki chosen to love Nyambura going against what the society holds dear to her members that is the societal customs. He decides to give much preference to his personal or individual conviction.

The two texts that is “*The River Between*” by “Ngugi wa Thiongo” and “*Romeo and Juliet*” play by “William Shakespeare” presents a fictional account of the historical conflict brought about by difficult things in the two texts. Ngugi wa Thiongo in *The River Between* shows the destructive effects of colonialism and evangelization on the locals born population. The converted members of the society are in deep conflict with the societal Names, cultural activities and the council of elders. Finally the meeting point is also related to the writer’s point of view in the both text. In both the river between and *Romeo and Juliet* play the two writers do not give the solution at the end of their texts on how the conflict that has been there for a long time will be solved rather they both leave the audience to decide on the conclusion they would come up with at the end of the text.

#### 5.0 CONCLUSIONS

In the view of the objectives, analysis and findings, it can be said that “*Romeo and Juliet* play by Shakespeare and *The River Between* by Ngugi wa Thiong’o” are one and the same text and the two texts seem to be a mirror image of the other. To a large extend through characterization of both “Nyambura and waiyaki and also *Romeo and Juliet*,” the two writers have shown that the roles played by those two characters are one and the same role. Through this characterization, the two writers have shown similarities of roles in the chosen characters. After a clear and critical analysis of the characters, the researcher concluded that waiyaki is Romeo in an African setting while Nyambura can be said to be Juliet in an African setting. This is because waiyaki defiance nature in order to be with Nyambura to and extend that he defies the oath of purity knowing very well the consequences of such an act. *Romeo and Juliet* defy their parents in a similar way in order to love and be with each other knowing very well their long term feud that exists in the two families.

Themes that are addressed by both William Shakespeare in “*Romeo and Juliet* and Ngugi wa Thiong’o in the novel *The River Between*” to a large extend are one and the same. Though William Shakespeare wrote the “play *Romeo and Juliet*” very man years ago, the themes he addressed are still relevant in the society today. On the other hand, “*The River Between* by Ngugi wa Thiong’o” is also relevant in the modern society. Many obstacles that the two lovers “in the play *Romeo and Juliet*” go through are also evidenced “in the novel *The River Between*.”

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