

Epistolary role in East African literary works on HIV/AIDS

Aldin Mutembei
University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania

Abstract

In East Africa, an epistle as a base for literary analysis is not common. It appears, scholars who have analysed works of fiction or drama relating to HIV/AIDS scourge, have not considered letters inserted in those works as worth examining. Yet, letters inserted in such creative writings as a style to expound different themes are often encountered. Written artistic works on HIV/AIDS in both Kiswahili and English languages have employed this style to illustrate the HIV/AIDS crisis, as lived by characters in their fictional world.

*Following Wolf Schmid's theory on narratology, supplemented with Rosenmeyer's analytical framework (2003) the article uses an epistolary analysis as a technique for identifying themes in a literary work. The argument developed throughout this article is that epistles should be taken as a point of departure in identifying and examining different voices in the narratives on HIV/AIDS on one hand, and in understanding the psycho-social challenges which fictional characters face in their creative or imaginative world. Through this theory the epistles are juxtaposed to the Kiswahili idiom: *barua ni nusu ya kuonana* (literally translates as "a letter is seeing each other partially"). It would appear that the reader sees fictional characters in HIV/AIDS creative works from a certain perspective as focalized by the letters. The voices which the readers hear from these characters are all directed the letters used. Following this theory it appears that the themes related to HIV/AIDS are related to or influenced by the inserted epistles.*

Keywords: epistle, epistolary analysis, HIV/AIDS, Kiswahili idiom, narrative.

Introduction

The earliest recorded letter, as part of literary works, dates back in 1485, when the Spanish novel *Carcel de amor* (Prison of Love), written by Diego de San Pedro, was published. However, as a genre in its own right, the epistolary novel became popular in the 18th century (Rosenmeyer, 2003; Turner & Martinez,

2003). Although initially the genre was confined to only letters inserted in a novel, with advances in communication technology, epistolary creative writing has developed to include different types of electronic communication texts, such as **e-mails**, **blogs** and **text messages** as Richard Davies writes (<http://www.abebooks.com/books/letters-diaries>). These electronic communications are not only confined to novels, but they can also be seen in written plays and poetry. They are contemporary modes of communication that portray societal challenges in artistic forms. Although these modes of electronic media show the trends of artistic writings over different periods, more research is needed to find out their appearance onto the main stream literary genres. Since this has not happened, a letter remain the main inserted element into other works especially novels and plays.

In East Africa, creative writers have used epistles inserted in the literary genres to illustrate the experience of people in their daily lives. These genres include those whose themes evolve around the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) and Acquired Immuno Deficiency Syndrome (HIV/AIDS). The genres examine the challenges encountered by those living with the HIV or their relatives. Such literary works include fictions and plays, which discuss the HIV/AIDS crisis and its challenges to East African societies.

Using the narrative theory as developed by Wolf Schmid (2010), the article focuses on the inserted letters through the epistolary analysis (Rosenmeyer, 2003), to discuss several questions worth a literary critical thought. These questions emanate from a general understanding of a Kiswahili idiom concerning letters. Kiswahili is a lingua franca of the people of East Africa. Thus such an idiom is understood and used among Swahili speakers. The idiom: *barua ni nusu ya kuonana* (literally translates as “a letter is seeing each other partially”) raises several questions regarding the HIV/AIDS crisis.

The research questions are: If a letter is seeing one another partially, who does the reader see when reading the characters in HIV/AIDS creative works? What are the narrative characteristics of the letter in opposition to the rest of the text? What is the narrative perspective, and whose voice do the readers hear? These research issues are meant to address one major concerned, that is, the epistolary role in these creative writings.

I have selected five creative works written in East Africa, by East Africans. These are works published between 1993 and 2008. Prior to 1993 there is a limited number of creative works on HIV/AIDS and even those that existed did not use epistles in their works. The 1993-2008 period thus marks the time where HIV/AIDS was no longer thought to be only a medical crisis that called for medical solutions alone. The crisis then started to be understood as a cross-cutting socio-

medical challenge that needed an intervention of every person in a given society. It was in this period that creative works joined other avenues to make HIV/AIDS understood among the people and to challenge members of the society to change risk behaviours. The selected literary works are written in either Kiswahili, or in English, a colonial language which is taken as an official medium by East African governments. Both languages artistically illustrate the challenges of living with HIV and HIV/AIDS. These creative works all are using epistles to demonstrate the power of communication against the flaw of silence.

A brief history of HIV/AIDS creative works in East Africa

Although African orature¹ on HIV/AIDS in East Africa started almost immediately after the occurrence of the then paradoxical disease (Mutembei, 2001; Mutembei, *et al.* 2002), in Tanzania it was not until Ibrahim Ngozi's drama book *Ushuhuda wa Mifupa* (The Skeleton's Testimony, 1990) was published, that HIV/AIDS became a subject of literary criticism. In secondary schools, Ngozi's drama book was mandatory for every student to read. In Kenya, almost three years later, *Confessions of an HIV/AIDS Victim*, a novel by Carolyn Adalla got published. The 1990s then marks the beginning of writing about HIV/AIDS in East African literary circles. Thus I can safely say that, informed by oral traditions, the African literary works on HIV/AIDS (written fiction, poetry and drama) started to be published almost ten years after the onset of the HIV/AIDS crisis.

Presentation, analysis and discussion

Our article takes African literary works written in both English and Kiswahili to reflect on the function of epistles that are contained therein. Five works to be analysed include *Confessions of an HIV/AIDS Victim* (1993), *Orodha* (2006), *Mateso Mwathirika wa UKIMWI* (2007), *Yours Faithfully, Yogi* (2008) and *Sitaki iwe Siri* (2008). Of these, four are novels and one is a (Play) drama book. Following a narrative theory developed by Wolf Schmid (2010), the article will use epistolary analysis to examine narrative voices and arguments raised in these works and mirror their meaning in today's literary life. The epistles in these works are so central to the extent that all main themes stem from and evolve around their contents. Let us start by examining the fiction: *the Confession of an AIDS Victim*.

¹ In this article, *Orature* is taken to mean "the creative and imaginative art of composition that relies on verbal art for communication and that culminates in performance" as explained by Micere, Githae Mugo, 1991.

Summary of the *Confessions of an AIDS Victim* (1993)

Confessions of an AIDS Victim is Carolyne Adalla's novel, published by East African Educational publishers, Nairobi in 1993. It has 98 pages, which present the protagonist Catherine Njeri's confessions to her close friend Marilyn in nine chapters. The confessions are in a form of a long letter. Through this letter, Catherine narrates her life story, looking back from the time she met her first boyfriend, to the long list of male friends she had had sexual contact with, and to the day she was diagnosed to be HIV positive. Her dream to go for Masters Degree in the US is cut short due to her sero status. She recounts her happier moments in life and wishes she could turn back the reality of the present life. She moves back and forth in her life journey and metaphorically laments that life in the HIV/AIDS era is like taking an underground train which "will take those aboard to their graves..." The letter ends with an appeal to Marilyn to make known to public its contents and the writer's views concerning the HIV/AIDS challenge. Almost the same request is seen in the drama book *Orodha* that we now turn to briefly see what it contains.

Summary of *Orodha* (2006)

Orodha is a play written by Steve Reynolds. It was published in 2006 by Macmillan Aidan, Dar es salaam. Written in a flashback style, the play a compulsory book in secondary schools, has twenty scenes, which start with the funeral of its protagonist Furaha. Just before her burial, Furaha's mother informs the priest that her daughter had written a letter and had requested that it be read publicly for the benefit of all. Furaha's mother requested that her daughter's wish be granted. The priest declined, under the pretext that it was interfering with official holy liturgy. This appeal was overruled by Furaha's mother and she went on to read the letter. The play then flashes back to show Furaha's life. It shows how she lived a loose life, full of sexual desire. Among the people who had had unprotected sex with Furaha was the Priest, and a businessman. Both apparently were at her funeral and were against the reading of the letter with the list. After the retrospective life of the protagonist Furaha, the audience is taken back to the funeral service where her mother is ready to read the letter. Finally the letter is read, and the list is revealed. Before we turn to discuss the centrality of a letter in this book, let us briefly see the summary of another literary work on HIV/AIDS that uses a letter to communicate its message to readers.

Summary of *Mateso Mwathirika wa UKIMWI* (2007)

Mateso Mwathirika wa UKIMWI (Mateso the HIV/AIDS infected individual) is a novelette with 104 pages written by Fortunatus F. Kawegere and published by Phoenix publishers in Nairobi in 2007. It has seven chapters that explain the

challenges facing people who are living positively. Changing the character's name from Furaha (happiness) to Mateso (suffering), the book examines how people like Mateso are living in a changing world. Unlike the previous play where we saw one letter in a form of a list, *Mateso Mwathirika wa UKMWI* has four epistles. Three of these are written by one person who starts as anonymous writer in the first two discourteous letters. After the first two letters, there is a third epistle that comes in a form of a Will. It informs the reader what should be done following the demise of the writer. In the fourth letter the author reveals himself and uncovers the mystery. Actually it is in this last letter that readers come to know not only the reason for writing the two anonymous and provocative letters, but also the general theme of the novel. It is a novelette that sets to enlighten its readers about the challenges facing people living with HIV and HIV/AIDS. Disclosing the name of the writer brings us into the discussion of secrecy surrounding the HIV/AIDS crisis. It is a theme of the third novel *Sitaki Iwe Siri* that we turn to summarize.

Summary of *Sitaki Iwe Siri* (2008)

Sitaki Iwe Siri is a novelette of 83 pages written by Bitugi Matundura and published by Longhorn publishers Nairobi in 2008. Arranged in ten thematic chapters, *Sitaki Iwe Siri* attempts to answer a psycho-social quandary. Should the disease remain concealed or should it be disclosed. In attempting to answer this question, Musa, the protagonist decided to go against the main stream thinking of the time, which was to remain silent over the killer disease. Instead, Musa decided to disclose and let people have open discussion about the disease that has afflicted his society. Musa seized an opportunity to participate in an essay writing competition organized by the Ministry of Health in collaboration with the WHO. After thorough research he wrote an essay entitled *Sitaki iwe siri* (I don't like it to remain a secret) where he argued for people to break the silence over HIV and HIV/AIDS. The title of the essay is extracted from a letter written by one Yuri who openly said she had decided to commit suicide because she had immune deficiency [virus] in her body and that her death should be a lesson to others. Put in an envelope, the essay was sent through a postal address to the Ministry of Health. It won the competition and Musa was announced a winner during the World HIV/AIDS Day. Musa's step to break the silence over the HIV/AIDS could be equated to the efforts done by Yogi in his willpower to assist his village to get free antiretroviral drugs and cope with the HIV/HIV/AIDS crisis.

Summary of *Yours Faithfully, Yogi* (2008)

Yours Faithfully, Yogi is 'a literary masterpiece in the fight against HIV and HIV/AIDS'. Written by Hellen Banda-Aaku, it is a novelette of 74 pages published by East African Educational Publishers in 2008. It has nine chapters, mainly about two teenagers: Yogi and Shaka who are close friends. Although the catalyst is Shaka's father, Yogi is determined to assist the entire Matengo community get access to free antiretroviral drugs. He seized an opportunity to meet the CEO of a Pharmaceutical Company who was coming to officiate the opening of a secondary school. The connection between Yogi and Mr. CEO was through a letter. However, it is not, until the last chapter when the letter is revealed to the reader. Although every chapter has a story to tell, it is in the last chapter, chapter nine, where the main arguments are raised. Craftily written, the letter gives thanks to the CEO for generously funding the construction of the state-of-the-art secondary school. It goes a step further to inform him the most and desperately needed assistance to the whole of Matengo community: the urgent need to have free antiretroviral drugs. It is this letter that spells out all that are implied in the preceding eight chapters. The letter is a petition, pleading for the rights of the people to "antiretroviral drugs, to life".

Theoretical framework and analysis

I propose to start this discussion with a theoretical question: Is there a narrator in epistolary works? Jenna Ballard writes: *One of the reasons epistolary novels are so much fun to read is that it's like there's no narrator at all — it feels as if you've actually stumbled upon the character's old diary entries or a letter she wrote to her best friend* (Ballard, 2014, p. 1). Following Ballard's observation, it would appear as if there should not be a narrator in the epistolary novels. Ballard's argument comes from the notion that epistolary works are linear by nature. They contain information that goes from the addresser to the addressee. However, Derrida (1987) proposes intervention worth expounding in this article. Quoting Derrida, Hui-yu Huang says: "The sender" and "the receiver" can refer to the identified letter writer and the intended letter receiver, but they might also refer to the multiple readers who read and interpret the letter in many different ways (Huang, 2004). Could the interpretation of such letters be influenced by the different voices in a letter? In other words, could epistolary works avail different narrators who might be giving different voices? To have a fair answer to these questions I propose a thorough look into the theory of narratives.

In his book, Schmid (2010) starts with the centrality of a narrator by saying that "the nature of narration is revealed in the refraction of the narrated reality through

the prism of the narrator” (2010, p. 1). Schmid continues to distinguish the classical and the structuralist concepts of narrative. He points out that the two concepts are either counterintuitive or insufficiently differentiated, and thus he proposes a new direction in literary criticism, which is a hybrid concept. To that end, he proposes the concept of a mediating narrator. He says, “The theory refers to those texts in which the classical concept of narrativity coincides with the structuralist one. Its subject matter will therefore be literary texts that present a story and thereby represent, more or less explicitly, the mediating authority of a narrator (Schmid, 2010, p. 7). In this discussion, I will follow this concept of a “mediating authority” to find out whether there is a narrator or not and to determine the role the inserted letters play in the epistolary works on HIV/AIDS.

It is worth a debate in *Yours Faithfully Yogi*, (Hellen Banda- Aaku, 2008) to find out if the letter at the end of the narrative is a mediated narrative text or mimetic narrative text? Schmid (2010) distinguishes the two by pointing out that a mediated narrative text is a text where a narrator tells the story, while a mimetic narrative text is the one in which the “story is portrayed without a mediating narrative authority”. Another question followed in this article is the literary value of the inserted epistles. Do the letters have any literary or cultural value related to HIV/HIV/AIDS that is worth examining? To discuss these issues, I propose to start by examining the basis of our analysis.

The analysis in this article takes letters as a point of departure in understanding the psycho-social challenges which fictional characters face in their creative or imaginative world. It is an epistolary analysis meaning that a letter is not only a stylistically device, but a pillar upon which a work of art is leaning to get its meaning. Rosenmeyer (2003, p. 20) defines a letter as follows:

A letter is a message, written and signed by its author, sealed, addressed, and finally delivered (by hand, airmail, or pony express) to an addressee. The situation calls for a letter either because the addressee is absent and could not have been communicated with otherwise, or because the writer prefers the medium of writing to communicate matters of secrecy, formality, or emotional delicacy. The letter contains an epistolary greeting, a conventional closing, and perhaps a postscript; the body of the letter may be handwritten, dictated, or typed, but the final signature is usually in the writer's own hand

Following the above definition, we take the term “epistolary analysis” to mean a technique of using letters (epistles) to identify themes in a literary work, as Trudeau (2001) would have it. The analysis is not only based on the inserted letter(s), but also such letters govern and direct the whole discussion raised in a

given work. The following section thus, analyses and discusses the findings based on the inserted letters.

Analysis and Discussion

In all five works analysed, epistles foreground to connect themes. On one hand, such letters are like a writer's needle that stitch literary thoughts on HIV/AIDS, on the other, letters attempt to connect to readers and inform them the experience and challenges of the affected and infected people. This rhymes with the Kiswahili idiom about letters that if physical meeting cannot be accomplished between two parties (the addresser and the addressee), the completion and value could be felt through a letter. It is through these letters that the addresser conveys the value and meaning of his/her work in addressing the HIV/AIDS scourge. For example, while an epistle in *Yours Faithfully*, *Yogi* appeals for free antiretroviral drugs, in *Mateso Mwathirika wa UKIMWI* the letter illustrates the challenges facing those who are using those drugs. It is through letters that we see the issues evolving around this psychosocial and economic challenge brought about by the lack of drugs on one hand, and improper use of the same on the other.

In all these works, an epistle is central to what the author wants to convey to the reader. It is through the letter that the world of the creative work unfolds to give thoughts to the challenges of HIV and HIV/AIDS. Going by the philosophy behind the African maxim: "*baruani nusu ya kuonana*", we understand that a letter means to communicate. What does the narrative voice communicate in relation to HIV/AIDS crisis? The same meaning is also reflected in the saying that "*barua hujibiwa*" (A letter demands a reply). How does the narrative in these works construct answers to questions linked to HIV/AIDS issues? In each of these works, the inserted epistles give interesting scenarios worth stimulating an academic discussion

It is surprising that, although the basic intention of a letter is to communicate, in all the creative works sampled, the epistles do not avail a chance for communicative voices. The epistles are unidirectional, meaning that the voice of a sender does not wait for an answer from the-would be receiver, to proceed. Even where the dialogue is expected like in *Confessions of an HIV/AIDS Victim* or in *Mateso Mwathirika wa UKIMWI*, the narrative voices are unidirectional. The voices in these letters persuade the reader to see what is happening from a certain perspective. In a way, they provide an internal focalization element which is normally seen when considering characters in fiction. While in nine chapters of *Confessions of an HIV/AIDS Victim*, the protagonist Catherine Njeri writes to

her closest friend Marilyn, the reader do not see the latter answering back. It is like reading an autobiography while at the same time we see different players through a single character's life. Besides the elements of focalization captured in these letters, the narrative theory followed in this article also shows that in the *Confession of an HIV/AIDS victim*, a letter is a mediated narrative text. It is through the letter that we are told about what the protagonist experienced, before and after she was diagnosed with the deadly virus. Moreover, the narrative voice in these letters is clear. Not only does the narrator use the first person voice, but she consistently uses an active tone. It is the voice that gives first-hand information on the life of a protagonist and at the same time keeps the bell ringing in the minds of the reader about the reality of HIV/AIDS in the society.

In *Yours Faithfully, Yogi*, the centrality of the letter is backed from the start with a challenging, but persuasive question, raised by the protagonist Yogi: "...if you believed in something very much and you wanted the world to know about it, what you would do?" Yogi asked one of the elders in the area. The answer to this question gives the meaning and power of a letter: "*First I would think about whether I want to remain anonymous or not. Then, I would decide on the most effective way to communicate my message.*" This was the answer from Mr. 'BBC' for which Yogi then proceeded to announce his plan of writing a letter (2008, p. 32). As readers, our focus shifts from looking at Yogi as the character who controls the point of view in question, to the letter as the technique of the focalization. All our expectations as readers are now confined to one "channel" of communication: the letter. We start speculating about the contents of the letter and whether or not, that will be the answer to the problems of the Matengo village. It finally turns out that not only is the letter a focalization text, but also there is a causal connection between Yogi's letter as a narrative and the rest of the text. The rest of the text is meaningless without the letter. The reader is kept in suspense until at the very end, in chapter nine to be able to read the letter. Its focalizing role then comes retrospectively. The reader comes to fully understanding and appreciating the centrality of the letter in this work. It is at the very end and through the letter that Yogi, the protagonist broke not only the silence about the disease, but also challenged the position, which had discouraged him from writing a letter. It is this notion of breaking the silence over the disease that I want now to turn to and discuss how it relates to letter writing.

In *Sitaki Iwe Siri* (I don't like it to remain a secret), the letter is used to break the silence on HIV/AIDS. Through the letter, Musa defy the stereotype over socio-economic challenges like HIV/AIDS. Using a fictitious character Yuri, Musa opposes her grandmother's silence over the disease that killed his parents. The letter shows that Musa and through him, his generation, wants to have a completely different life; a life of self-confidence and openness; a life that would

come out and face the reality. Although Yuri's letter had only three lines, her words were so powerful and made the impact. Musa's grandmother had vowed not to disclose the disease that killed her son and daughter-in law. Silently, but consistently she promised herself: "*nataka iwe siri*" (I want it to remain a secret). She thus decided to keep quiet until her grandson's letter openly opposed her and broke the silence: *sitaki iwe siri*. Musa negates the position of her grandmother, and upholds the power of the letter by giving his letter the title of those "magical words" *sitaki iwe siri*.

The narrating authority shifts from Musa to the letter. From an angle of a third person narrative voice, the letter carries the basic message of the novel: to break the silence over HIV/AIDS. In other words, due to this centrality, the letter by Musa becomes a mediating narrator. It narrates the story on the importance of openness, while at the same time, mediating the past traditions into the present demands. Breaking the silence and facing HIV/AIDS with a positive outlook is also the aim behind the letters in *Mateso Mwathirika wa UKIMWI*. Unlike in the previous novelette, in this work, two things are different. First the writer is anonymous, and secondly, the writer keeps on writing letters without getting answers. Or rather he keeps on writing without waiting to receive an answer. Again, in this work, letters do not conform to an adage that *barua ni nusu ya kuonana*. But even when there was no answer, or name of the writer, it was due to those letters that Mateso was made to live as a character in the story. To be an active character, and push the narrative in its right direction Mateso needed these letters. The existence of these letters resonates with landscape that surrounds the infectious virus. An argument that now we turn to discuss.

The unidirectional nature of the epistles in the HIV/AIDS works is a metaphor. It reflects the way the HIV infects its subjects. The viral infection does not give one a chance to negotiate. There is no dialogue as it were. Once it has secured a place in the body, there is no point of reversal; at least not in the mainstream science of today. For this reason, one needs a kind of perseverance in sending the warning message even if there is no immediate answer. These letters therefore keep flowing to send the right message to the people appealing for change in behaviour. It is this message that was missing in Furaha's life, which, then necessitates for her writing of the list in *Orodha*.

In *Orodha*, the need to understand and take precautions comes too late. The letters in both *Sitaki Iwe Siri* and *Mateso Mwathirika wa UKIMWI*, had important message that did not exist during Furaha's life. The letter in *Orodha* plays an apprehensive function and keeps characters in suspense. This is the soul of a good work. The list is mentioned at the very beginning, and hold on hanging until at the very end of the play. That is where the list is revealed. There is a lot of factors behind this style. With the flashback, HIV/AIDS unfolds the challenges in

the health system of most African countries. It is not a common behaviour that Africans go for health check-ups. It does not happen unless there is a strong reason, and which, most of the time it turns to be treatment and not just check-ups. By employing the flashback style, *Orodha* calls for check-ups. People should not wait for “the list” to start thinking the need for testing. In *Orodha*, the list was an important alarm to those who had had sexual contact with the deceased.

The letter holds the suspense, which in turn builds the urge to know what will follow next. It thus plays an aesthetic motivation in a literary work.

The suspense in both *Yours faithfully Yogi* and *Orodha* makes an interesting comparison. In *Yours faithfully Yogi*, the two characters believed that Shaka’s father had been infected with the deadly virus. The mere suspect triggered the reaction that came to save the whole community. In a similar manner, in *Orodha*, several people were worried that the letter which the protagonist Furaha had left with her mother to be read in public contained a list of names (orodha) of those she had had sex with. The “suspects” wanted their names concealed for fearing the stigma that is attached to the infected. It is this fear that follows Mateso in the anonymous letters before the writer is disclosed.

In *Mateso Mwathirika wa UKIMWI* the letter builds a literary suspense on one hand, and on the other, it is a pillar upon which the narrative spins. The letter is the central part of the novelette and as such it triggers the reading curiosity and builds up the reader’s desire to complete the story. In a sense the role of the letter in *Mateso Mwathirika wa UKIMWI* goes well beyond the meeting sense highlighted in the quoted African idiom, and enters into psycho-analytical issues. Why is the letter anonymous? What is it that the writer wants to convey in a mysterious manner? What could happen if the author(s) were to be disclosed? All these questions engage the reader and keep his or her reading focused. The narrator’s voice in the letter is different from the voice in the rest of the text. The voice in the letter suggests that a reader should take a charge in changing unsafe sex behaviour.

When reading these letters, the reader sees the addressee, a character in a fiction or drama, like a person who is victimised. Throughout the reading, a reader attempts to understand the behaviour of the characters as those of the victimised individuals (Wilkie, 1996). Such characters are considered as being aggravated by the feelings of defencelessness or inability to helping themselves. This situation draws not only sympathy from readers, but it also persuades the way readers see and understand characters.

Understanding characters through the inserted epistles in fiction or drama invites thoughts worth a literary discussion. In a recent study Eder, Jannidis and

Schneider (2010) have discussed different ways of understanding characters in literature, film and other media. This study has dissected characters from different perspective, but has not looked upon a character in fictional worlds, as seen through another medium.

Eder, Jannidis and Schneider (2010, p.3) say the following about characters:

... They remind one of real persons, but at the same time they seem to consist of mediated signs only. They are ›there‹ but they do not appear to exist in reality – we do not meet them on the streets, after all. They do exert an influence on us, but we cannot interact with them directly. They are incredibly versatile; they change over time and appear in different forms in different media...

Through letters, characters become narrators who take positions and give their own point of view. Readers meet such characters in their families, on the streets, at work place and places where people hang out. Letters reveal that the interaction with these people and the way we communicate with them are daily happenings. The letter in *Yours Faithfully, Yogi* for example, gives meaning to the title and thus recaps what the author wants to convey. The author shows the actual life of the people in particularly Africa, where HIV/AIDS has afflicted lives of a significant number of individuals. Reading this letter, one faces the reality of lives of such people than he/she could have done by analysing fictional characters alone.

Again, it is in the title that the readers know the power of the letter. In *Sitaki Iwe Siri*, readers understand Yuri's position through his letter. His three words epistle depicts him as a committed character that is determined to criticize the silence imbued in an older generation. In a way, epistolary analysis avails an opportunity to understand a fictional character through a combination of three perspectives; hermeneutic, psychoanalytic and cognitive (Jannidis& Schneider, p. 5). Readers see Yuri as representing historical and cultural background of his time. Appreciating the powerful words of Yuri: "I do not want this to remain a secret any more" is penetrating his inner most psyche, and through him, understanding those of his fellow youths. The letter therefore illustrates its characters as those having not only influence but possess power to change the status quo.

Conclusion

In the examined works on HIV/AIDS, a letter is used to reveal to the world the narrative voices that show the complex nature of the HIV/AIDS crisis. From a single direct voice to multiple voices representing characters in the third voice a

reader hears different people's concerns over the HIV/AIDS crisis. These voices are made "loud" though inserted letters in the creative works. Sometimes these voices appear in a dialogue, but sometimes it is a monologue where a character – through the letter, speaks with the self.

In a way, the letter becomes a mediating narrative authority, because it is in these letters where a narrator tells the story from his or her perspective without necessarily keeping the status quo. In the four works out of the five analyzed in this article, (that is, with the exception of the *Confessions of an HIV/AIDS Victim*), the insertion of a letter deviates the narrative pattern from the norm. The letter, much as it influences the reading, it comes at the time and space where it was not expected, let alone its contents. Indeed a letter in these works form an event using the Schmid's narratology theory. The insertion of these letters do not obstruct the flow of a narrative, to the contrary, letters blend the story to form an interesting narrative on HIV/AIDS crisis as seen in literary works.

Throughout the texts, (again with the exception of the *Confessions of an HIV/AIDS Victim*) the letter holds suspense until the very end. As a literary feature, the suspense style could be equated with the trepidation in the positive body that increases fear and nervousness to especially undiagnosed HIV infected bodies.

In this article, the use of letters in fiction is so central in elevating different themes. The use of letters is thus a literary style that cannot be ignored when discussing these creative works on HIV/AIDS. But what is more intriguing is the fact that the HIV/AIDS theme compels the use of epistles in HIV/AIDS fiction. In other words, the circumstances of HIV/AIDS as manifested in the creative works that we have discussed, determine the style and indeed the structure of its thematic construction in a literary work. For example, all the preparations that lead to *Yours Faithfully, Yogi*, were under the assumption that there is a crisis looming that needed an urgent attention. It is this crisis that necessitates the writing of the letter which spells out what was needed. The circumstances surrounding the HIV/AIDS crisis influence the insertion of a letter in this novelette.

The insertion of letters in literary works on HIV/AIDS captures the cognitive meaning in these creative works. Readers understand the thoughts surrounding the protagonists and get to establish why a certain happening occurred. It is through such letters that a narrative exposes the aesthetic meaning of the literary works on HIV/AIDS. The use of letters is a style that needs more literary scrutiny and analysis to be able to explain its role in understanding the psychic of an individual character in HIV/AIDS fiction and drama. It is from attempting to make an in depth understanding of the role of letters that might bring out a particular narrative characteristic of the "HIV/AIDS novel" or "HIV/AIDS drama".

We have seen that some characters' existence is made possible by the letters. It is as if such characters have been "created" from these letters. Characters' behavior, the way they change from one position to the other, and the way they develop and make mental progress, are all connected and influenced by these inserted letters in creative works. For example, it was due to the letters that Furaha changed to become Mateso and was made to live as a protagonist in the story in *Mateso Mwathirika wa UKIMWI*. As said earlier, Mateso needed these letters to live and grow as a central character in the story.

One last item captured in this discussion is the shift in the narrative voice. The narrators in all the letters are different from those narrators in the main story. In the epistolary analysis therefore, it is important to distinguish who says what and in which context. While making a single coherent discussion, analysts of HIV/AIDS related literary works should be able to tell the role of letters in fiction and drama.

References

- Adalla, C. (1993). *Confessions of an HIV/AIDS victim*. Nairobi: East African Educational publishers Ltd.
- 11 contemporary epistolary novels that are a blast to read. Retrieved November 26, 2015, from <http://www.bustle.com/articles/34809-11-contemporary-epistolary-novels-that-are-a-blast-to-read>
- Banda-Aaku, H. (2008). *Yours faithfully, Yogi*. Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers Ltd.
- Davies, R. (2011). "Epistolary fiction: Stories told via letters, diaries & journals." n.pag. Web. 26 Sept. 2013.
- Derrida, J. (1987). *From socrates to freud and beyond*. Trans Alan Bass, Chicago. University of Chicago Press.
- Eder, J. Jannidis, F, & Schneider, R. (ed.) (2010). *Characters in fictional worlds: Understanding Imaginary Beings in Literature, Film, and Other Media*. Berlin: de Gruyter.
- Huang, H. (2004). Detour, deferral, and différance: Epistolarity in the post card. Unpublished Masters Degree at National Chengchi University
- Kawegere, F. F. (2007). *Mateso Mwathirika wa UKIMWI*. Nairobi: Phoenix publishers.
- Matundura, B. (2008). *Sitaki Iwe Siri*. Nairobi: Longhorn publishers.
- Mugo, M.G. (1991). *African orature and human rights*. Institute of Southern African Studies: National University of Lesotho, Lesotho.
- Mutembei A. K. (2001). *Poetry and HIV/AIDS in Tanzania: Changing metaphors and metonymies in Haya oral traditions*. Leiden University: CNWS Publications Vol. 101.
- Mutembei, A. K, Emmelin, M, Lugalla, J., & Dahlgren, L. (2002). "Communicating about HIV/AIDS-changes in understanding and coping with help of language in urban Kagera, Tanzania." *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 37(1), 1–16.
- Ngozi, I. (1990). *Ushuhuda wa Mifupa*. Dar es Salaam: Inter-Press Tanzania Ltd.

- Reynolds, S. (2006). *Orodha*. Dar es Salaam: Macmillan Aidan Ltd.
- Rosenmeyer, P. A. (2003). *Ancient epistolary fictions: The letter in Greek literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Schmid, W. (2010). *Narratology: An introduction*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.
- Trudeau, J. L. (ed). (2001). "The Epistolary Novel – Introduction." *Literary Criticism (1400-1800)*. 59 n.pag. Web. 26 Sept. 2013.
- Turner, H., & Martinez, A. L. (eds) 2003. *The Cambridge companion to the Spanish novel from 1600 to the present*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Wilkie, W. 1996. *Understanding the behaviour of victimised people. Beyond bullying*. New South Wales: Association Inc. Millennium Books.