



SHONA PEOPLE'S CONCEPT OF BEAUTY AND ITS RELEVANCE TO THEIR LITERARY APPRECIATION

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ABSTRACT

Literary appreciation, just like literary production, is both cultural and environmental. A critic usually appreciates a work of art depending on how he or she was socialised. For a work of art to be considered beautiful, it is cultural. Hence, what can be beautiful in one culture may be viewed as ugly in another. In Shona people's cosmology, it is clear what for example, a beautiful woman or a beautiful tree is. It is this concept of beauty, which is even exploited by the Shona in their appreciation of works of art. What the people view as a beautiful or good work of art is quite the same as what they regard as a beautiful woman or a beautiful tree. This paper seeks to show that Shona literary appreciation is both inspired and informed by the people's social concept of beauty. This social-literary beauty interface will be explored using examples and extracts from Shona folktales, proverbs, prose and poetry.

Key Words: Literary appreciation, Social-literary beauty, Shona culture, Cosmology

INTRODUCTION

The Shona, like the rest of humanity have a perception of what is beautiful and what is not. In contemporary society, beauty is usually but mythically seen in terms of women. Contrary to this, in traditional Shona society, even men and objects like trees and drums are overtly or covertly viewed, described and even judged according to this aesthetic quality. More importantly, the same concept of beauty exuded in social life applies to their appreciation of any form of literature. Any work of art is beautiful or good depending on its social value. A well-crafted work of art does not easily move the Shona until its relevance or worthiness in improving people's lives has been ascertained.

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More importantly, the Shona people's concept of beauty is opposed to that of, especially the West. This disparity is of importance to literary critics as it provides the basic canons of Shona literary criticism. The paper first discusses beauty as conveyed through Shona poetry, folktales and proverbs and then explores the differences between such a world-view and that of the West. Finally, it highlights the indispensability of this social value to Shona literary appreciation in particular and African literature in general.

THE SHONA PEOPLE'S CONCEPT OF BEAUTY

Special body qualities are admired especially among Shona women. Such qualities are the crust of beauty. There are body sizes and shapes that are praised. In most cases praises are showered to the tall and strongly built women as well as the short and stout ones. Such women normally exude big and round buttocks as well as succulent breasts. A well-developed body in the case of a woman means having rounded buttocks and big and stiff breasts, suggesting fertility (p'Bitek, 1986: 30). Such a posture also assumes agility and virility, values cherished by the industrious Shona society. These features would make it possible for women to give birth, breast feed and carry children on their backs, which are some of their celebrated responsibilities. Such women are eulogised as "*chibandanamapfupa* (the one you can eat whole, including the bones), *chibhamu* (short, beautiful and luscious), *muridzirwamheterwa* (one who is always whistled to by boys – meaning most boys try to have their attention)" (Chidyausiku, 1971: 80) and also "*mutsikapatinhira*" (one whose stepping reverberates on the ground) as in Hamutyinei's poem "Ndiye wandaireva" in *Mabyumira eNhetembo* (1969: 33). White and uniformly arranged teeth are most admired, and if a gap exists between the front teeth, the better. A medium sized and round head (*musoro senhanga rendodo*), a relatively long neck (*mutsipa sewetwiza*), succulent lips (*miromo izere munyepfu*), a succulent chest (*chipfuva chakakombodza*), an expertly tattooed body, strong and smooth legs, rounded and tender cheeks, a medium sized and centrally placed nose are all admirable features. To most Shona men, such are tempting and eye-catching features an ideal woman should possess and it is not surprising that most African men pass resentful comments to the slim ones; comments like, "... *kapi kaye, kanenge kakamedza waya, kapi kaye kanenge kakomana ndiko kaungabvisire danga remombe ikako!*" (... ooh that one that appears as if she swallowed a piece of wire, she looks like a boy, is she the one you can pay a whole herd of cattle as bride price!) (Chidyausiku, 1971: 80-1).

This does not mean that the slim ones do not have a place in Shona society. They too attract praise, but from very few Shona men. The poem "Toita sei navo vana vamazuvano?" in *Nduri dzeNhango dzemuZimbabwe* (1980: 144) testifies this, "*Matetepero ako azere nenyemudzo, inozvuvu meso, ...Ndikakubata yangu inorova hana.*" (Your slimness is laden with captivating features, which attract the eye's attention...If I touch you my heart throbs." In this poem, the slim body is a great centre of attraction to the male who cannot resist showering her with praises. This demonstrates that whilst both the slim and the stout women attract attention and praise, that of the later is more elaborate and popular.

Various shades of skin colour are also admired. The brown, 'light brown' and even the 'black' skins one are all centres of praise. In some cases the skin colour is described as '*Deko renzvuru*' (the skin of the brown fruit). However, the very lightest of all skin colours, though admired, is usually approached cautiously, for its bearer is usually a centre of attraction for most men and so could end up tempted to abuse her beauty.

Much of what has been said about the female body also applies to the male one. However, in the later, fatness is not a virtue. A strong, athletic and healthy body is ideal for the male so that he can carry out all the expected masculine and muscular roles without fatigue creeping in him. It appears that in Africa where marriage is a goal and responsibility a virtue, human beings need to have healthy and strong bodies for them to be able to carry out laid down tasks. So the physical bodily attributes are a necessity for some of the social duties to be carried out.

What happens when the beautiful woman or handsome man fails to carry out the roles expected of him/her? S/he is criticised and lampooned. In other words, the Shona people's concept of beauty is two-faced. The male suitor is not only concerned with the physical bodily attributes of a woman and Mujuru captures this in his poem "Rudo" in *Nduri Dzorudo* (1978: 21-2) where he says,

Waro jaya hawaida uso chete
Mwoyo waro hawaimerera pauso ukararama
Waida zvizhinjzhinji zvaitora nguva
.....
Hawaida kutsveterwa neushava hwechiso
Hawaida kutsveterwa nechimiro chemusikana
Hawaifurirwa neinzwi remusikana
Havaisungwa mbiradzakondo neziso
Izvi handizvo zvavaitsvaka paari kwete
Vakazviona pachena kuti hazvaibatsira

(The boy's heart was not attracted by the face's good looks only
His heart could not treasure the face and live
It desired quite a lot of things, which took time

.....
The beauty of the face would not deceive the heart
The heart would not be deceived by the girl's physical attributes
It could not be deceived by the girl's mellifluous voice
What the eye saw could not deceive it
This is not what the boys looked for from a girl
They discovered that these features are not important)

Mujuru indicates that though physical attributes are worthy mentioning, a young man would never be fooled by the outside appearance of a woman. In fact, young men were, and are still advised and taught to be very careful and suspicious of a very physically beautiful woman because a lot of bad things could be hidden within. A serpent could be lying hidden underneath a seemingly beautiful flower. Chirikure Chirikure in his poem “Ndaidai ndakakutora” in *Rukuvhute* (1989: 7) aptly captures this philosophy of beauty among the Shona. He says he could have married the girl he talks about in this poem on account of her good looks which include, strong and smooth legs, long neck, sexy eyes, soft and sweet voice but he did not because the girl turned out to be lazy, disrespectful to elders, garrulous, ungrateful, immoral, and argumentative and worse, she has aborted so many pregnancies.

Since marriage is a goal, everybody is expected to marry, bear and rear children. This demands loyalty from both parties, the husband and the wife; loyalty to one’s duties and responsibilities. If a woman who had been praised as beautiful is seen to be a witch, immoral or uncultured, then she is criticised and frowned at. The Shona society also thrives on hard work of its individual members – when the beautiful one is discovered to be lazy, she is avoided as a marriage partner. Aschwanden (1982: 47) rightly notes that a young man looking for a wife is advised to make sure his beloved has horny hands; soft hands are a sign that the girl is lazy. Also, if the girl does not have the expected manners and is seen to be talkative, domineering, disrespectful to elders, she is described as *akazvarwa chembere dzainda kudoro*, one who was born when the grandmothers, elderly women had gone to drink beer (meaning she was born when there was no one to teach her good manners). Such a girl fails to attract a marriage partner and is despised. Chidyausiku (1971: 78-83) stresses that among the Shona, a girl raised in, and bearing expected values and manners is highly sought after by men who are serious about courtship and marriage. Cleanliness is a virtue, especially among women. What p’Bitek (1986: 31) writes of the Acholi also applies to the Shona, that the body, teeth and finger nails must be clean, so should be the cooking pots, utensils, gourds for milk and water, the floor and the walls, the compound etc. Among the Shona, long and dirty finger nails are actually associated with witchcraft.

Hence, among the Shona, a woman’s beauty is only praised if it does not deter her from fulfilling the roles expected of her by society. What has been said about the woman equally applies to the man. A man who is ‘beautiful’ or handsome but does not perform his expected duties is described in all negative terms. As Aschwanden (1982: 47) points out, “The girl wants a hardworking husband, lazy men die in the house of bachelors”. A girl also treasures marriage with a man whose cultural background can be established. This comes out clearly in many Shona folktales in which young women are warned against getting married to handsome men whose cultural orientation is not known. In the tales “Girls and boys who turned into lions” in *Shona Folktales* (1987) and “Vasikana vakaroorwa nemadzvinyu” in *Ngano Volume 11* (1982: 57-58), young girls meet boyfriends at a well and in a forest respectively and they agree to elope with them without any of their elders knowing it. The girls’ argument is that if they do not go with the boys, they might never

again in life come across such handsome men. In other words, the girls are swayed by the physical attributes of the boys. They later discover that their husbands turn into lions and lizards respectively. Put differently, they later discover that their husbands' behaviour is far from being human. Such are examples of husbands who were born when the grandfathers, elderly men had also gone beer-drinking, meaning there was no one to advise them on the right kind of behaviour expected in society. The two tales teach young women never to be fooled by outward appearances of men. The tales advise them that all that glitters is not gold. Today, outward appearances which may charm a girl apart from the frame of the body also include possessions like cars, houses, cell phones and money among others. So, like their female counterparts, men are only considered "beautiful" or handsome if their physical bodily attributes are complemented by moral attributes.

In cases where such physical beauty is not matched with moral beauty, then the Shona do not seriously regard it as beauty. Ngara's poem "Wandichashara" in *Nduri Dzerudo* (1978: 29) captures this view:

Teererai munzwe wandichashara pauzima
Kana ndazvifunga kubuda gota
Akanaka kunze nomukati sezhumwi
Akanaka divi rimwe ndomuti fambira mberi

(and hear the kind of person I will choose
When I will have decided to marry
She will have to be outwardly and inwardly beautiful
If her beauty is one sided, then I will tell her not to bother me)

Emphasis here is on the fact that the Shona people's concept of beauty is double-edged; it is both physical and moral. One who is only physically upright is not really considered to be beautiful. Rather, to the Shona, one who is morally beautiful (though with unattractive physical features) is more admirable if compared to one who is the opposite. To them, physical beauty which withers away with time though good, should not take precedence over moral beauty which thrives to eternity. Mujuru (in *Nduri dzoRudo*, 1978: 23) again captures this philosophy when he says:

Nokudaro shoro hayaipiwa wose
Wose ane chimiro chakaipa
Kana chimiro chisinganwisi mvura
Ndiani aiziva chemuninga
Pamwe ndiyeyu aive nyenyedzi chaiyo
Nyenyedzi pahana nezviito

(Therefore criticism was not showered to everyone
To everyone who was not physically beautiful
If the body was not physically attractive
Who knew what was inside?)

Maybe this was the most beautiful
The most beautiful morally)

The poem is both a warning and an encouragement to the Shona man to consider as the better of the two, that girl who though not physically attractive is morally upright. In other words, the girl who may be considered ugly externally but is morally upright and good at performing the roles expected of her by society is the better of the two. The physically ugly but morally good woman is in the long run more beautiful than the physically attractive but morally wicked.

The same applies to males. Women are warned against committing themselves to men who look handsome but whose morals or values could be uncouth. The tale ‘Chinyamapezi’ (The one with leprosy) in *Ngano Volume 11* (1982: 43-45) aptly captures this. A father who has a very beautiful daughter allows every male who wants to propose love to her to do so with the understanding that the daughter will never break her oath of not crossing the mountain that lies across the foot path. The most handsome of all men try their luck but all fail to make the girl cross the mountain. At last there comes the (physically) most unattractive and most despised Chinyamapezi, who is leprosy infested. By turning his head away from the girl each time she tries to catch his attention (for if he looked at the girl, she would go back to her home), Chinyamapezi surprises all and sundry by making the girl cross the mountain and ultimately getting married to him. In another tale, a young man of similar stature manages to bring down (from a tree) a king’s beautiful daughter disregarding the beatings he receives when all the well-to-do have failed. These two young men, although not-so-well-to-do physically, are the best in terms of personality because they have the qualities much needed and treasured in life – resilience, determination, courage and duty consciousness among others. Their bodily attributes do not deter them from performing their social roles and as a result, they are considered more admirable and beautiful among the Shona.

What obtains among human beings is the same with regards other objects like trees and even drums. A *Mutamba*, *Munyii*, *Mutsubvu* or *Mugwavha* tree that grows in the backyard or in a field is not cut down for it bears fruits which happen to feed the human body. If the same tree happens to disturb man’s being, either by being an attraction to reptiles like snakes, then it is done away with. A tree that happens to give shade at one’s home or in the field is again spared the chop. A thorn tree that grows in the backyard or in the field, if it serves no purpose is considered a liability and so is chopped. However if the thorn tree has grown around the homestead as part of a person’s fence, then it is spared. Therefore, a tree is only good or beautiful if it serves an important purpose in people’s lives. If it does not, then there is no reason for keeping it. Such a philosophy is similar to the Malawian one in which Hector Duff says,

They have nothing which they seem to cherish on account of its appearance only. The sublimest scenery leaves them unmoved ... they can understand well enough that a plant should be grown for

the sake of its fruit, that a tree should be spared for it happens to shade a man's hut (Chimombo, 1988: 34).

In the same vein, a drum is only beautiful if it produces the required sound when drummed not just when it looks good in the people's eyes. p'Bitek (1986: 22) puts it right when he says that in Africa, "Drums are for drumming and not merely for gazing at; for dancing; for celebrating in festivals. A silent drum, an unplayed flute, a string of the nanga which is not plucked etc, what are they for?" In other words, all objects' beauty should be functional and not merely aesthetic.

For easy remembrance, the Shona have even coined proverbs to summarise such important observations about life. Among them are the following:

Mukadzi munaku / mutsvuku akasaroya anoba.

A very beautiful woman is either a witch or a thief.

Matende mashava anovazva doro.

Brown gourds make beer lose its taste.

Onde kutsvukira kunze mukati mune masvosve.

A fig fruit looks attractive from outside yet the inside is infested by insects.

Totenda maruva tadya chakata.

We can only give complements to the flowers after we would have eaten the *chakata* fruits.

The first three warn against the deception of outward appearance versus internal reality. The last one warns against rushing to give praises to something when its worthiness has not yet been determined, for example rushing to praise the external beauty of a woman or man when her or his moral uprightness has not been ascertained.

Differences between the Shona people's philosophy of beauty and that of the West

It is true that beauty is a cultural phenomenon. What the Shona view as beautiful is not exactly the same as what Europeans regard as such. To the whites, a beautiful woman is one who is tall and slim, with a long neck and who wears make-up (Chidyausiku, 1971: 80). It is a fact that most African women who take part in beauty contests against European candidates usually find themselves as losers because they do not measure up to the standards of beauty used, which are predominantly western. More so, most beautiful women by African standards will have to undergo a slimming exercise for them to meet the western criteria. Again, those who might in the end meet the western criteria may well have fallen out of favour with true African judges. Similarly, if European women were to participate in beauty contests alongside African women in which the panellists are uncorrupted African judges, they will find the going quite tough. The so called beauty contests, which are a brain-child of the West, end only at examining physical attributes of the

contestants, totally disregarding the very core of the African people's concept of beauty, the moral and social value of an object.

The difference in this concept of beauty is even seen by examining objects like drums and other carved gadgets. Europeans usually buy African-made drums and other carved objects which they see as beautiful so that they can gaze at them back home (p'Bitek, 1986: 22). Africans in general and the Shona in particular do not buy these carved animals merely to gaze at and admire them. A drum, however attractive it may look, is not for adoration. It should be drummed and produce the required sound. If it does not, the maker destroys it and tries to build up another which will perform the role better. What one sees is that whilst Europeans' concept of beauty ends at the external appearance of objects, Africans in general and the Shona in particular treasure the relevance of such objects to the people's lives more than anything. It is this concept of beauty which applies or should apply in Shona literary appreciation. It is thus not surprising that most western approaches to literature are formalist in nature or do not consider the intrinsic value of art. Such approaches like formalism, structuralism, modernism among others, only appreciate the observed and observable techniques exuded by a work of art, paying very minimum or even no attention to the social value of such works of art.

Relevance of the Shona people's philosophy of beauty to Shona Literary Appreciation

As seen, among the Shona, beauty is a two-faced phenomenon which comprises both external and internal features. This has a direct bearing on literary criticism because literature too has both internal and external characteristics. Karenga (1971: 31) correctly observes that "all art can be judged on two levels – on the social level and on the artistic level". The external beauty of humans and objects resemble quite well the observable stylistic devices that make up a poem, novel or play. These too are identifiable by the naked eye as is the case of a person's body size, whiteness of teeth, shape and size of hips, strength and smoothness of legs among others.

A human body can assume various shades of skin colour and be bragged about. Likewise, literature clothe different shades of skin; that is, different genres which include poetry, novel and plays or can have various techniques employed by the various artists and still remain a centre of beauty. Again, since human bodies can be of different shapes and sizes and still be praised, similarly, a poem, novel or play can assume various lengths (sizes) and still attract praise. For example, some poems can be very short. An example is "Rusarura" in Chirikure's *Rukuvhute* (1989) which is ten lines long (others can be shorter still). Some, especially epics, can be very long as exemplified by Chitepo's "Soko risina musoro" in *Nduri DzeZimbabwe* (1983) which is five hundred and fifty-five (555) lines or seventeen (17) pages long yet both attract special praise. With prose, lengths also vary considerably from short stories of sometimes three pages to longer novels of three hundred and forty-four (344) pages as is the case of Ngugi waThiongo's *Tsanga Yembeu* (1987), a translated version of *A Grain of Wheat* (1967).

The various individual physical traits that a human body is praised for, such as round cheeks, white teeth, long neck; succulent breasts for example, all resemble the identifiable devices that constitute the structure of a poem, novel or play. In a poem, such devices would include among others, linkage devices (initial, final and cross-linking), alliteration, assonance, parallelism, rhyme, proverbs, idioms and idiophones. These devices if properly and skilfully used very well resemble a body that is physically beautiful or handsome. The smoothness of a human skin also finds itself manifested by for example, a brilliantly structured poem such as Chivaura's poem "Mumukonombwe" in *Nhaka YeNhetembo* (1996: 38) all of whose stanzas have five lines and the length of whose lines in each stanza are almost equal:

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|-----|
| <i>Mum'konombwe,</i> | (1) |
| <i>Muguta rashe Makombwe,</i> | (2) |
| <i>Tairima chibhakera,</i> | (3) |
| <i>Mubundo rukweza tichidzongera,</i> | (4) |
| <i>Rwenjera nhuri</i> | (5) |
| | |
| <i>VanaMusarurwa,</i> | (1) |
| <i>Nyanzvi huru dzeharwa,</i> | (2) |
| <i>Mumakura kunekaira</i> | (3) |
| <i>Pamafudzi dzakaakwaikira</i> | (4) |
| <i>Ehota mapadza</i> | (5) |

The poem has ten stanzas in all, all of which have the same pattern of; a short first line (1) followed by a relatively longer one (2), then a shorter one again (3), a relatively longer one (4) and lastly a shorter one (5). More so, the poem has such features such as rhyme which is in the form of a, b and c, d as in "...konombwe" and "makombwe", "...bhakera" and "...ngera". Such a well structured poem resembles a body whose physical features appeal to the eye. A novel can also be outstanding by such features as epistolary methods, dialogue, characters' names as chapters; for example Mutasa's *Sekai Minda Tave Nayo* (2005). Each chapter in this novel makes the book outstanding because it is a letter written by a friend to a colleague. Such well-structured works of art should be praised by Shona literary critics for indeed they capture the reader's eye and attention in the same way a beautiful body would. The more devices are aptly used, the more a work of art resembles a luscious body, with well developed buttocks, breasts among others. Ngugi waThiongo (1981) testifies that when he writes his works, he makes great use of a variety of techniques ranging from first person narrative, dialogue, flash back, *in medias res*, stream of consciousness, songs, proverbs, riddles, myths, legends, apt names. A work of art with these embellishing devices surely deserves special attention.

Though the shape, length or structure of a work of art may draw special attention from the eye, Shona critics usually do not, and should not blindly praise these. Any devices if used should be aimed at conveying a message. This is because the purpose of any work of art in Africa is to

communicate (p'Bitek, 1973). Any literary work is crafted for a specific purpose and not just for aesthetic reasons. Achebe (1975: 19) rightly observes that in Africa, "there is no art for art's sake; art for art's sake is just another piece of de-odorised dog shit." Rather, our ancestors from time immemorial created myths and legends and told their stories for a human purpose, including for amusement of course. Thus, among the blacks, there is no such luxury of creating works or appreciating them merely for aesthetic reasons.

The above demonstrates that Shona literary appreciation is not, and should not only be limited to valuing the stylistic devices employed by the artists, but should determine the relevance of such works to the improvement of the Shona people's lives. Chinweizu *et. al* (1980) comment that literature must not just be, it must also mean. Chivaura's poem given earlier, though well-structured, is criticised for hiding its message behind its inaccessible language. Readers cannot discern what the poet says or is trying to say. According to Chinweizu *et. al*, such poets should be criticised for their failure to stand as public figures whose duty and mission is to speak clearly and audibly to their readers. They should remember that they are public figures who should use a public language when writing. In the same vein, Hamutyinei's poem "Pfumo renyuchi harina mununudzi" (The sting of bees has no saviour) in *Mabvumira Enhetembo* (1969: 16-17), part of which goes as follows,

Takange tiri mubishi kumedza doro
Pabikiro ravatete vangu VaMadzoro
Hapana aiziva kuti dziripi pwere
Idzo dzakatipinza mukanwa mamupere
Kushanja kwepwere kuzvikoromorera chakati tende
Vakagofa mukoko wadzo nyuchi idzo dzikati hende

(We were busy drinking beer
 At my aunt, Madzoro's brewing place
 No one knew where the youngsters were
 And they courted trouble for us
 Their misdemeanours are really self-destructive
 They disturbed a beehive and the bees said "Let's go"!)

Though intelligently and skilfully crafted is not accorded much praise. It has rhyming and final linking in cases like "doro" and "Madzoro", "pwere" and "mupere", "tende" and "hende". Again, there is word inversion as in "dziripi pwere" which could have been "pwere dziripi" and idioms as in "dzakatipinza mukanwa mamupere" and idiophones (which aptly captures the drama that ensued as the bees attacked) in later stanzas such as "tetsu tetsu pfacha", "tsudunu", "pfacha-a" among others. All these testify the work of a genius but instead of getting the praises, the poet is criticised for focusing on trivial and peripheral issues at the expense of the most important themes of the time. The poem was published in 1969, when colonial injustice was at its peak; when the Shona

people had had their large tracts of fertile land taken away by white settlers and when they were being forced to work for pittance wages in mines, farms and factories. It was also a period characterised by massive unemployment and acute poverty among the Shona. Instead of standing up as the prophet of justice (Ngugi, 1982: 7), a conscience of the nation (Ngugi, 1972: 65), a teacher (Achebe, 1975: 42) and as a ruler who passes judgement on what is good and bad (p'Bitek, 1986: 39), Hamutyinei chooses to remain silent on these. His behaviour can be likened to that of the proverbial man who left his house on fire to run after a rat that had escaped from the flames (Achebe, 1975: 78). In other words, to Shona critics, the poem does not deserve much praise because it does not help improve the Shona people's lives. It serves no special purpose to Africans. To the Shona, just like other black Africans, a poem is only beautiful if it helps to improve their lives, if it conveys an important message, if it exposes the enemy, praise the people and support the revolution (Karenga, 1971: 32).

The same applies to many poems, novels and plays that were published during the colonial period after the recommendation by white assessors who formed the editorial board of the Literature Bureau. Kuimba's novel, *Gehena Harina Moto* was recommended for publication for two main reasons. First and foremost, it was said to be a replica of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* (Chiwome, 1996) and the other reason was that it showed the Shona people's past as marred by violence, disorder and superstition. The first point shows that the book was accepted purely on formalist grounds; its structure or layout resembled that of a European play. This would mean that for a Shona work of art to be considered good or beautiful, it should have visible structuralist elements and should be moulded after a known European work of art. At another level, the work of art should despise Africans and their cultural values, should champion the "white is good and black is bad" philosophy. What is clear is that the concept of a good work of art is quite different between the Shona and the Europeans. Whilst Europeans concentrate on formal aspects, the Shona concentrate on what those formal aspects convey.

Of importance to note also is that a poem, novel or play may have a poor structure, may be devoid of captivating stylistic devices. To Europeans who treasure more the outside as opposed to the inside, such literature if it does not have devices that make it prominent, is substandard. It is similar to a man or woman whose bodily features are far from being admirable. However, to the Shona who treasure more the inside, such a work of art is good and worth the praise if it realistically and meaningfully explores social life. Such a work of art would be very similar to a tree that gives shade to a man's hut, to a drum which, though poorly constructed produces a good sound. Examples of such literature include Mutasa's novel, *Nhume Yamambo* (1990) and Zvarevashe's *Dzinza raVaGovera VaChirumhanzu naMutasa* (1998). Structurally, they are not the best yet they remain some of the very few books so far to realistically capture the Shona people's past in an extraordinary way. As Karenga observes, between the social and artistic judgement accorded to a work of art, the artistic, though necessary is not sufficient. What is important is the social criterion. He says:

All art must reflect and support the Black revolution, and any art that does not discuss and contribute to the revolution is invalid, no matter how many lines and spaces are produced in the proportion and symmetry ... (Karenga, 1971: 31).

Thus although a work of art is well patterned and has several devices to its credit, if it does not serve to meaningfully explore and improve people's life then it is not worth praising. If a work of art then confirms to both the internal and external beauty, the better. Examples of works of art that try to match the two beauties are poems by Chirikure Chirikure in *Rukuvhute* and *Hakurarwi* which use simple diction, linkage devices, rhyme, parallelism, proverbs, similes, idiophones among others to bring out topical issues such as irresponsibility of leaders, corruption, cultural disintegration, denigration of one's language among others. Also Mabasa's novel *Mapenzi* (1999) uses such devices as riddles, folktales, characters' names as chapters, symbolism, flashback, stream of consciousness to bring out issues like corruption, immorality, looting of war victims' compensation fund and the general deterioration of economy. These works of art deserve the most of all praises. As Karenga (1971: 32) rightly remarks,

Art should play the role it should play in Black survival and not log itself down in the meaningless madness of the western word. In order to avoid this madness, black artists and those who wish to be artists must accept the fact that what is needed is an aesthetic, a black aesthetic, that is a criteria for judging the validity and / or beauty of a work of art.

It is this aesthetic that the Shona people's concept of beauty has tried to demonstrate.

CONCLUSION

The Shona people like any other humanity, have their own conceptualisation of what is beautiful and what is not. To them, beauty is judged basing on two parameters, the outward appearance of an object and then its significance in improving people's lives. An object which may be good looking but does not serve a specific commendable function in society is deemed ugly and therefore useless. A bad looking object which performs an important function in the people's lives is admired. One that matches the two facets is the most highly celebrated. This concept of beauty is quite different from that of the West where the outside appearance of an object takes precedence over its value or purpose. Therefore, it is from their concept of beauty that Shona critics get, and should get inspiration in their analysis of works of art. Only works of art that serve important functions in society should be accorded praise and not those which merely strive to bring out some recommendable patterning or structure. Works of art that are a combination of the two beauties, the physical and the social, the external and the internal are the best and it is literature of this kind that Shona critics should urge writers to produce.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The first draft of this paper was accepted for presentation at the African Languages Association (ALASA) Conference which was held at the University of Cape Town, 3-5 July 2006.

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