**THE HEART SOOTHERS BY: SYLVESTER ONZIVUA**

**Setting**: The play the heart Soothers is set in the contemporary Africa. It addresses issues of tradition and modern civilization.

**About the book**

The heart Soothers is a play that explores the clash between tradition and modern civilization. This is manifested in the institution of marriage and love relationships in the contemporary African setting. A lot of questions arise i.e. must parents choose marriage partners for their children? Can educated women fit in rural setting? Is church marriage superior to traditional marriage? Does infidelity solve marital challenges? All these questions come to pass as the protagonists struggle to make ends meet in their relationship.

The playwright uses Iyaa to echo the need for the preservation of the traditional values, culture and heritage while embracing the positive aspects of western civilization.

**Plot Summary**

The text starts when Jimmy has taken his fiancée Mini to the village to meet his mother. Iyaa Jimmy’s mother seems not to be impressed with Minis lifestyle and in her mind she has the Catechists daughter as the best wife for her son. To make matters worse, Mini breaks Iyaa’s pot which has been there for generations. This makes Iyaa to lament that in the broken pot she sees her own death and the death of her son.

Jimmy and Mini’s relationship seem to be flourishing. Jimmy wants Mini to permanently move in with him. But at first she is resistant but later she succumbs. Several months later, all is not well. When mini’s friend Florence pays her a visit, unfaithfulness has crept into their relationship. Jimmy is engulfed in reckless living, epitomized by alcoholism, deception, pride and arrogance to Mini. Florence advises Mini to visit Jaja the native doctor to fix her problem or get another man (a panadol, pain killer, and heart soother) but mini remains faithful.

Jimmy goes ahead to continue lodging away with Jez and Mini takes to revenging and nursing her frustration by lodging with Jogo. This is after she has succumbed to Florence’s ideas.

Jimmy seems to have come to his senses and now wants to formally visit Minis parents. He prefers traditional marriage to church wedding. Jimmy one time says “ In the Whiteman’s culture a woman goes to her new home through the church. But for us she goes to church through her new home.” Their conversation is cut short when he gets a message that his mother is ill. He prepares to leave for village.

In Jimmy’s absentia, Mini invites her heart soother Jogo into the house. She reveals that she is pregnant of him. Later in the night Jimmy and Patrick return. Jimmy has had an accident. Jogo disguises as a woman, however this disguise is blown when jimmy discovers Jogo’s clothes and this makes Mini and Jogo to flee. Jimmy decides to bring Jez to replace Mini and is supported by Patrick. Jez is advised by Florence to bring the native doctor to cleanse the house. This happens when Jimmy has gone to the hospital. On his return, he finds Jez in a bad condition caused by a concoction given to her by a native doctor.

Florence suggests that they call Jogo to take them to the hospital and in the process, Jimmy returns finding Jogo again. This annoys him and thus strangles him to death. Jimmy’s sister Recho, storms in to announce the death of their mother Iyaa. His mother’s ghost is lamenting about the broken pot.

**Relevance of the title (The Heart Soothers**)

The title is relevant to the play whereby; when the young graduates Jimmy and Mini get misunderstandings. Their acquaintances Florence and Patrick begin to ill- advise them. Their selfish interest in misguiding the couple to secretly involve themselves in illicit relationships, and revenge so as **to “sooth their hearts**.” Mini gets Jogo as her heart soother whereas Jimmy gets Jez. This makes all of them to end in ruin.

**Character and characterization**

**Jimmy**

* He is a company executive director.
* Elitist and dismissive.
* Male chauvinist.
* Assertive i.e. on the issue of the Catechist’s daughter, he stands firm to reject it basing on the qualifications he desires. Page 20.
* Unfaithful i.e. he goes ahead to lodge with Jez and keeps on deceiving Mini.
* Deceitful
* Irresponsible

**Mini**

* She is a school teacher and Jimmy’s fiancée.
* Loyal
* She is respectful of the traditional norms.
* Vengeful

**Iyaa**

* She is Jimmy’s mother.
* Disciplinarian
* Hardworking i.e. she struggles and educates her son Jimmy up to the university. Unfortunately she does not achieve her dream. Her son does not become responsible of the family. Therefore she dies unhappy.

**Patrick and Florence**

These remind of the many men and women in our society who specialize in causing confusion and distress in people’s relationships. Their target is to ruin people’s relationships. They are big mouthed.

Other characters we have;

* Jogo- taxi driver
* Jez-young woman
* Recho-Jimmy’s sister
* Jaja- native doctor

Themes and ideas.

* Traditionalism
* Family conflict
* Tradition versus civilization
* Love relationships

Compiled by: Tr. Alex Katamba