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"Without a Name" by Yvonne Vera

"Without a Name" is a novel by Yvonne Vera, an award-winning author from Zimbabwe known for her poetic prose, difficult subject-matter, and strong women characters. The novel is a tragic tale of Mazvita, a young Zimbabwean woman who is a victim of Zimbabwe's violence and male-dominated society.

Mazvita, originally from rural Mubaira, travels to Harare to escape the war and start a new life. She works in a tobacco field where she meets Nyenyedzi and they have an affair. However, Mazvita is scared living in that area due to the ongoing war of independence in 1977. Despite Nyenyedzi's preference for the rural area, Mazvita decides to move to Harare on her own.

Upon arriving in Harare, Mazvita finds the city far from her expectations. The streets are strewn with rubbish and she struggles to find a job. She meets Joel who allows her to move in with him and takes care of her. However, when Joel discovers that she is pregnant – a pregnancy that must have started before they met – he wants her to leave and eventually throws her out.

Mazvita ends up wandering the streets with her baby, tired and weak. She decides to take a bus without knowing where to go. The novel ends tragically with Mazvita left with a dead baby and lost.

Throughout the novel, Vera vividly portrays Mazvita's pain and the pain of her country, particularly its women. The novel is a forceful depiction of the struggles faced by women in Zimbabwe's difficult past.

"Without a Name" by Yvonne Vera explores several themes:

1. **Violence and War:** The novel is set during Zimbabwe's war of independence in 1977. The violence of the war and its impact on the people, particularly women, is a recurring theme.
2. **Women's Struggles in a Male-Dominated Society:** Mazvita, the protagonist, is a victim of Zimbabwe's male-dominated society. Her

struggles represent the hardships faced by many women in similar situations.

3. **Rural vs. Urban Life:** Mazvita's journey from the rural area of Mubaira to the city of Harare highlights the stark contrast between rural and urban life. The novel explores the challenges and disillusionment that come with urban life.

4. **Motherhood and Loss:** Mazvita's experience of motherhood is marked by hardship and ultimately, loss. The theme of motherhood is explored through her relationship with her baby.

5. **Identity and Displacement:** Mazvita's journey and her experiences in Harare lead to a sense of displacement and loss of identity. The title of the novel itself, "Without a Name", underscores this theme.

These themes are intertwined to present a poignant portrayal of the struggles faced by women in Zimbabwe's difficult past.

A Cowrie of Hope by Binwell Sinyangwe

"A Cowrie of Hope" is a novel by Zambian author Binwell Sinyangwe. The story is set in Zambia and revolves around poverty, resilience, and the pursuit of hope against formidable odds. Here's a comprehensive summary:

Setting:

The novel is set in a rural village in Zambia, providing a backdrop that reflects the socio-economic and cultural context of the region.

Plot Summary:

- **Introduction of the Protagonist:** The protagonist, Nasula, is a young Zambian woman living in a village. She is married to a man named Winelo Chiswebe, and they struggle to make ends meet in the face of poverty.

- **A Quest for a Better Life:** Nasula and Winelo face numerous challenges in their impoverished life. They yearn for a better future and decide to seek their fortunes in the city. Winelo leaves for Lusaka in search of employment, promising to send for Nasula once he is settled.
- **Betrayal and Loss:** Winelo, however, falls prey to the allure of city life and abandons Nasula. Left alone in the village, Nasula faces the stigma of being a deserted wife and the harsh realities of rural poverty. She becomes determined to overcome her circumstances.
- **The Cowrie Shell:** Nasula discovers a cowrie shell, a symbol of hope and possibility. The cowrie becomes a focal point in her life, representing her aspirations and resilience in the face of adversity.
- **Struggles and Triumphs:** Nasula faces various trials, including societal judgment and economic hardship. Despite these challenges, she strives to build a better life for herself and her daughter, Kaliwo. Her determination and resourcefulness lead to small triumphs.
- **Themes of Resilience and Hope:** The novel explores themes of resilience, the indomitable human spirit, and the capacity for hope in the midst of dire circumstances. Nasula's journey becomes a testament to the strength of the human will.
- **Social Realities:** Binwell Sinyangwe uses Nasula's story to shed light on the social and economic challenges faced by many in Zambia. The novel addresses issues of poverty, gender inequality, and the complexities of urbanization.
- **Cultural Context:** The story is deeply embedded in the cultural context of Zambia, incorporating traditional beliefs and practices into the narrative.

Style and Reception:

Binwell Sinyangwe's writing style in "A Cowrie of Hope" is characterized by its vivid portrayal of Zambian life and its exploration of universal themes through a distinctly African lens. The novel has received acclaim for its

poignant storytelling and its ability to resonate with readers, offering a window into the complexities of life in rural Zambia. It stands as a work that both captures the specific struggles of its characters and addresses broader human experiences.

Highlighted summary of the novel

“A Cowrie of Hope” is a novel by Binwell Sinyangwe that captures the rhythms of a people whose poverty has not diminished their dignity, where hope can only be accompanied by small acts of courage, and where friendship has not lost its value.

The story revolves around Nasula, a widowed mother of one, who is portrayed as a poor woman. She is troubled by her inability to raise funds for her daughter’s schooling. Nasula needs one hundred kwacha to save her daughter, Sula, from suffering the way she had as an adult. She has an idea of what she wants her daughter to grow into — an independent woman who is not dependent on a man just like she was on her husband. To her, education is the only key that can open her daughter the door to such liberty.

She reminisces on how she got to her current state of penury. Her late husband, Winelo Chiswebe, had taken her from the village to the city. He provided for all her needs and yet taunted her about it and her seeming helplessness. She realized she was a financial liability and could not alter this fact. Then, Winelo was shot by the police while trying to steal tins of paint from a paint manufacturing company. His family, particularly his father and brother, came to the city to accuse her of being responsible for her husband’s death. At first, they tried to make her marry Isaki Chiswebe, the fourth-born and oldest son of Chiswebe after Winelo. Nasula refused to acquiesce to their demand on the ground that the Chiswebes love money more than people. They value money over human life. Consequently, they leveled accusations against her; for example, that she is complicit in her husband’s death. They refused to acknowledge the dead man’s bequeathal of his properties to his wife and daughter. Instead, the family sent Nasula and her daughter packing, and sold Winelo’s Kalingalinga house. Nasula managed to find her way back to the village where she has been taking care of her daughter all on her own in spite of her state of lack. Now, she resolves to turn to her husband’s family for financial aid. After Nasula resolves to turn to her husband’s family for financial aid, she goes to her parents-in-law to ask for money for Sula’s education. Her father-in-law, Chiswebe, is sympathetic but he too has lost all his money. She gets grain and other provisions from a friend called

Nalukwi and is given a bag of beans to sell at the market. The beans are valuable and Nasula sees them as the money she needed to send her daughter to school. But when Nasula arrives at the market, a man takes her beans without paying her. After the man takes Nasula's beans without paying her, she does not return empty-handed. Instead, she tries to track the man down. First, the man claims that Nasula is mad. Then when she takes him to the police, the man bribes an officer. But Nasula does not give up and takes her case to the "big boss" of the police. After Nasula takes her case to the "big boss" of the police station, her determination and love for her daughter lead to a positive outcome. Because of her love for her daughter, Nasula gets the money for her beans. She returns home and Sula can go to school. This shows the strength of Nasula's character and her unwavering hope for a better future for her daughter.

Characters of the novel

In addition to **Nasula** and her daughter **Sula**, the novel "A Cowrie of Hope" features several other characters:

Winelo Chiswebe: Nasula's late husband who brought her from the village to the city.

Isaki Chiswebe: The fourth-born and oldest son of Chiswebe after Winelo.

Chiswebe: Nasula's father-in-law.

Nalukwi: A friend of Nasula who gives her grain and other provisions.

These characters play significant roles in the story, contributing to the narrative's exploration of poverty, dignity, and hope.

Rebel by Bediako Asaré

"Rebel" is a novel by Ghanaian writer Bediako Asare, published as part of the influential Heinemann African Writers Series. The story is set on an imaginary island off the African coast, in the remote village of Pachanga. The inhabitants live a traditional lifestyle, untouched by modern innovations.

The villagers are governed by Mzee Matata, a fetish priest, who refuses to allow any innovations to undermine his authority. However, after many years of cultivating the same land and fishing the same stream, the soil is

overworked, the fish are being rapidly depleted, and the villagers are facing starvation.

Only one villager, Ngurumo, dares to challenge the fetish priest by suggesting that the villagers relocate to a fertile valley on the other side of the jungle. Mzee Matata rejects this idea, arguing that the villagers are suffering because they have displeased the gods. He regards Ngurumo as a threat, and attempts to have him killed during a hunting expedition.

When this fails, Ngurumo realizes how dangerous it is for him to remain in the village, and together with his wife Seitu, he sneaks away at night and builds a new life for himself in the valley. To Mzee Matata, Ngurumo's disappearance and the possibility that he is living well while the rest of the people suffer is a serious challenge to his authority, especially as the people are starving.

At a meeting of the entire village, Mzee Matata explains to them that the gods are angry with Pachanga because of Ngurumo and because the villagers have abandoned the ancient practice of human sacrifice. That night, he sends a group of hunters led by Fundi to the valley to bring back Ngurumo and Seitu so that they can be sacrificed and the village spared.

Ngurumo and Seitu are brought back to the village and prepared for sacrifice. As Mzee Matata raises his knife to plunge it into Seitu's belly, there is suddenly a loud pop, and he falls dead to the ground. He was shot by Shabani, a government surveyor, who happened upon the valley by chance just as the ceremony was about to take place.

Shabani startles the villagers with his magic stick (his rifle) which can kill a powerful fetish priest at a distance and the many other wonders he shows them. He befriends Ngurumo and begins to prepare him for a new leadership role for the villagers. He is, however, insistent that the choice be made democratically, and that Ngurumo be elected. His chief rival is Fundi, who inherits the role of fetish priest from Mzee Matata.

Some important themes highlighted in the novel

The novel "Rebel" by Bediako Asare explores several themes such as :

1. **Conflict between Tradition and Modernity:** The story is set in a traditional African village, where the people are governed by a fetish priest who insists on maintaining old customs and traditions. However, the protagonist, Ngurumo, represents modernity and progress, challenging the old ways and advocating for change.
2. **Struggle for Leadership:** Ngurumo engages in a hazardous fight for leadership with the conservative fetish priest. This theme highlights the power dynamics within the community and the resistance to change.
3. **Survival and Adaptation:** The villagers face extinction from starvation due to overworked soil and depleted fish stocks. The theme of survival is evident in their struggle to adapt to these harsh conditions and find new ways to sustain their community.
4. **Courage and Bravery:** A few brave men, including Ngurumo, struggle against the fetish priest's control and strive to bring Western civilization in. Their courage is a key theme in the novel, demonstrating the strength required to challenge authority and advocate for change.
5. **Superstition and Religion:** The fetish priest uses superstition and religious beliefs to maintain his authority. The theme of superstition versus rationality is a significant aspect of the novel.

These themes contribute to the richness of the novel and provide a deep exploration of societal issues within the context of an African village.

Characters of the novel

The novel "Rebel" by Bediako Asare features several characters:

1. **Ngurumo:** The hero of the story, Ngurumo challenges the traditional ways of his village and advocates for change. He engages in a hazardous fight for leadership with the conservative fetish priest.

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2. **The Fetish Priest:** This character is a conservative leader who insists on maintaining old customs and traditions. He controls the people through fetish worship and human sacrifice.
3. **The People of Pachanga:** These are the villagers who are caught between the conflict of old and new ideas. They face extinction from starvation and are influenced by the power struggle between Ngurumo and the Fetish Priest.
4. **A Few Brave Men:** These characters struggle against the control of the Fetish Priest and strive to bring Western civilization into their village.

These characters contribute to the rich narrative of the novel and help explore the themes of tradition versus modernity, leadership, and survival.