TR93-83

A STUDY OF NGUGI WA THIONG'O'S LATER NOVELS TO ASSESS HIS ADAPTATION OF DRAMATIC TECHNIQUES AND GIKUYU ORAL TRADITIONS TO THE REQUIREMENTS OF FICTION

THESIS
In Fulfilment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Presented to
The Faculty of Arts
RHODES UNIVERSITY

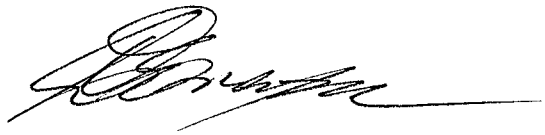
by

LABAN OMELLA ERAPU

November 1992

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis wholly represents my own work and I certify that it has not been submitted for a degree at any other university.



.....

Laban Omella Erapu

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines Ngugi wa Thiong'o's later writings in order to establish the nature of his quest for a people's literature. It illustrates how the author attempts to break the barriers between traditional oral forms and the relatively new written forms in addressing a basically "illiterate" audience. The research begins with an exploration of Gikuyu oral literature as an essential background to Ngugi's later dramatic and fictional writings as distinct from his earlier literary works in which he initiates the dominant quest for a more just society. Ngugi's return to these roots constitutes the central "homecoming" that characterizes his search for new forms.

The analysis is conducted through three significant chronological stages, representing Ngugi's writings over a period of about a decade from the mid-1970s to the early 1980s. Each stage starts with a play and performance, followed by a parallel novel, the first pair written in English and the subsequent ones in Gikuyu. The three stages - designated **Transition**, **Homecoming** and **Realization** - mark Ngugi's involvement in the promotion of Gikuyu culture and orature, both as a source of inspiration and as a cause to which he fully dedicates himself.

The transitional stage depicts the convergence between conventional and traditional oral literary forms with which Ngugi begins to experiment. The second stage introduces significant departures as Ngugi begins to use the Gikuyu language as his primary medium of creative expression. The final stage demonstrates his ultimate assertion of the primacy of orality over the written word as a dynamic agent of transmission.

The thesis concludes that Ngugi wa Thiong'o in these later works - while leaving the possibilities of his vision of a "New Earth" unfulfilled - pioneers the African writers' climb down from an "ivory tower" to deal with the realities of the experience of the predominantly non-reading African masses, acknowledged as both recipients of and active participants in the relatively new written literature which purports to speak for their experiences and their times.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF APPENDICES x

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS xi

0 GENERAL INTRODUCTION 1

0.1 THE RESEARCH PROBLEM 2

0.1.1 The Field 2
0.1.2 The Objectives 2
0.1.3 The Context 3

0.2 THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK 5

0.3 THE THESIS OUTLINE 7

0.3.1 Part One: Gikuyu Oral Literature 7
0.3.2 Part Two: The Transition Stage 8
0.3.3 Part Three: The Homecoming Stage 8
0.3.4 Part Four: The Realization Stage 9
0.3.5 Part Five: Conclusions 9

1 PART ONE:
GIKUYU ORAL LITERATURE 11

1.1 INTRODUCTION 12

1.2 DEFINITION 13

1.3 CLASSIFICATION 15

1.3.1 Narratives 15
1.3.1.1 Straight Narratives *(Ng'ano)* 16
1.3.1.2 Ogre Narratives *(Ng'ano cia Maarimu)* 18

1.3.2 Dance-Songs 20
1.3.2.1 Songs for Children 23
1.3.2.2 Songs for Young Adults 24
1.3.2.3 Songs for Elders 27
1.3.2.4 Songs by Professional Performers 28

1.3.3 Poetry 30
1.3.3.1 *Gicaandi* 30
1.3.3.2 *Kiriiro* 32

1.3.4 Proverbs 34

1.3.5 Riddles 36

1.4 THE ORAL ARTIST 38

1.4.1 The Narrator 42

1.4.2 The Singer 45

2 PART TWO: TRANSITION 52

2.1 INTRODUCTION 53

2.1.1 The First Stage: Transition 53

2.1.2 The Transition Play: *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* 57

2.1.3 The Transition Novel: *Petals of Blood* 61

2.2 THE TRANSITION PLAY: *THE TRIAL OF DEDAN KIMATHI* 65

2.2.1 Plot and Structure 65
2.2.1.1 The Opening 65
2.2.1.2 First Movement 66
2.2.1.3 Second Movement 67
2.2.1.4 Third Movement 71

2.2.2 Theme and Social Context 74
2.2.2.1 The Ideological Debate 75
2.2.2.2 The Audience 81

2.2.3 Characterization 84
2.2.3.1 The Hero and Ogre Syndrome 84
2.2.3.2 Stereotypes: Patriots, Traitors and Oppressors 85
2.2.3.3 Dedan Kimathi 86
2.2.3.4 Shaw Henderson 89
2.2.3.5 Woman, Boy and Girl 92
2.2.3.6 Waitina, Johnnie and Windhoek 94

2.2.4 Stylistic Adaptations 95
2.2.4.1 Dramatic Techniques 96
2.2.4.2 The Choice of Language 98

2.3 THE TRANSITION NOVEL: *PETALS OF BLOOD* 103

2.3.1 Linear Plot versus Cyclic Narrative 103

2.3.2 Narrative Technique: Blending the Old and New 106

2.3.3 Psychoanalytical Figures and Traditional Character Profiles 113

2.3.3.1 Munira 114
2.3.3.2 Karega 122
2.3.3.3 Abdulla 125
2.3.3.4 Wanja 127

2.3.4 Themes: Renewal and Continuity 132

2.3.4.1 Political Ideology: The Threat of Capitalism 132

2.3.4.2 Religion: The Church as an Agent of Neo-Colonialism 135

2.3.4.3 Culture: A People Torn Apart 136

2.3.5 What Readership, What Audience? 138

3 PART THREE: HOMECOMING 143

3.1 INTRODUCTION 144

3.1.1 The Second Stage : Homecoming 144

3.1.2 The Homecoming Play : *Ngaahika Ndeenda* 145
3.1.2.1 The People's Theatre 145
3.1.2.2 The People's Play 147

3.1.3 The Homecoming Novel : *Caitaani Mutharaba-ini* 149

3.2 THE HOMECOMING PLAY : *NGAAHIKA NDEENDA (I WILL MARRY WHEN I WANT)* 158

3.2.1 Introduction 158

3.2.2 **The Play as Narrative** 160
3.2.2.1 Narrators as Heroes 160
3.2.2.2 Villains as Caricatures 167

3.2.3 ***Ngaahika Ndeenda:* A Celebration of Culture** .. 170
3.2.3.1 Song, Dance and Ritual in Performance 171
3.2.3.2 Gikuyu Proverbs and Sayings as a Reservoir of Traditional Wisdom 186

3.3 THE HOMECOMING NOVEL: *CAITAANI MUTHARABA-INI (DEVIL ON THE CROSS)* 198

3.3.1 Introduction 198

3.3.2 **Style: The Novel as an Ogre Narrative** 199
3.3.2.1 The Narrating Persona and the Writer as Narrator 200
3.3.2.2 The Symbolic Journey as a Structural Narrative Technique ... 206
3.3.2.3 The Faustus Factor and the Ogre Syndrome 210
3.3.2.4 The Devil's Feast 218

3.3.3 **Characterization: Heroes, Patriots and Ogres** 221
3.3.3.1 Wariinga 222
3.3.3.2 Gatuiria 224
3.3.3.3 Muturi 227
3.3.3.4 Wangari 229
3.3.3.5 Mwireri wa Mukiraai 231
3.3.3.6 Mwaura 232
3.3.3.7 Student Leader: The Facilitator 234
3.3.3.8 The Rich Old Man from Ngorika (Ghitahy) and *Boss* Kihara: The Devil and His Proxy 236

3.3.4 **Themes: From the Universal to the Traditional** 238
3.3.4.1 The Duality of Man 239
3.3.4.2 Class Conflict: Proletariat and Peasants versus Bourgeoisie 244
3.3.4.3 Betrayal and Retribution 246

4 PART FOUR: REALIZATION 251

4.1 INTRODUCTION 252

4.1.1 The Third Stage : Realization 252
4.1.2 The Realization Play : *Maitu Njugira* 252
4.1.3 The Realization Novel: *Matigari* 255

4.2 THE REALIZATION PLAY : *MAITU NJUGIRA (MOTHER, SING FOR ME)* 258

4.2.1 Introduction 258

4.2.2 Plot and Structure 259
4.2.2.1 Act One 259
4.2.2.2 Act Two 269
4.2.2.3 Act Three 271

4.2.3 Characterisation: Duplicates and Stereotypes 274
4.2.3.1 Kang'ethe 275
4.2.3.2 Kariuki 276
4.2.3.3 Nyathira 277
4.2.3.4 George Scott alias Kanoru 277
4.2.3.5 Nyabaara 279
4.2.3.6 Mwendanda 280

4.2.4 Themes: Renewal and Continuity 281
4.2.4.1 Economic Exploitation and Political Oppression 281
4.2.4.2 Unity: "United We Stand, Divided We Fall" 282

4.3 THE REALIZATION NOVEL: *MATIGARI MA NJIRUUNGI (MATIGARI)* 287

4.3.1 Introduction 287

4.3.2 The Oral Narrative as A Fusion of Form and Content 289

4.3.2.1 Part One: Delineation of Characters 291
4.3.2.1.1 The Matigari Mystique 292
4.3.2.1.2 Muriuki and the Children 294
4.3.2.1.3 Ngaruro wa Kiriro and the Workers ... 295
4.3.2.1.4 Guthera and the Women 296
4.3.2.1.5 John Boy, Robert Williams and the Colonial Legacy 297

4.3.2.2 Part Two: The Symbolic Quest 298

4.3.2.3 Part Three: The Ultimate Confrontation ... 302

4.3.3 Devices of Orature 306
4.3.3.1 Proverbs 306
4.3.3.2 Riddles 309
4.3.3.3 Poetry 311
4.3.3.4 Songs 315

5 CONCLUSIONS 321

5.1 FINDINGS OF THE STUDY 322

5.2 CONCLUSIONS 323

APPENDICES 331

BIBLIOGRAPHY 361

LIST OF APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1A:	THE WOMAN AND THE BIRD by Wambui wa Wambugu	332
APPENDIX 1B:	THE OGRE AND THE GIRL by Wangari	334
APPENDIX 1C:	THE GIRL AND THE OGRE by Fidelis Wanjiru	335
APPENDIX 1D:	THE DAUGHTER OF KARARU by Wambui wa Wambugu	337
APPENDIX 1E:	THE STORY OF WANJIRU by Nyokabi wa Maithori	339
APPENDIX 1F:	MUCUNGW'A by Wanjiru Kabuagara	340
APPENDIX 1G:	NJUKIA	341
APPENDIX 1H:	KIBAATA DANCE-SONG	341
APPENDIX 1I:	NDUUMO DANCE-SONG by Wacucu wa Njoroge	342
APPENDIX 1J:	MUTHUNGUUCI by Wanjiru Kabuagara	343
APPENDIX 1K:	GITIIRO by Wacucu wa Njoroge and S. Wambui	345
APPENDIX 1L:	GIKUYU PROVERBS (THIMO)	346
APPENDIX 1M:	GIKUYU RIDDLES (NDAI)	348
APPENDIX 2A:	NGUGI WA THIONG'O: WRITER IN TROUBLE	350
APPENDIX 2B1:	*TRIAL OF DEDAN KIMATHI* IN LONDON	352
APPENDIX 2B2:	NGUGI'S VIEW OF DEDAN KIMATHI	353
APPENDIX 2C:	NGUGI'S PLAY UPSETS LONDON	354
APPENDIX 2D:	NGUGI'S PLAY BANNED	355
APPENDIX 2E:	THE BIRTH OF A NEW EAST AFRICAN AUTHOR	356
APPENDIX 3A:	NGUGI WA THIONG'O STILL BITTER OVER HIS DETENTION	357
APPENDIX 3B:	KAMIRITHU REVISITED	360

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge the assistance of the following people without whose contribution this research might not have been possible:

- Professor Malvern van Wyk Smith, my supervisor, for seeing a flicker in the dark which became a ray of light; for not being alarmed by the frantic pace at which I worked; and for giving me a sense of direction whenever I wandered too far;

- the University of Transkei who paid part of my tuition fees over the three years of research;

- Professor L.S. Wright of the Institute for English Studies in Africa at Rhodes University who offered me a Visiting Research Fellowship to enable me to complete my research at Rhodes;

- Miss Barbara Dale-Jones of the English Department at Rhodes University for her painstaking editorial work on the final thesis draft;

- Mr Henry Chakava, Managing Director of Heinemann Kenya, for giving me the opportunity (as Publishing Manager) of working with Ngugi and for the donation of the publications I needed for the research;

- Mr Hudson A. Liyai of the Nairobi University Library who compiled a comprehensive Bibliography on Ngugi;

- Professor J. Erapu Iputo, my brother, for crossing over from the medical profession to the literary world to give me the encouragement I needed to keep working;

- Professor Peter Omara-Ojungu, Dr Chris Musampa and Mr Emmanuel Sarpong, who similarly traversed the territory between Geography and Literature to find common ground between us;

- my numerous colleagues and friends whose support I relied on and whose sacrifices, to make time for me, I might have taken for granted; and last but not least:

- my wife, Monique, who encouraged me to pick up my academic career where I had left off to go into publishing; my children, some of whom have had to go through long periods without seeing me; and my extended family as a whole whose expectations of me have never been fulfilled.

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

0.1 THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

0.1.1 The Field

The aim of this study is to analyze Ngugi wa Thiong'o's later novels to assess his adaptation of oral and dramatic techniques to fiction, in the light of his plays of the same period and certain features of Gikuyu Oral Literature, so as to trace the origins of certain fictional innovations in his later writing. His non-fictional writings of the period are also examined to determine his basic theoretical concepts, his general intentions and his attitudes about the literary experiments and innovations he is engaged in.

0.1.2 The Objectives

This study investigates the means by which Ngugi has succeeded in reaching a wider, largely illiterate, audience close to his roots. Ngugi's literary "homecoming" to the culture that nurtured him is traced through the novels and plays back to the traditions that bind him to his non-reading audience.

The study proposes to test the following general hypotheses:

(1) that Ngugi's later novels benefit from dramatic and oral innovations that bring them closer to his intended audience;

(2) that Ngugi's plays of this period are experiments in popularizing the same conflicts that appear in his fiction, but through a more direct medium than the novel;

(3) that Ngugi borrows from African oral traditions certain aspects which he then adapts to fiction through the use of orature and dramatic techniques;

(4) that Ngugi experiments with several genres in order to find the best way to overcome his audience's illiteracy and get his message through to the masses in a more familiar form.

0.1.3 The Context

Ngugi wa Thiong'o is both the most significant and the most prolific writer to come out of East Africa. His novels are studied by every school child at some stage or other, though in Kenya some of his books are currently banned by the state. When he comes up with something new - even when it is written on toilet paper smuggled out of jail - everyone takes notice.

Ngugi's later three novels, *Petals of Blood*, *Caitaani Mutharaba-ini (Devil on the Cross)* and *Matigari* - written after a break of nearly a decade - represent a major departure from his previous publications. They give explicit expression to ideas he hammered out in several different genres and through all channels of communication available to him both in Kenya and internationally.

Crucial to an understanding of these novels are the three plays striving towards "the people's theatre" which precede each of them, respectively, and whose popularity with the masses spilled over to the subsequent novels. *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*, though not directly staged for the people, nevertheless enjoyed popular acclaim when it was performed in a formal setting at the National Theatre. *Ngaahika Ndeenda* (written in Gikuyu) received such a massive response on its informal staging in the Kamiriithu village amphitheatre that the authorities felt obliged to ban it on allegations of inciting the masses to question their leaders. *Maitu Njugira* (also in Gikuyu) never went beyond rehearsal stage before being banned but was nonetheless another landmark in the rise of popular theatre in Kenya. The final "unlicensed" rehearsals were seen by record audiences, who travelled to the city from all over the country. These throngs extended audience participation from the university theatre to the streets of Nairobi.

Ngaahika Ndeenda made theatre history in Kenya both in being the first "formal" play to be performed by ordinary peasants, who had never even heard of theatre before, and in drawing an audience overwhelmingly composed of ordinary people who had never been to theatre before. It was followed by *Maitu Njugira* which went a stage further in the technique of incorporating liberation songs and traditional dances from a cross-section of the Kenyan communities into the play so as to create a truly national spirit. This was evidently approved by the audience which watched the play's rehearsals, enthusiastically joining in the songs and dances, thus extending the scope of the drama beyond the stage to the auditorium and the community as a whole.

Ngugi's experience of that massively popular experiment in theatre led to his three radical works of fiction which chart new directions for the novel as a genre and, as demonstrated by this study, have the potential to give new impetus to African Literature. The link between the novels, the plays and Gikuyu oral traditions is of seminal importance in understanding Ngugi's more recent art and the creative forces that are at work in him. This link determines the structure of the study in which the works are examined in three chronological stages of development in each of which a play and novel are paired off to illustrate his *modus operandi*.

In these innovative works Ngugi strives towards writing a novel that radically alters the scope of the genre by being orally transmittable to a largely illiterate audience in the manner of a folk tale. The progressive accessibility of these books to the masses has led to Ngugi's detention, exile, and vilification following each respective publication. Yet each successive move by the authorities to put a clamp on Ngugi only entrenched his position in the political arena and focused the attention of even ordinary illiterate people on these books, copies of which have been known to circulate even in remote locations where they are communally read in the manner of the traditional oral folk tale.

The present researcher has the advantage of having worked for Ngugi's publishers (Heinemann Educational Books) in Kenya for several years at the

time when the books under investigation were written and published. In that time he had the occasion to discuss the new directions in Ngugi's writings both informally with the author and formally at the editorial level both prior to and after publication. Although he has not been in a position to work from the Gikuyu editions of the plays and novels as originally published, he has used his personal contacts with the publishers to establish the extent to which the English translations - some of which were undertaken by the author himself - approximate the originals. This has been attempted with a view to confirming what the Gikuyu reader of the original text gets which for cultural or linguistic reasons may be lost in translation. The comparative examination is referred to wherever feasible in the analysis of the research problem.

0.2 THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study falls into the category of post-colonial criticism as defined by Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin who suggest two possible approaches in *The Empire Writes Back*:

> Post-colonial criticism appears to be following two major paths at present: on the one hand, via the reading of specific post-colonial texts and the effects of their production in and on specific social and historical contexts, and on the other, via the `revisioning' of received tropes and modes such as allegory, irony, and metaphor and the rereading of `canonical' texts in the light of post-colonial discursive practices.[1]

The two approaches need not be mutually exclusive: indeed one should precede the other. The present researcher, while not totally ignoring possibilities of the second approach, chooses the first one - largely because of his personal knowledge of the social and historical background to the works in question - as the one that best serves to unravel Ngugi's techniques.

Too much emphasis is sometimes placed on separating theory from practice in post-colonial literature. This study is encouraged by the assertion of Ashcroft *et al* that "the analysis and exegesis of a specific text may be one of the most crucial ways of determining the major theoretical and critical

issues at stake."[2] This is particularly so in a situation where a body of texts like Ngugi's later writings invites analysis to establish a connection across his works in terms of genre and in relation to his earlier works.

> Such analyses are not directed towards totalising 'interpretations' but towards symptomatic readings which reveal the discursive formations and ideological forces which traverse the text. As a result, readings of individual texts may enable us to isolate and identify significant theoretical shifts in the development of post-colonial writing.[3]

According to Ashcroft, Griffith and Tiffin's classification, post-colonial literature in the Kenyan or East African context properly starts with works written in the imperial era by authors like Countess Karen Blixen (*Out of Africa*) and Elspeth Huxley (*The Flame Trees of Thika*) which are hardly ever read in the region today. These precede Ngugi's earliest works which have set a standard over the last two decades and which show a marked development of what Ashcroft *et al* describe as the 'abrogation' and 'appropriation' of the colonial language to deconstruct colonial ideas of literature and culture. Ngugi's later writing, which is the subject of this study, constitutes a later (and therefore more advanced) stage of deconstruction, which is described by Ashcroft *et al*, quoting Parry,[4] as follows:

> For Parry, Fanon (properly read) and presumably other decolonising critics engaged in writing what she characterizes as 'nationalist liberationist narratives' (e.g. Ngugi 1986) address the issue of the next stage beyond the limits imposed by the 'silencing' effect of colonialism: the stage in which a sufficient space can be created so that 'the colonised can be written back into history'.[5]

Parry's acknowledgement of new frontiers in post-colonial literature, and Ashcroft, Griffith and Tiffin's guarded mention of Ngugi as one of the decolonising critics who approach that stage, lead to the assertions of the present researcher that Ngugi's later writings do convincingly take him to that frontier. Theory and practice are both poised on the verge of a future that has yet to be constructed, as Ashcroft *et al* point out:

> Post-colonial literary theory, then, has begun to deal with the problems of transmuting time into space, with the present struggling out of the past, and, like much recent post-colonial literature, it attempts to construct a future.[6]

This study aims to demonstrate the extent to which Ngugi has made definite inroads into the task of beginning to construct that future in the space in which the unresolved contention between the post-colonial 'periphery' and the metropolitan 'centre' has taken a new turn.

0.3 THE THESIS OUTLINE

This thesis follows a chronological order through Ngugi wa Thiong'o's writings over nearly a decade, starting in the mid-1970s to the early 1980s. That approach was preferred to the more conventional generic and/or thematic one for the reason that there is a deliberate pattern in Ngugi's literary output that appears to set a trend he has sustained over the years. In the decade under consideration, which is generally seen as marking his literary homecoming, Ngugi has paired off a play and novel in three distinct stages that clearly establishes a case for their examination in that order.

The thesis is divided into five main parts to include these three main stages: **Transition, Homecoming** and **Realization**, as well as an introductory background on Gikuyu oral literature (rather than one on Ngugi's well documented personal and literary biography) and a conclusion summarised as follows:

0.3.1 Part One: Gikuyu Oral Literature

This section gives an insight into the traditional oral background from which Ngugi draws his material. Quoting some of the sources regarded as the most authoritative in the field of Oral Literature in Kenya today, the section provides a classification and analysis of Gikuyu oral literary traditions, outlining its dominant features and setting the parameters that provide the main framework for the investigation that follows.

0.3.2 Part Two: The Transition Stage

This probes the first stage of Ngugi's experimentation with new forms of writing, representing his concern with trying to reach new audiences, showing his frustration over having to write in English for a largely illiterate audience, and noting his departures from the norms of his established career. These are outlined in a brief introduction (Section 2.1). The main section is then assessed in two divisions that set the pattern for the rest of the thesis: **The Transition Play** (Section 2.2), which deals with the pace-setting play, *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*; and **The Transition Novel** (Section 2.3), which covers the parallel novel of the same phase, *Petals of Blood*.

0.3.3 Part Three: The Homecoming Stage

This explores Ngugi's literary return to his roots, transferring the focus of his creative efforts from the English speaking/reading educated elite and the universal audience to the predominantly illiterate workers and peasants of Kenya - principally the Gikuyu whose language and idiom he adapts to the dramatic and fictional genres as outlined in an introduction (Section 3.1). **The Homecoming Play** (Section 3.2) deals with the text and the momentous performance of the controversial *Ngaahika Ndeenda (I Will Marry When I Want* in English translation) which made theatre history in Kenya and became an unprecedented political event when it was first staged on an unconventional platform in a village "people's theatre" by a cast of illiterate "amateurs" before a predominantly illiterate and traditionally non-theatre-going mass audience. **The Homecoming Novel** (Section 3.3) handles the equally controversial novel, *Caitaani Mutharaba-ini (Devil on the Cross* in English translation) which was not only the first full length fictional narrative in Gikuyu, but which (like the parallel play) confounded publishing tradition by actually outselling any other book on the market at the time, including publications in English - the unifying language of the literate educated elite.

0.3.4 Part Four: The Realization Stage

This examines the final stage of Ngugi's experimentation with popular literature, culminating in his banishment into exile as recapitulated in a brief outline (Section 4.1). **The Realization Play** (Section 4.2) deals with the performance and the available fragments of the unpublished *Maitu Njugira (Mother, Sing for Me* in English) which fatefully followed on the footsteps of *Ngaahika Ndeenda* with the additional restrictions which ensured that it was only seen in public rehearsal before being banned like its predecessor. **The Realization Novel** (Section 4.3) examines *Matigari (Matigari ma Njiruungi* in the original Gikuyu edition) which was published overseas in English translation after Ngugi was banished from Kenya.

0.3.5 Part Five: Conclusions

This final part (Section 5) analyzes the findings of the research project, evaluating the significance of Ngugi's return to his roots and the contribution that his writings in Gikuyu make towards his development as a writer, to African Literature in general, and to the novel as a genre.

ENDNOTES:

1. Ashcroft, B., Griffiths, G., and Tiffin, H.: 1989, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures*, Routledge, London - New York, p. 194.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 83.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 83.

4. Parry, B., 1987, "Problems in Current Theories of Colonial Discourse", *Oxford Literary Review, 9, Nos. 1 & 2.*

5. Ashcroft, *et al, op. cit.*, p. 179.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 36.

PART ONE:

GIKUYU ORAL LITERATURE

1.1 INTRODUCTION

This study begins with an examination of Gikuyu Oral Literature as a basis for determining the effect Ngugi wa Thiong'o's return to his roots in the mid-1970s has had on his literary style. This literary "homecoming" was marked by an avowal to address himself to the working class and peasantry in his writings which had previously been aimed at the anonymous universal audience and the educated elite, respectively, to whom he had had to interpret the African experience and present an objective re-enactment of history and culture. Ngugi realised that, in order to be able to effectively communicate with his chosen audience, he had to have the humility to return home to his culture like a prodigal, prepared to learn anew the language and idiom of his people. Consequently, the following overview of Gikuyu oral literature starts on the premise that Ngugi's works of this later period, which are principally directed at his largely illiterate fellow Gikuyu people, are radically different from his earlier works, which were primarily addressed to the educated elite and "outsiders" readers.

Ngugi's reasons for returning to his cultural roots to find the inspiration for the new directions in his writing arose out of his conviction that the Gikuyu people have always had an oral literature of their own which they created and consumed themselves. This literature is a total experience that fully serves both the short-term aim of providing aesthetic satisfaction to the community and the long-term objective of transmitting their culture from one generation to another. Ngugi's "homecoming" amounted to a commitment to the promotion and preservation of his culture - culture which in his view is equatable to language, its sum total. As he states in his pivotal non-fictional work of this period, it is language that makes possible culture's "genesis, growth, banking, articulation and indeed its transmission from one generation to the next."[1]

Wanjiku Mukabi Kabira and Karega wa Mutahi, who have recently carried out extensive research into Gikuyu Oral Literature, emphasize the role of this medium in correcting the "false image and distortions" of the colonial experience and teaching people to "create a more positive image of themselves and their culture."[2] In their authoritative study from which this section draws most of its information, they also point out that the study of oral literature, apart from enhancing an understanding of the past, also enhances the creation of unity and nationhood by negating the distorting influence that still adversely affects people in post-colonial Africa. These are lessons that Ngugi wa Thiong'o - who had already dropped the name James and adopted his full Gikuyu name as a gesture to underscore his homecoming - was not only willing to learn through personal experience but was also ready to transmit to others through his own writing. He firmly endorses this view in the defence of oral literature which he says represents "the entire body of values by which we come to perceive ourselves and our place in the world."[3] On his homecoming, therefore, he was not taking the risk of becoming parochial by delving deep into his own culture, for he realised that a clear understanding of his traditions was essential in gaining a greater appreciation of the idea of community and nationhood.

A knowledge of what Gikuyu Oral Literature consists of is a prerequisite to one's attaining the necessary tools for making a critical appraisal of Ngugi's later writings. It is only with this knowledge that one can presume to determine the impact that the author's delving into Gikuyu oral literature has had on works that have only come to most of us "second hand" in translation and under the general cover of "African Literature written in English."

1.2 DEFINITION

Gikuyu Oral Literature, like any other oral traditional form, is the medium through which culture is passed on from generation to generation. It is a performance-centred medium which is also the tradition itself, for the medium and the tradition are almost inseparable. But whereas tradition refers to the

established ways of a people, or their culture in general, oral literature specifically refers to the art forms through which the people express their response to the experience of living together as a community with links to the past and future as well as links between man and nature.

This view is also borne out by Kabira and Karega wa Mutahi who define oral literature as "the medium through which a people's values and philosophy are transmitted."[4] They also refer to oral literature as the "dynamic medium of communication and transmission" of African culture.[5] The two researchers contend that oral literature "can only be fully appreciated within its cultural context and performances."[6] Essentially, it lives in the moment of creation and performance but traditionally had no life of its own beyond that of another re-creation and performance by the same artiste or another.

Nonetheless, Kabira and Karega put up a strong case for studying oral literature even though only in a transcribed form and in translation. The transcribed language component of these oral literary forms, they would agree, is a valid means of getting a pretty good idea of the underlying meanings. Ideally, witnessing live performances would be best, as these two researchers found out in practice when they went out into the field and quite often had to make do with staged performances which they realised were still a far cry from "the real thing". They note that the written form has limitations arising from the problems of transcription which are further aggravated by the problems of subsequent translation from Gikuyu as the source language into English as the target language. Commenting on the inevitable problems of transcription and translation, they point out that "a lot is lost in the attempt to communicate meaning, rhythm and many culturally bound concepts."[7]

This may not be a perfect situation but it is the best that there is, for it would be unrealistic to expect the scholar either to master the language of every community that he or she researches or - once having done so - to be content with enjoying that culture without making any effort to transcribe its oral literature and to have it translated for the benefit of the rest of the "less privileged" world with no other access to it. That would indeed be self-defeating as the primary objective of scholarly research is to be able to

throw some light on areas of interest that happen to be obscure or unknown to the vast majority of people.[8]

1.3 CLASSIFICATION

Gikuyu Oral Literature is not just a single genre but rather comprises several well-developed genres and sub-genres each of which merits special attention. Genre is defined by Vansina as a "concept that includes notions of form and specifications of content."[9] He then goes on to add that in any given culture "the concept of genre is shown by the existence of a name for it in the local language."[10] This corresponds with Kabira and Karega's classification of Gikuyu Oral Literature which they perceive as falling into five major generic categories:[11]

1. *Ng'ano* - Narratives
2. *Nyimbo* - Dance-Songs
3. *Marebeta* - Poetry
4. *Thimo* - Proverbs
5. *Ndai* - Riddles

1.3.1 Narratives

Narratives play the dual role of educating and entertaining the audience in Gikuyu Oral Literature. The entertainment also calls for audience participation in the songs and choruses. But it is the didactic part that is generally regarded as the most significant component. Kabira and Karega emphasize the major function of narratives in "reflecting a people's values and philosophy" and through which "the morals of the society are communicated to the audience and their needs and hopes are articulated."[12] [For example, see **Appendix 1A**: "The Woman and the Bird"][13]

Narratives are the dominant category in Gikuyu Oral Literature and fall under two major sub-genres of heroic and fictional stories, respectively, as follows:

(i) Straight Narratives *(Ng'ano)* and
(ii) Ogre Narratives *(Ng'ano cia maarimu)*.

1.3.1.1 STRAIGHT NARRATIVES

The straight narratives are not necessarily "true stories" for they cover history and biography, which are based on actual occurrences and actual people, as well as epics and stories of origin, which are essentially fictional re-creations. These stories are usually told without any flurry and, according to Kabira and Karega, the story-teller does not even say if the story he or she is going to tell is either history, legend or myth.[14] In addition, the onus of proof is not upon the story-teller and basic facts are taken for granted. The audience is expected to accept them for facts and not just as a figment of the artist's imagination. Stories told about legendary characters like Kenyatta, Kimathi, Waiyaki, Elijah Masinde of the "Dini ya Msambwa" cult would all fall in this category as these are all historical figures whose many heroic exploits the Kenyan audience would be familiar with. Vansina places the audience in the critical position of at once knowing what to expect from the narrator and yet being able to fully appreciate how it is presented. As he puts it, "the public likes to hear known tales in new garb."[15]

The most significant myth in Gikuyu Oral Literature, *Rugano rwa Gikuyu na Mumbi*, relates to the origin of the Gikuyu people, said to have descended from Gikuyu and his wife Mumbi.[16] Mumbi as the mother figure of the tribe is of particular significance in Gikuyu orature - for though the "Gikuyu" people are nominally named after Gikuyu, the father figure, in practice they quite commonly refer to themselves as `the children of Mumbi' or as being of `Mumbi's house'. The Gikuyu men and women (regardless of their age) also generally refer to themselves by their mothers' names rather than their fathers' when they are talking of themselves informally.

The Gikuyu clan system, which is essentially matrilineal, significantly derives its names from the daughters of Mumbi and Gikuyu whose names are still the commonest for girls/women among the Agikuyu. The names of these daughters of Mumbi and the respective clans that are named after them, with only minor variations that have cropped up over the generations, are listed here for reference as they frequently feature in Ngugi's writings:[17]

	NAME	CLAN DERIVATIVE
1.	Wacheera	Aceera
2.	Wanjiko	Agachiko
3.	Wairimo	Airimo
4.	Wamboi	Amboi
5.	Wangare	Angare
6.	Wanjiro	Anjiro
7.	Wangoi	Angoi
8.	Mwethaga	Ethaga
9.	Waithera	Aitherando

Significantly, there is no clan named after Mumbi herself for she is the mother of all clans constituting the tribe which is nominally named after her husband, Gikuyu, who is accorded the honour of being the father of all the children of 'the House of Mumbi'. She is elevated above all clans in parity with Gikuyu, thus balancing the underlying matrilineal reality with the overt patrilineal exhibition.[18]

In Ngugi's writings the position of the woman as a major participant in the people's struggle for freedom is portrayed as early as *The River Between* in which Muthoni and Nyambura feature as influential factors in setting the course of events. Later on in *A Grain of Wheat* the woman's role in society attains prominence through the significantly named Mumbi who emerges as a symbolic mother figure with the capacity to reconcile past suffering with future hope. These are the earlier prototypes on which the increasingly militant women of the later novels are modelled.

Another famous myth which the Gikuyu men often quote to explain the ascendancy of men over women in their community is *Rugano rwa Wangu wa Makeri* which tells the story of the beautiful but harsh woman chief who was deposed after being induced to dance naked in public. This myth is not only used in justifying male domination in Gikuyu society but also in trying to explain the dichotomy of a patrilineal society which has retained a matrilineal clan system from bygone days for reasons that are detailed by Kenyatta in his anthropological study of the Gikuyu.[18] Other myths, like *Rugano rwa Mugo wa Kibiro,* which is pivotal to Ngugi's earlier novel, *The River Between,* in which the above two myths also feature, border on legend as there is no clear distinction drawn between myth and legend in Gikuyu folklore. All these are important resource materials for Ngugi who had drawn on them before and could be expected to search for more on his "homecoming".

This sub-genre is generally marked by a lesser emphasis on artistic presentation as well as the absence of songs and choruses, thus giving a generally more serious tone to the performance. It is usually the domain of the more experienced, "professional" story-teller, the *Ng'ano* being often reserved for more important or ceremonial occasions or as a serious medium of education, with entertainment as only a secondary factor. Men are not always the best tellers of this type of story, though they tend to favour the epic histories and biographies while women story-tellers - who generally excel in this genre as a whole - on the average tend to favour the more imaginative fables, fantasies, legends and myths.

1.3.1.2 OGRE NARRATIVES

The ogre narratives are imaginary stories calling for the suspension of realism as the story-teller transports his or her listeners to the world of fantasy. These stories are not necessarily restricted to ogres for their subject matter, as Kabira and Karega point out, for the sub-genre also covers imaginary tales and fables in which there are no ogres. To the Gikuyu people, an ogre story means a fictional story in which the characters, land or rivers

mentioned are all "creations of the imagination" and the events narrated are "not historical fact."[20]

Unlike the straight narrative, which normally starts without any fuss, as stated above, the ogre narrative is usually told to a formula that opens and closes the tale, immediately ushering the audience to the world of the unreal at the beginning of the narrative and then bringing them back to the world of reality at the end of it.

In the case of the Gikuyu, the artist opens an ogre tale with the saying: *Ugai Itha* (Say Itha) and closes it with another stock phrase which means "The story ends there". This involvement of the audience from the beginning is the hallmark of a good story-teller. Ngugi emulates the spirit of the stock opening at the beginning of *Caitaani Mutharaba-ini (Devil on the Cross)* in which the narrating persona takes the audience through a ritual of remorse so as to purify them all of the sin of pride and the presumption to pre-judge others without first listening to all the facts. Listeners of oral narratives in general, and ogre narratives in particular, are bound by a strict code of behaviour which even the adults observe as an example to the young who are required to obey on peril of some supernatural punishment (like stopping to grow taller) for any wilful transgression that might occur. This way, the medium serves as a means for instilling discipline from an early age.

The fictional narratives are by far the commonest in Gikuyu Oral Literature, largely because there are nearly as many competent story-tellers in this medium as there are homesteads in the community. These are the fire-side stories that most African children have grown up on and there is hardly any mother who does not have her own stock of them. Certain popular narratives - like the one about the beautiful but wilful girl who rejects all suitors in her village and ends up falling in love with a stranger who turns out to be an ogre - though basically the same in outline, differ in detail from narrator to narrator and sometimes even from one session to another in the repertoire of the same narrator.

In this sub-category, the women story-tellers (particularly the older ones) are generally thought to excel over their male counterparts, maybe because it is something they do on almost every single day of their lives and the experience tells. Ngugi, as a novelist and story-teller himself, could be expected to take a particularly keen interest in the Gikuyu oral narrative form as a basis for his new writing which aims at reaching the people in their own language and idiom.

Kabira and Karega give several examples of such popular narratives in their work, including ogre narratives that have close parallels in Ngugi's work - especially *Devil on the Cross*. The story of "The Ogre and the Girl" and its variant [**Appendix 1B** and **Appendix 1C**][21] is a good example of the influences behind Ngugi's portrayal of the evil forces of Capitalism and Neo-colonialism that runs through the works in this study. [For other examples of Ogre Narratives, also see **Appendix 1D**: "The Daughter of Kararu"; and **Appendix 1E**: "The Story of Wanjiru"][22]

1.3.2 Dance-Songs

In Gikuyu culture, as in most African cultures, song and dance are the most popular art forms and they are almost always linked to one another. However, there are songs in African folklore that are often only meant to be sung as an accompaniment to a narrative. These are intended either to break the monotony, to emphasize a point, to draw the audience into participating, or merely to keep everyone (and particularly the youngest of the listeners) from going to sleep.

The dance-song genre is also a highly specialized one in Gikuyu Oral Literature though it is also the most flexible because new ideas and happenings can easily be adapted to an existing tune without altering the form and rhythm of the song or the dance movements that go with it. This flexibility makes the dance-song medium easy to adapt to different occasions and functions, depending on the time and season or the circumstances

prevailing at the time when it is performed.[23] Because of the relative ease with which songs can be learnt, recalled and transmitted from one group to another, this medium is also an effective one for recording history from current affairs and popularising certain ideas, as Kabira and Karega point out in their study. They particulary emphasize the reliability of the song medium in recording current affairs in "pre-literate" societies because song is "more responsive to actual happenings in society." They say that this is particularly true of the Gikuyu community where many historical records are preserved in songs.[24]

Although one could never fully appreciate a song without hearing it in its original language, still the words of the following example illustrate just how politically conscious the Gikuyu people were during the period of emergency and how song played a major role in mobilising support and keeping up morale when the liberation war was not going too well:

> We agreed to carry this log together
> and when we reached the middle of the river
> Those who ran away and sold their people
> And burnt our houses
> Now their children are like those of Goliath.
>
> Now Mumbi is in hospital
> Lets pray God that Gikuyu will have a good issue
> Let her get a boy whom we shall call Freedom
> And if she gets a girl, we shall name her "Our land".
>
> Let us praise those of us in Nyandarua forest
> Dedan Kimathi and General Mathenge,
> General Kago and General Waruingi.
>
> Our people have you forgotten
> The Gikuyu proverb that one cannot eat
> What he has not sweated for?[25]

However, Kabira and Karega's contention that song is a reliable medium for recording history can be construed to be contradictory to what they say elsewhere about the role of narrative in the same respect. It could be argued that the flexibility of the song art form mentioned earlier makes it a popular form that is more easily manipulated, changing facts from mouth to mouth and thus making it an unreliable record of any event. These researchers, though basically reliable in their judgements, need not have gone beyond saying that

song, like the narrative forms discussed earlier, covers historical aspects of the Gikuyu society and that this coverage is a more accurate record of the past than either the legends or the myths which are only remotely related to the people's real past collective experiences.

Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that the Gikuyu people have always regarded songs as more than mere entertainment. Kenyatta, in his study which has become a classic on the Gikuyu people, points out the value of songs as a medium of children's education in the traditional society in which the mother sung songs not only for amusement but "to teach the child [the] correct manner of speech and to acquaint him with all the important names in the family, past and present."[26]

In Gikuyu Oral Literature, the dance-song genre falls into several sub-categories which are classified by age groups *(mariika)* because that is how they have always been strictly performed. The number of categories and sub-categories and the degree of differentiation involved in Gikuyu dance-songs is quite astounding. For that reason, examples are only cited where necessary and the rest of the examples in Gikuyu and English translation are consigned to the Appendices at the end of the thesis for later reference in discussing Ngugi's plays - particularly *Ngaahika Ndeenda* in which the author goes into great pains to include as large a variety of Gikuyu songs as he could.

Kabira and Karega further classify this genre as follows:[27]

1. Songs for Children (the uninitiated).
2. Songs for Young Adults (from initiated youths to those in the early years of married life).
3. Songs for Elders (of the age of grandparents).
4. Songs by Professional Performers.

The above reference to "songs" in fact extends to dances as well, which are taken for granted since one would be meaningless without the other. The confusion in terms that often occurs is perhaps one of translation as the word *nyimbo* is often freely used for either song or dance by the Gikuyu. In most

cases the composition of a song starts with the basic rhythm already established, creating a dance movement to which the words then fall naturally. It is in its performance that a **song** as an independent art form is finally transformed into a **dance** form that becomes the ultimate realization of the song and yet remains subservient to it. One needs to draw a distinction between the tuneful dance-songs, which are usually entertainment-oriented, and the more sombre chants (usually by the professional singers) which are more ritual-oriented.

1.3.2.1 SONGS FOR CHILDREN

These range from the play songs that children learn from a very early age to the pre-circumcision songs that boys and girls are taught as part of their traditional education in preparation for adult life. The songs, which include sub-categories like *Ngucu, Muthuu, Uriigu* and *Kibuiya*, are never simply sung but are always referred to as "performed", which means they are sung as an accompaniment to the respective dances that take their names from the songs. Within each sub-category, there are songs for uncircumcised girls only *(nyimbo cia irigu)* as well as songs for uncircumcised boys only *(nyimbo cia ihii)*.

Ngugi frequently cites popular Gikuyu children's songs in his works as will be discussed later in this study. Some of these are play songs relying on simple rhymes but they nevertheless convey a message as in the following example from *Petals of Blood*:

> Cows are wealth
> Work is health
> Goats are wealth
> Work is health
> Crops are wealth
> Work is health
> Money is wealth
> Work is health
> God the Almighty Giver
> God Bringer of rains![28]

Others like the following plaintive and poignant lullaby, also taken from *Petals of Blood*, have the capacity to touch deep into the heart of human compassion:

> Do not cry, our little one
> Whoever dares beat our little one
> May he be cursed with thorns in his flesh.
> If you stop crying, child of our mother
> She will soon come home from the fields
> And bring you a gitete-calabash of milk.[28]

1.3.2.2 SONGS FOR YOUNG ADULTS

These are songs sung by an extensive and loosely defined age-group that ranges from the newly circumcised boys and girls (now regarded as adults) to those not old enough to become elders when their first born is initiated to adulthood. Young women are the exception, for they cease to dance with unmarried men as soon as they get married. As can be expected, the songs in this sub-category are dominated by the themes of love, courtship and marriage which are viewed from every perspective as part of the youths' preparation for adult life.

According to Kabira and Karega the songs for this sub-category include:

- *Mucungw'a*, which is usually performed at weddings by men and women together; [**Appendix 1F**][30]
- *Njukia*, which features several soloists of both sexes and a chorus telling what could be a long story; [**Appendix 1G**][31]
- *Mugoiyo*, which is only performed at night;
- *Kibaata*, which is performed by young men only; [**Appendix 1H**][32]
- *Nduumo*, which is performed by young women only, responding to each other but without male partners in attendance. [**Appendix 1I**][33]

The following verse is taken from a *Nduumo* and the partner referred to could be only a dancing partner and fellow soloist, of which there are two others in the complete song:

When I come here
Waruguru who will be my partner
Who will be my partner
Mother of Kabogoro
Who will be my partner?
Who will be my partner
You old ladies of Ruguru
Who will be my partner
Wangari wife of Kibiro?[34]

The following *Kibaata* is clearly male-oriented, since this sub-category of dance-songs is meant to be performed by young men only:

See, it is him
Is it only you who is seeing
A person of my relations
And the wisdom is yours.
You always do step like that
And the eye is focused on you
And the uncles
And the uncle to ask him for the nines.
He steps just like that
And his father's brothers
And his brother
Do always step like that
When you go and when you return.[35]

Although many of the songs for young adults are performed by both sexes, there is further specialisation even in "shared" sub-categories like *Mucungw'a* [**Appendix 1F**] where songs for young men only *(nyimbo cia aanake)* are differentiated from songs for young women only *(nyimbo cia airitu)* under generally accepted conventions rather than strict taboo, though no self-respecting man or woman would wish to be caught and ridiculed for crossing the lines. The following verses about a debate between the parents of a wayward young man who goes courting and sleeps out, taken from a *Mucungw'a* in the Kabira and Karega work, though composed and sang by a woman (Kabuagara) is still essentially a man's song:

Mother said I should be fetched
Father said I should not be fetched
A woman is a fool
She wants to bring a leopard home
While she knows it finished the goats
It finished the goats worthy a wife.[36]

This compares with a *Mucungw'a* taken from Ngugi's *Ngaahika Ndeenda*, revealing that the latter's songs originate from a common pool of Gikuyu folk songs though he dramatically modifies his version to incorporate a chorus which echoes the verses of the soloist:

> I was late and far away from home
> I spent the night in a maiden's bed
> My mother said they should go back for me
> My father said they should not go back for me.[37]

Kenyatta gives details of the specialised songs that go with just the central ceremony of initiation alone in which there are different songs for every stage of the ritual. In the festive *matuumo* dances and songs, the girls to be circumcised are escorted from their homes and entertained all day long. Their minds are kept away from the pending ordeal by the joyousness of the young married and unmarried women who accompany them.[38] Following the ceremony of taking the tribal oath *(muma wa anake)*, in which the initiation candidates symbolically throw away the sins of their childhood in preparation for entering adulthood, they head home from the sacred *mugomo* tree without a backward glance. On this journey home, they are fortified by songs which are directed towards denouncing childish behaviour and meant to "encourage the initiates to become worthy and honourable members of the adult community into which they are to be graduated."[39]

The following day, as the initiates get closer to their ordeal, the pre-operational songs that are sung cease to be festive and lose the dance element. The singing becomes mournful as everyone gets caught in this `moment of great excitement and anxiety' which sets the tone.

After the circumcision, the songs that are sung to the initiates as they recover from their ordeal reflect yet another mood altogether to suit the situation. The invalids are "entertained by their sponsors, who sing them encouraging songs"[40] which vividly recall the experience they have just gone through and assuring them that the pain will soon be over and then it would be time for jumping and dancing. These songs are intended to have a strong "psychological effect on the minds of the initiates" whose thoughts are thus

turned away from the operation to "the day they will again appear in public as full-fledged members of the community."[41]

Then there are the ritual songs that the initiates - whose common experience has made them brothers and sisters - sing as they bid each other farewell when they return to their homes, escorted by their relatives.[42] Finally, there are the initiates' songs that the new adults sing in groups as they go from village to village throughout the district, thanking their friends, their relatives and all the people who had given them encouragement in the difficult period of transition. These songs are performed out in the open fields and only during the day. As in the earlier stages of initiation, the festive atmosphere is restored and dance becomes an important feature of the celebration of the advent of adulthood.[43]

Ngugi himself in his first written novel, *The River Between*, uses initiation dances and songs to great effect in delineating his characters and developing the theme of the tragic conflict between Gikuyu tradition and Christianity that runs through his writing.[44]

1.3.2.3 SONGS FOR ELDERS

This sub-category includes the same broad classification of dance-songs as those for the young adults: *Mugoiyo*, *Nduumo* and *Kibaata*, as well as dance-songs exclusively reserved for the age group: *Muthunguuci* [**Appendix 1J**][45] and *Gitiiro* [**Appendix 1K**][46] for example. *Nduumo* and *Gitiiro* are performed by women only, while *Kibaata* is performed by men only. In the other shared sub-categories, there are songs for old women only *(nyimbo cia atumia)* as well as songs for old men only *(nyimbo cia athuuri)*. As in the other age groups, these performances are usually in the dry season and on special occasions like marriage ceremonies, reception of new born or warriors, burials and funerals or beer parties.

Ngugi uses an extensive *Gitiiro* as an operatic sequence in the wedding scene in *Ngaahika Ndeenda* (pp. 65-67) to demonstrate how versatile this form can be. The latter is composed by an unnamed old woman in Kamiriithu village who trains the performers too and it is a lot more complex than the *Gitiiro* by Wacucu wa Njoroge and Sarah Wambui cited in **Appendix 1K**.

In the following verses of a *Muthunguuci* song composed by a well known Gikuyu artist, Wanjiru wa Kabuagara, we can see that she is clearly out to entertain both the audience and the performers:

> To dance with Magenda (x2)
> People of Aceera clan
> It is like eating sweets. (x2)
>
> To dance with Muriiyu (x2)
> People of Aceera clan
> It is like drinking sugarless tea from a calabash. (x2)
>
> I shall dance with this one (x2)
> People of Aceera clan
> This one, a wife of the foolish man at home. (x2)[47]

In this example, the audience and the artists performing the song would be in a position to identify the good dancer who is praised in the first verse, the tasteless dancer who is ridiculed in the second verse, and the foolish one who stays at home and lets his wife go alone to dances to be enjoyed by other men. In this way, though the tone is light and humorous, the artist sounds a warning to ridiculous, unconventional men who would drink sugarless tea from a calabash and those who would be foolish enough to entrust their wives to other men while they stay at home nursing babies.

1.3.2.4 SONGS BY PROFESSIONAL PERFORMERS

This sub-category is only marginal as it includes *Gicaandi* and *Kiriiro* which scholars tend to classify as poetry whereas the Gikuyu put them into the same category as songs and dances. Kabira and Karega's description of the sub-category does not altogether dispel the closeness of the above two types of

song to *Marebeta* (Poetry) which the researchers appear to refute. According to them, *Gicaandi* is basically performed by male artists while *Kiriiro* is performed by women. Both these art forms, they say, are noted for their individualism and greater emphasis on words than on dance or body movements. They also state that *Gicaandi* deals more with coding and decoding of messages, while *Kiriiro* is the newly-wed's response to the state of marriage.[48]

The *Gicaandi* is almost always performed under intense competition (like a game of chess) with one master responding to another, the loser being honour bound to surrender his instrument to the victor in final submission to the latter's superior talents. It is certainly not an art form for amateurs, which perhaps explains why it tends to be linked with the more formalised *Marebeta* genre than to the song medium to which it is only incidentally related.

The *Gicaandi* and the *Kiriiro* as largely poetic forms are therefore better discussed in greater detail in the next section which deals with traditional poetry.

Kenyatta describes other songs and dances that were always restricted to certain groups like the young warriors whose dances were not only for enjoyment but were also used in the drills for improving physical fitness.[49] These songs and dances were usually performed during the day in seasons when there was no work in the fields and the warriors were free to engage in contests with other age-groups which also included athletics.

As Kenyatta points out, the *kaare* is a ceremonial song that was only sang by warriors who have killed an enemy in battle. Songs and dances by warriors are prohibited during certain religious ceremonies and rituals for fear of their provocativeness leading to a fight or a killing that would anger the ancestral spirits.[50] Kenyatta also describes in detail another category of "constitutional" songs and dances specially composed to proclaim a new democratic government in traditional Gikuyu society. The emphasis in these celebrations was not on entertainment, for the dances were ritualistic and the songs were an embodiment of the laws and regulations of the new democratic

government of the people established after the overthrow of a despot. These dances and songs were performed by the council of elders *(njama ya itwika)* led by their president who recited the proclamations.[51]

1.3.3 Poetry

There are two main poetic art forms in Gikuyu Oral Literature: the *Gicaandi* and the *Kiriiro*. This category also includes the formal poetry that is usually recited on ceremonial occasions like marriages, births, initiation or burials.

In Gikuyu orature, poems are either performed to the accompaniment of basic instruments to establish the mood or without any instrumentation - depending on the circumstances and the tastes and skills of the individual poet. These poets are usually professional performers, like the *Gicaandi* players, and, whereas the latter primarily deal with encoding and decoding messages in an almost impromptu fashion, Gikuyu poetry in general is quite often a carefully prepared verse form of epic proportions which hardly varies from performance to performance. In this way the form comes close to narrative without being restricted to telling a story but relying more on the grandeur of language for impact. Among the Gikuyu people, the experts in this art form are also rare, highly revered and much sought after.

1.3.3.1 *GICAANDI*

The *Gicaandi* art form involves the coding and decoding of clues which are usually given in proverbs, rather like the clues in a modern crossword puzzle. It is almost always composed and performed by men though expert female *Gicaandi* artists are found in the Gikuyu community who can effectively hold their own against their male counterparts in competition. Unlike the dance-song medium, the *Gicaandi* performance is hardly accompanied by any body

movements. The performer of the *Gicaandi* only moves his hands and mouth while the rest of the body remains still.

There are no fixed tunes or rhythms in this art form and therefore there are as many tunes as there are composers, each boasting his or her own unique style. The verses of the *Gicaandi*, though apparently impromptu, are made up with care and accuracy, for they are liable to be challenged instantly. The composer relies on his knack for innuendo and subtlety for effect, always hoping to catch his opponent off-guard. Direct attacks on each other, however, are carefully avoided and even warnings (like the checkmate in chess) are cushioned with figurative references that have to be decoded to be understood. This calls for a sense of fair play and mutual professional respect for one another. The formal reference to singing with which the *Gicaandi* usually opens is only a metaphor, for it is in actual fact a contest of wit and logic in which the tune is only an additional embellishment for the entertainment of the audience.

The following verse is taken from a prelude to a *Gicaandi* in which the artist introduces himself, and his instrument indirectly, in cryptic terms and images that have to be encoded to be understood:

> I was not a guest in this place
> I came after hearing sounds
> Of children being sent to the river
> So I said I should send mine.
>
> Is the child played with?
> By short people like me?
> By slender people like me?
> So that when I am satisfied I may go.[52]

This subtle request for permission to join the performance could be accepted without preamble or answered in equally cryptic language as follows:

> The child is always greeted,
> Go ahead and greet it
> Again it is played with
> When you get satisfied you may leave.[53]

This invitation leads to the dialogue which is actually a battle of wits between the professional participants who could start with each parading his

prowess in an attempt to try and out-awe the other. This illustrates just how complex this art form is and how hard it must be to master, which is why expert *Gicaandi* players (usually accompanying themselves on the *Gicaandi*, a small decorated gourd made into a single-stringed instrument played with a bow) are said to be rare and highly venerated in the Gikuyu society. Their compositions not only call for a wide knowledge of Gikuyu culture but also a gift of the gab, a natural flair for repartee, a keen wit, intelligence, and an impressive "stage presence" to enable one hold the attention of a diverse audience as well as wither the opposition over hundreds of instant verses, sometimes performed through the night until a winner emerges."

Ngugi's veneration for the *Gicaandi* player is most evident in the opening of *Caitaani Mutharaba-ini (Devil on the Cross)* in which he is equated to the Prophet, the seer, the judge, an intermediary between man and God, and the all-knowing narrating persona.

1.3.3.2 *KIRIIRO*

The *Kiriiro* is a sad poem in which the newly wedded woman laments the conditions of life in her new home, perhaps comparing her present loneliness to the happiness she was used to in her father's home, or comparing the joys of an unmarried girl with the bondage of marriage. It is exclusively composed and performed by the woman in the first consecutive eight days of marriage, giving her ample time to cover a wide range of subjects. The performer of this art form usually sits on a stool as she either sings or recites her poetry, sometimes only swinging her body slightly.

There are no fixed tunes or rhythms in this form either, with each composer claiming her own unique style. The composition calls for expertise in putting across subtle messages that lie beyond the words of the rendition, for it is the only licence the bride is allowed to redress any of the shortcomings she might have noticed in her new home, husband, family or relatives. The bride is accompanied by her age-group who sit around her as she performs her

kiriiro, which takes most of the day and as well as the early evening. According to Kabira and Karega, the *kiriiro* is a predominantly individual performance in which the companions normally do not sing with the bride though they sometimes weep in sympathy with her as she laments her fate:

> Oh dear
> You of Gicui village
> You came to greet Waceera
> She came here
> She drowned in the river
> When the river dried up
> The singer too dried up.
>
> I do not remember anything
> When you, our children, come in and go
> Waceera did you leave that boy and Njeeri well?
>
> And now I the lone child
> You singers when you reach Aceera clan
> Greet Kigotho, my father, for me
> I know he did not come.
>
> Oh dear
> Ngewa, I have gone
> You greet Anjeera
> Me, I died alone
> You know, I will never be able to move freely.
>
> I died alone
> Me, the lone child of Wangari
> You know, I am no more able to move freely.
>
> I the daughter of Njeeri
> Milks Kigotho's cows
> Now, may peace be with you.[54]

The loose structure of the *Kiriiro* is itself suggestive of the trauma that the singer experiences in leaving her family when going to live among strangers. It also allows her to be creatively innovative, especially since the lament goes on for eight days in which she is allowed to explore every aspect of her alienation. The emphasis is on her utter isolation.

Kenyatta, however, emphasizes the communal age-group involvement in his elaboration of the *kiriiro/kerero* song and the cultural environment of its performance which is much more theatrical and entertaining than is suggested

by the lyrics of the lament. The performance of the *Kiriiro* usually begins with a mock fight between the young women of both sides in the marriage after which they all get together and start "dancing, singing and cheering hilariously." Later in the evening the bride is visited by her age-group of both sexes who bring her presents by way of food and ornaments. The bride entertains them with songs called *kerero* (which literally means weeping) in which girls only take part while the boys listen.

Kenyatta emphasizes that the *kerero* songs "are mostly connected with the collective activities of the girl's age-group" and that it is "considered as the age-group mourning for the loss of the services and companionship of one of their number who, by marriage, has passed to another age-group."[55] In that case it is as much a lament by the age-group as it is by the newly married girl. It can be assumed that the composition of the audience would have a bearing on the tone of the performance, for if the bride is performing to an audience which is almost exclusively made up of her age-group, then she can be expected to react more lightly, with the emphasis on entertainment (in spite of the ceremonial weeping) rather than take occasion to pout and complain in earnest. One has to bear in mind the fact that in the final analysis, the *kiriiro/kerero* is only an artistic performance presented to a participating audience which knows that it is only an imitation of the concerns of real life.

1.3.4 Proverbs

Proverbs are like seasoning needed to spice everyday language in most African cultures and this is also true of the Gikuyu people whose language has a wealth of *Thimo*. Although, unlike the other genres already discussed, proverbs do not really constitute an independent skill that needs to be mastered, they are the tools of a good orator in particular and the essence of the culture's wisdom in general. That is why the older generation - who are also acknowledged to be the custodians of tradition - are also best known for their stock of proverbs.

Vansina compares proverbs to narratives in their agelessness, saying that the "dynamics of proverbs and sayings are not well known," for they seem to "evolve like any metaphor in the language, which become just an expression." He insists that there is nothing in a proverb that makes it "old by definition, only wise." Then he asserts that proverbs are even more difficult to pin down that tales for "as aphorisms such sayings are shorter and more allusive."[56]

Kabira and Karega define proverbs as "metaphorical statements that summarise a cultural context, event, a happening or an experience ... used to warn, advise, inform, clarify ..."[57] They go on to point out that in Gikuyu society proverbs are usually used for serious business such as discussions on land, marriage contracts and legal proceedings. In such situations, they state, "nobody ever interprets the proverbs."[58]

Because proverbs can express even complex ideas in a short form, they are usually featured in other genres like narratives and songs in a didactic role that sums up the point of the tale or song. They also become part of the imagery and general metaphors of the work on question. Kabira and Karega list a number of Gikuyu proverbs [See **Appendix 1L**][59] that come from a common pool that Ngugi draws from as will be seen later in this study. The following are clear examples whose variants are used several times by Ngugi, particularly in *Ngaahika Ndeenda* and *Caitaani Mutharaba-ini*:

- A fool's staff is used by the wise man to support his own walk.
- To be smiled at is not to be loved.
- Too much fire denies itself the meat.
- The antelope detests the one who announces its whereabouts more than the one who sees it.
- A hyena does not eat its young.
- A necklace you find on the wayside can make you lose your own.[60]

The adaptation of such proverbs to his narrative style is part of the fascination that the Gikuyu audience has found in Ngugi's later works. In an

example like "The restless mongoose misses the slaughtering ceremony in his home", for instance, we are at once made aware of the different variants that exist among the Gikuyu as we are forced to recognise Ngugi's innovations, for the same proverb appears several times in Ngugi's later writings as "The restless child leaves home when a goat is about to be slaughtered."

A good orator or story-teller has to have an extensive stock of proverbs so as to be able to effortlessly find one to illustrate whatever point he or she may be making. It is for this reason that Ngugi can be expected to pay close attention to this art form in his re-appraisal of Gikuyu Oral Literature.

1.3.5 Riddles

Riddles are commonly played down in most African cultures where they are often relegated to the status of children's word games. In Gikuyu Oral Literature, the *Ndai* constitute a serious genre that often features in narratives, songs or poetry while bearing close affinity to the proverbs. This word game is usually played by at least two contestants or teams pitting their wits against each other. Like the ogre narrative, the riddle is always played to a formula beginning with: *"Gwata ndai!"* ("Catch a riddle!"), to which the other contestant replies: *"Ndaagwata!"* (I catch it!").

The simplest of the riddles are children's word games which are, nonetheless, never taken lightly even though mothers often use them only to keep the younger children awake until meal-time. But always beneath the playfulness there is a more serious purpose to help the children acquire general knowledge as well as develop their memories and intelligence through quick and logical thinking in making deductions. Between children or mothers and children, the loser normally only makes a token payment like such and such a chief's cows or some impossible dream which the winner graciously accepts before giving the answer to the riddle. Examples like the following show how cryptic the Gikuyu riddles are which most children would normally answer without hesitation:

- It is upside down but does not leak: a cow's udder.
- My house has only one pole: a mushroom.
- The companion who never tells me to rest: my shadow.
- An elephant with one ear: a teacup.
- I have thrown a bell to far off places: the eyes.
- Njoroge the carpenter: a beetle.
- I know a person who is always laughing by himself: a maize cob which has been attacked by birds. [See **Appendix 1M**: List of Gikuyu Riddles].[81]

Commenting on his own childhood experience, Ngugi adds another dimension to the value of the game of riddles in developing the child's sensitivity to language as an art form in itself. He says that as children, their "appreciation of the suggestive magical powers of language was reinforced by the games we played with words through riddles, proverbs, transpositions of syllables, or through nonsensical but musically arranged words."[82]

Riddles are not neglected as children grow into adults, for there are always other more complicated problems in life that demand logical solutions which they have to find. The Gikuyu have developed riddles for adults which have the structure of a formal contest in which the riddler challenges the audience to untie the riddle for a forfeit which is usually either a far-fetched prize like one's own non-existent daughter or fabulous fortune - as in the children's game - or an actual object of value like one's prize bull or coveted stool. Between adults the prize is not always automatically accepted first time but is often a case for bargaining that could even end up in additional forms of fines being levied - all in good fun! Such fines usually take the form of cryptic sayings that the loser would be bombarded with before finally being given the answer.

Although the forfeit may indicate a light-hearted attitude, the riddle itself usually calls for intelligence and wisdom in the ways of the Gikuyu. Thus the *Ndai* has evolved into a form that is educative not only to the children but to adults as well - especially in the rural communities where this is one of the

ways of disseminating knowledge and information about a limitless range of subjects from current affairs to urban eating habits.

1.4 THE ORAL ARTIST

The oral artists in Gikuyu society are as much the spokesmen for their culture as the superstars in show-business are for modern western society, and they are treated with as much adulation as well as being materially rewarded. This could be misleading when one considers the fact that in the Gikuyu society the artist more often than not is actually a very simple member of the community. But the simplicity and the modesty - like that of Ngugi himself who emulates the art as well as the artists - belies the conviction and determination with which the traditional story-teller "religiously" performs his duties to society.

Commenting on Kabebe, one of Kenya's best known oral artists, Kabira says that in the narratives of largely communalistic communities (like the Gikuyu), "social heroes do not have to be kings, princes and princesses, or even great warriors" but are often very ordinary members of the society who may be compelled to assume a messianic role. She contends that in most narratives created in such a community "the oral narrator can actually be called the artist of the little people." Such a narrator, she goes on to say, is connected with every individual in society and not only with exceptional people. Social institutions in such a community, she says, "are intended to support and protect the weak, not to protect a few powerful, individual members of the community."[63]

This is an important point to bear in mind when considering characterisation and the concept of heroism in Ngugi's writing. The narrators in such a situation, like their heroes, are often ordinary members of the society, involved in the same day-to-day activities as everyone else in the community and not treated to a position of special privilege. Kabira pays special tribute to these faceless figures, among whom one would number the majority of

oral artists and their ordinary environment when she says that in the Gikuyu community "there are no specialists to tell the narratives, and people often take turns to entertain each other... nobody has the monopoly of knowledge, because the source of the narratives is the values of the community, including its attitude towards work, the world around it, children, women, wealth, strangers, customs, etc."[84]

This is what gives rise to what is commonly believed - that oral literature is of necessity anonymous in form as in content. However, there is a class of what might erroneously be called "professional" oral artists whose artistry is renowned beyond their homestead, village or district. This calibre of oral artist can have an almost unlimited influence on society when it comes to making moral judgements and illustrating a point with age-old stories, songs, proverbs and riddles retold with an accomplishment that makes the narrative a rare art form.

However, despite this prominence, Kabira draws a clear distinction between this kind of "communal" artist and the *griot* kind who developed in feudal monarchies throughout the African continent. She says "the griot *per se* emerges in a feudal society when the narrator becomes a professional artist, who reflects the predominant values of the ruling class, his employers." The narrator/singer becomes a friend of the king, she adds, and is thus elevated above the rest of his community while his art is put in the service of the monarch. As a result, she goes on to say, the artists begins to use history to justify the presence and the role of the powers that be. Thus the central figures in these narratives, she points out, are the historical characters like Shaka, Mwindo, Sundiata, and Gilgamesh, who are deliberately "isolated from the rest of society" with the intention of making the narrative attain more "grandeur and even universality." This distancing of the heroes from ordinary reality and experience, she contends "is intended to underscore their extraordinariness, so that the rest of society should not challenge their positions as rulers."[85]

This distinction is also important in the study of Ngugi's writing and in understanding its commitment to communalism as an ideal that has bound the traditional Gikuyu society ever since the *iregi* (rebel) generation deposed the autocratic rule of King Gikuyu and took the first steps towards establishing a democratic, constitutional government.[66] Kabira in her study goes on to conclude with words that might apply to Ngugi himself for his assertion of the importance of the community over the individual and his recognition of the universal community of workers and peasants in his evolving socialist viewpoint. Kabira says that "every artist should, in essence, be studied within the context of his community, and in relation to the historical development of the society which has created him." Acknowledging that this development has not been homogeneous and that "the oral artist has tended to reflect different social values at different periods of history," she points out that "the oral artists operating in a society dominated by kings, chiefs and priests will, most likely, create literature that supports the rulers and reflects the ideology of the ruling class." In contrast, she adds, the artist in a communal society will "be inclined to present the values of the majority of the people and propagate their ideology."[67]

In the case of Ngugi the reverse also applies, for here is an artist whose agenda differs completely from that of the ruling class and whose aim is to rouse the communal society to an awareness of itself through its own orature. His homecoming - after the success he had already achieved internationally as an artist - is proof of his refusing to accept the status quo and wear borrowed laurels when he could earn his own where he most values it. Kabira's conclusion to her introduction of Kabebe might well apply to Ngugi wa Thiong'o, particularly in the light of the bold step he took in the mid-1970s to return to his roots in spite of all the harassments.

In a comment that echoes Ngugi's own need for change, Kabira says that "whatever the nature of the society he lives in, the good artist does not remain static: his art and the values it reflects are always changing." She goes on to add that oral artists like Kabebe try as much as possible to narrate their stories without changing them, but they also recognise the

changes that have taken place in their community and although they may be talking of the past, the tone in their narratives, the comments, hopes and aspirations, "all tend to be a comment on the present society," because their art "reflects the present needs of the community... whose ... life has, in the last eighty years, been one of political, social and economic struggle: first, against the colonial government that alienated their land, their main source of livelihood, and now against their new masters who continue to perpetrate the same kind of alienation and exploitation."[68] This is essentially the basic theme in Ngugi's later writings.

Kabira and Karega in their study comment on the wide scope open to the Gikuyu oral artist to develop the narrative as an art form in the following words that can also be legitimately applied to the later Ngugi as an artist:

> Oral Literature is dependent on the narrator, the singer etc., in other words, the performer. Very often the artist can change the philosophy of a narrative by his choice of detail, his emphasis on certain elements and playing down others, his choice of characters and even his use of non-verbal features such as the voice, tone, gestures, etc. In this way, the artist can formulate the message the way he wants and manipulate the audience in his way.[69]

Manipulation is a rather unfortunate choice of word in this context as it suggests a measure of exploitation when what is really meant is that the oral artist is a sensitive interpreter of verbal and non-verbal expression to communicate subtle meanings to an audience. As the two researchers put it earlier, it all starts with the skill of controlling language - a skill that an artist like Ngugi had mastered and then brought home with him when he returned to his roots:

> Through the artistic use of language, the oral artist expresses the anxieties, the wishes, the hopes, aesthetics and philosophy of the society. Through the same process, he records the people's cultural heritage. In this way the society's thoughts are expressed in the form of images. It is through these images that the artist reflects, transmits the feelings and shapes the lives of the members of his society. In the process, he entertains his audience.[70]

We note that entertainment comes secondary to the more didactic roles of the oral artist in Gikuyu society - an opinion that holds true to Ngugi's own view of his art. Although no particular class of artist is taken to be superior to the others in Gikuyu community, it is generally acknowledged that an expert narrator commands the respect of most people in the society - particularly since he is able to incorporate the other mediums into his or her performance. The singer - being the most visible of the artists - is the most idolised by the populace, especially in these days of the mass media. But in traditional society the story-teller commanded more respect because of the vast skills he displayed, which encompassed even those of the singer.

1.4.1 The Narrator

The narrator's ability to perform before a live audience without relying on text as an intermediary is the virtue that made Ngugi look to the directness of theatre as the key to attaining his objective of reaching a non-reading audience - a factor that influenced his *modus operandi*, leading directly to the deliberate pairing of drama and fiction with the performance-oriented plays preceding each of his novels which themselves appealed direct to the mass audience. A clear understanding of the role of the traditional narrator is therefore important in understanding the forces that influence the later Ngugi.

Good narrators are as concerned with form as with content, always balancing their style with the subject and substance of their performance, entertainment with elucidation and education. Narrators are creative artists in every sense of the word and do not merely memorise and repeat tales they have been told by someone else with little or no original contribution of their own. Apart from being an accomplished actor/actress who can convincingly portray all the characters in the narrative, he or she has to be a master of language, able to manipulate it to make the most impact on the audience. In addition, he or she should be a good dancer and must have a good singing voice that can capture the audience's attention with the recurrent song/dance sequences that are

usually incorporated into the structure of the narrative to create the necessary moods and give a sense of development in time and space.

It is the combination of these qualities that makes the narrator outstanding in his or her field and in society as a whole. Kabira and Karega underscore the importance of performance to the narrator's repertoire, saying that "in the process of rendering a narrative, a good artist will automatically dramatize the various roles of his characters." This, they say, calls for the integration of "the drama, the tone and the mood of the narrative into an aesthetic whole," using both verbal and non-verbal language to fully communicate the message. A good narrator will become the various characters that he presents at different times in the course of the rendition of any one narrative because "performance is part and parcel of the story-telling and enables the artist to emotionally involve and move the audience."[71]

This is corroborated by Vansina who emphasizes the importance of artistic expression in the narrator's performance that goes beyond the demands of transmitting what is usually a reasonably well known tale in the community in question. In defining performance Vansina says that its "best-known situation is the telling of tales." He says that this is never just a recitation, for "the voice is raised or lowered, used as a means of dramatization" and the storyteller does not just sit there but rather acts out the tale "with body gestures" whether he sits down, stands up, moves around, or mimes parts of the action narrated.

Vansina also points out that in most cases the public is not just watching but is active and "interacts with the teller, and the teller provokes this interaction by asking questions, welcoming exclamations, and turning to a song sung by all at appropriate points of the action." Thus the teller and public create the tale together, the teller leading the event while the audience responds. The teller also "tries to frighten, delight, worry, and put them on tenterhooks, in turn and skilfully builds on the passages which move the audience most, expanding the exciting parts and condensing or transforming the ones where the attention of the audience lags."[72]

The good narrator also needs a sharp memory to recall details and tell the story without any awkward lapses, repetitions and contradictions that might undermine his or her credibility and render the narrative less effective in entertaining the audience or in conveying its message. Kabira re-asserts the same points in her study of Kabebe whom she cites as the supreme example of what a good narrator should be.[73]

Such a narrator does not acquire these qualities by accident but very often has to cultivate them over a long period right from childhood through practice and competition of which there are umpteen opportunities in Gikuyu society. As Kenyatta points out, in every stage of life among the Gikuyu there are various competitions arranged for the members of the several age-groups "to test their ability to recall and relate in song and dance the stories and events which have been told to them, and at such functions parents and the general public form an audience to judge and correct the competitors."[74]

A responsive audience is the joy and inspiration of the good narrator who is able to react to it with a heightened performance that would be mutually satisfying. As Kabira and Karega comment, very often the audience plays a major role in helping the artist to shape the narrative in a certain direction or manner. If the audience is alive and fully participates in the performance, it encourages the artist to be more creative in the rendering of the work but if on the other hand the audience is dull and unappreciative, then the artist cannot be creative and often shortens the presentation. The good artist, they say, "will therefore be fully aware of the type of audience he has, their interests and whether or not they appreciate his presentation. He will then act accordingly."[75]

Vansina points out the dilemma of the oral artist when he or she is confronted with the prospect of being recorded on paper or tape. This has the effect of putting the narrator in a fix as to where his or her loyalties lie and how best to safeguard what after all is the heritage of the community as a whole. Commenting on the sudden transformation of the artist from performer to informant and its possible effect on what is recorded, Vansina says that the recording of tradition on tape or paper creates an unusual situation as it

transforms a performance into a testimony in which the performer finds himself caught between two different worlds: his community and the wider world. The performer becomes an informant who could be viewed by his compatriots as betraying the secrets of the community and this creates a state of unease which itself influences the performance being recorded. In such a situation, Vansina correctly concludes, "distortions are to be expected when compared to a normal performance."[78]

This is the situation that worried Kabira and Karega - who were recording oral performances - but not Ngugi whose position was that of one artist learning from other artists in order to be able to create in that medium as a performer in his own right.

1.4.2 The Singer

The good singer also needs to be an expert dancer: a total and accomplished performer who is as concerned with communicating a message as with entertaining the audience. He or she should be able to draw on other modes: narrative, poetry, proverbs and even riddles. The most popular artists strive to excel in all the mediums, though they may be regarded as specialists in one genre or other. The qualities ascribed to the good narrator also apply equally to the good singer.

Singers in the Gikuyu society often have to perform together, communally, as most of the songs involve team work: solo and chorus, questions and answers, praises and reprimands or just dialogue in dramatised discourse. Teams often get invited elsewhere for contests and festivals on the strength of their reputation in artistic mastery.

Many of these teams and individual artists today have recording contracts and their records feature on radio and television, selling hundreds of thousands of copies annually. Like writers (Ngugi himself, for example) they have become outspoken critics of the status quo and thus earned the wrath of the authorities who have proscribed some of their recordings and/or even detained

them in the interests of state security. The threat they pose has a historical precedent as evidenced by Kabira and Karega whose comments on the sensitive political status of the artist warrants quoting in full as follows:

> This is why during the times of crisis within the community the artists became crucial instruments of social mobilisation. These artists can sensitise and mobilise the people for a common course. The Gikuyu oral artists played this role very effectively during the struggle for independence. Through the artists the issues of major concern shifted from those of the ridges and clans to focus on the national concerns.
>
> Through variations on earlier compositions and all kinds of stylistic devices, the artists of the colonial period supported the struggle. Through detention songs, the artists highlighted the sufferings of the people and made them optimistic. They recorded the history and encouraged each other.
>
> In most cases, the Agikuyu oral artist has consistently risen to the situations as they arise. In the pre-colonial society, he created songs for the war, work, marriage, circumcision etc. He was an artist created by the communal society and in essence, as indicated by the narratives in particular, was an artist of the majority of the people - especially the unfortunate ones. He carried over the values and the philosophy of the majority of the people.[77]

These views from competent researchers who have been on the field differ drastically from the assumptions of a critic like Andy Gurr who is of the opinion that the oral artist only deals with material which already exists and has no scope for any drastic alterations:

> The "artist" in traditional society is more a performer of what already exists than a creator. The [creative] writer therefore has little directly to offer to his community's traditional culture. Even when the stability of social conditions necessary if traditional materials are to build up disappears the writer has little to offer. Tradition by definition is resistant to change, and so resistant to new offerings.[78]

In fact the oral artist in traditional society is usually flexible and responsive to the changing times and different situations in which he or she would be narrating a tale that may be of antiquity only in form. In this way, the oral artist (as composer, director and actor all in one) works with material and a form which are both more flexible than the writer whose words usually attain a fixed form, especially on publication. It is only drama, through the medium of theatrical performance, that comes closer to orature in

flexibility, though it is also subject to controls of form, content and interpretation.

In Kenya today the recording artists - claiming a heritage from the above forebears - are as famous for their meaningful and entertaining lyrics as they are for their good voices which blend with the contemporary rhythms and instrumentation to create a popular sound. They are able to generate an enormous mass following which constitutes the kind of audience that Ngugi - who himself today ranks among the popular artists - had in mind when he decided on returning to his roots for new inspiration. His homecoming is greeted with the reverberations from the songs of these men and women whose voices have always been heard above the cacophony of the petty squabbling of their times.

ENDNOTES:

1. Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 1981, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature,* Heinemann, Nairobi/ James Currey, London/ Zimbabwe Publishing House, Harare, p. 15.

2. Kabira, W.M. and Karega wa Mutahi, 1988, *Gikuyu Oral Literature,* Heinemann, Nairobi, p. 3.

3. Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *ibid.*, p. 15.

4. Kabira and Karega, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

5. *Op. cit.*, p. 3.

6. *Op. cit.*, p. 2.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 2.

8. Ngugi himself was to take a less compromising attitude, initially, towards the translation of his works into English and other languages, though he bowed to common sense in the end and handled the translation into English himself to ensure that it was done to a standard acceptable to him and as close to the letter and spirit of the Gikuyu original as possible.

9. Vansina, Jan, 1985, *Oral Traditions as History*, James Currey, London/ Heinemann, Nairobi, p. 79.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 80.

11. Kabira and Karega, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 18.

13. *Ibid.*, pp. 11-13.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 6.

15. Vansina, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

16. Vividly featured in Ngugi's first written novel, *The River Between* (Heinemann, London, 1965).

17. Kenyatta, Jomo, 1938, *Facing Mount Kenya*, Secker and Warburg, London/ Heinemann, London and Nairobi, 1978, pp. 6-8.

18. In reality this balance is a precarious one as the Gikuyu tend to use the myths to justify male domination and play down the obvious matrilineal evidence of their clan system.

19. Kenyatta, *op. cit.*, pp. 3-6.

20. Kabira and Karega, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

21. *Ibid.*, pp. 49-53.

22. *Ibid.*, pp. 14-17.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 18.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 25.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 157.

26. Kenyatta, *op. cit.*, p. 100.

27. Kabira and Karega, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

28. Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Petals of Blood*, Heinemann, London & Nairobi, 1980, p. 21.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 24.

30. Kabira and Karega, *op. cit.*, pp. 145-146.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 143.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 144.

33. *Ibid.*, pp. 147-148.

34. *Ibid.*, pp. 147-148.

35. *Ibid.*, p. 144.

36. *Ibid.*, p. 21.

37. Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Ngugi wa Mirii, *Ngaahika Ndeenda*, p. 11.

38. Kenyatta, *op. cit.*, pp. 138-139.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 142.

40. *Ibid.*, p. 148.

41. *Ibid.*, p. 149.

42. *Ibid.*, p. 151.

43. *Ibid.*, p. 151.

44. Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *The River Between*, Heinemann, 1965.

45. Kabira and Karega, *op. cit.*, pp. 141-142.

46. *Ibid.*, pp. 146-147.

47. *Ibid.*, pp. 24-25.

48. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

49. Kenyatta, *op. cit.*, p. 205.

50. *Ibid.*, p. 245.

51. *Ibid.*, p. 192-193.

52. Kabira and Karega, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

53. *Ibid.*, p. 28.

54. *Ibid.*, pp. 35-36.

55. Kenyatta, *op. cit.*, p. 172.

56. Vansina, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

57. Kabira and Karega, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

58. *Ibid.*, p. 38.

59. *Ibid.*, pp. 135-138.

60. *Ibid.*, pp. 135-138.

61. *Ibid.*, pp 138-140.

62. Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind*, p. 11.

63. Kabira, W.M., *The Oral Artist*, Heinemann, Nairobi, 1983, p. 1.

64. *Ibid.*, p. 2.

65. *Ibid.*, pp. 2-3.

66. Kenyatta, *op. cit.*, pp. 186-187.

67. Kabira, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

68. *Ibid.*, p. 4.

69. Kabira and Karega, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

70. *Ibid.*, p. 42.

71. *Ibid.*, p. 43.

72. Vansina, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

73. Kabira, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

74. Kenyatta, *op. cit.*, p. xvi.

75. Kabira and Karega, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

76. Vansina, *op. cit.*, pp. 110-111.

77. Kabira and Karega, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

78. Gurr, A, 1971, "Engagement is not Marriage: Perspectives on Cultural Conflict in East Africa," *Mosaic: a Journal for the Comparative Study of Literature and Ideas, Vol 5 (2)*, (University of Manitoba Press).

PART TWO:

T R A N S I T I O N

2.1 INTRODUCTION

2.1.1 The First Stage: Transition

The decade between the publication of *A Grain of Wheat* (1967) and *Petals of Blood* (1977) was a period of transition in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's development as a writer. *Weep Not, Child* (1964), *The River Between* (1965) and *A Grain of Wheat,* constituted an important trilogy that had put him on the road to establishing himself as a serious novelist - the most outstanding to come out of East Africa. By the time the third of this trilogy was published, the first two (which were actually written in reverse order) were well set to become classroom classics which in the years to come would be regularly studied by candidates preparing for the Literature in English paper in the East African Certificate of Education (O-Level). *A Grain of Wheat* itself was soon set to establish a niche in the English Course for the East African Advanced Certificate of Education (A-Level). Having one's works prescribed for these key examinations, which were the gateway to higher education and a whole new way of life for any child in the three East African territories - Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania - ranked as one of the highest achievements any writer in the region could hope for. It put Ngugi wa Thiong'o on the same pedestal as the likes of Chinua Achebe, Camara Laye, Wole Soyinka and Sembene Ousmane.

Although Ngugi had shown his mastery of the English language in these early novels and was personally happy about the stylistic competence of *A Grain of Wheat* in particular, by the end of that productive decade he was far from happy with his contributions to what he himself increasingly began to view as "the literature of the petty-bourgeoisie born of colonial schools and universities."[1] On looking back in *Decolonising the Mind* in 1981, Ngugi makes an indictment that must be seen to include his own "false start" with

The Trial of Dedan Kimathi and *Petals of Blood* when he talks of the limitations of a literature that was "inspired by the general political awakening" and which "drew its stamina and even form from the peasantry: their proverbs, fables, stories, riddles, and wise sayings" but was not really of "what was generally conceived as the people."[2] Casting his eyes beyond Africa to the Black Diaspora and the wider "post-war world of national democratic revolutionary and anti-colonial liberation," Ngugi saw the massive literature that had emerged from this experience as having become bogged down in the futility of apportioning blame for "the post-indepedence betrayal of hope."[3] He saw the general quest for "new audience and new directions" as compromised from the beginning because it was "still within the confines of the languages of Europe whose use it now defended with less vigour and confidence."[4] By then Ngugi was much more conscious of the need to address himself to his own people - the Gikuyu workers and peasants - whose traumatic colonial experience had given substance to his earlier writings.

In order to achieve this objective, he knew that he had to overcome two major obstacles: the English language as the accepted language of literary expression, and a 70% illiteracy level among the peoples of Kenya, the Gikuyu included in spite of their greater exposure to European influence. The need to write and teach in the English language, which he had come to resent as the language of the oppressor, irked him for it made him feel like a traitor to his Africanness. He saw it as part of the wholesale submission of the African to the subjugation to the colonial and neo-colonial system of education: the "systematic suppression of our languages and the literature they carried" and "the elevation of English and the literature it carried."[5] It made him begin to ask: "Why ... should an African writer, or any writer, become so obsessed by taking from his mother-tongue to enrich other tongues?"[6] In that light, he became a critic of the very movement he had been a prime practitioner of, admitting that "The literature it produced in European languages was given the identity of African literature as if there had never been [any] literature in African languages."[7] To be educated out of one's culture, and then to have to write in the language of the coloniser, leads to an alienating experience that Griffiths terms "a double exile" in his work of that title.[8] The

homecoming is Ngugi's attempt to reverse this double exile, described by Peck as a process of "integrating oneself in the community, thus reducing the anguish of alienation".[9]

Ngugi had been made aware of the alienation even before he began writing, for he was in the audience at the 1962 Makerere `Conference of African Writers of English Expression' at which Obi Wali said " `that the whole uncritical acceptance of English and French as the inevitable medium for educated African writing is misdirected, and has no chance of advancing African Literature and culture', and that until African writers accepted that any true African literature must be written in African languages, they would merely be pursueing a dead end."[10] Ngugi had not only gone on to establish himself as one of the major exponents of "African Literature in English" - with three novels as well as several plays and short stories to his name - but he had also gone on to initiate his eventual "homecoming" with yet another play and his most substantive novel to date, both written in English and therefore addressed (to use his own words) to "the petty-bourgeoisie [whose] readership [can be] automatically assumed by the very choice of language."[11]

The question is: why did Ngugi thus continue to write in a language he no longer believed could serve his purpose of reaching the masses? The answer to this is more complex than merely ideological. In the first instance, for very practical reasons, English is also the language of publishing in Kenya and particularly at that time, even a writer of Ngugi's calibre would have found it near impossible to get a play or novel published in one of the native languages with the exception of Swahili which alone commands a substantial nation-wide and regional readership. The overwhelming illiteracy of the Kenyan workers and peasants meant that they had practically no access to Ngugi's writing which in effect had become the preserve of the very people he was anxious to expose: either for their oppression of the Africans or, if they were black, for their betrayal of the African cause.

To correct the first of these anomalies, Ngugi had come to feel more and more strongly over the years that he had to break away from the English language as the medium of his creative effort and start writing in the Gikuyu language -

not as a kind of nostalgic return to "some `pure' and unsullied condition" which Ashcroft, Griffith and Tiffin impugn,[12] but as a serious commitment to promoting indigenous literature. This was in spite of the lack of encouragement from his publishers whose only concession was to issue his earlier works in Swahili translations so as to reach a wider Kenyan readership. Gikuyu readership was regarded as too limited to be economically viable to cater for. Eventually Ngugi was to override all these objections by writing in Gikuyu in the first instance and refusing to permit translation until the Gikuyu original had been given a fair chance to justify itself.

The second obstacle was far more difficult to overcome without relying on an external agency to mount a massive literacy campaign on a scale that the Kenyan authorities had never tried to do. Not only were the majority of the people illiterate, but even those who were known to be literate were only nominally so as they had never cultivated the habit of reading, most of them never having thought of ever opening a book again once they left school. Most people's idea of reading stopped with the routine of glancing through the pages of a newspaper and to them literacy meant being able to fill in an occasional form without assistance. There had to be a way to get over the obstacle and drama offered a directness that began to appeal to Ngugi.

It is of some significance that Ngugi's early experience was not limited to writing novels. He had also written no less than five plays of note: *The Black Hermit* (1968) written as early as 1962 when it was performed in Kampala as part of the celebrations marking Uganda's Independence and *This Time Tomorrow: Three Plays* (1970) one of which had been broadcast on the BBC African Theatre programme. Although these plays showed his promise as a playwright, they left no doubt that his greatest potential lay in the novel. Yet it was increasingly towards drama and theatre that Ngugi's thoughts drifted in search of an answer in the transition period during which he was known to be working on a major novel to come after *A Grain of Wheat*, which had settled into something of a literary landmark on the East African scene and looked as if it might have become a hard act to follow.

But in all the time when he seemed to be stuck, Ngugi was neither static nor idle for all the while he was putting together a collection of criticism[13] and consolidating his ideas for a new thrust which would find expression in the new novel he was writing. [See **Appendix 2A**][14] He had begun to see drama and theatre as the ideal means of reaching an audience without the intervening obstacle of the written word. However, not just any drama would do: it had to be relevant and it had to have its roots in the culture of the oppressed people themselves. Realizing that he was practically an outsider himself (as a university professor in fact one of the petty-bourgeoisie) Ngugi had to accept the fact that he was ill-equipped to venture in that direction without stepping back to his roots to learn his own language anew, like a child, and pick up their idioms and the aesthetics and intricacies of their culture.

The journey back to his "homecoming" may have started with the exciting and deeply moving visit to Dedan Kimathi's birthplace which is documented in the introduction to *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*.[15] With this symbolic journey and the writing and staging of the experimental play that followed, Ngugi appears to have put a hold on the novel in the making. Apart from the more immediate trial run in Nairobi, there was the prospect of the All-Africa Festival of Arts and Culture (FESTAC '77) in Lagos, Nigeria, for which the play was originally written.

2.1.2 The Transition Play: *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*

Ngugi wrote *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* in collaboration with Micere Githae-Mugo, not because he did not completely trust his own skill as a playwright, but because it was absolutely crucial that from the outset he got right the experiment he had in mind. Although his earlier ventures into drama had shown that he could write plays of note, this time he had good reason for seeking an outside input. It was not just to make the style and content water-tight. That would not sufficiently explain his choice of Micere Githae-Mugo, of all the possible candidates, for as co-author she was herself not any better

grounded in the field of drama. From reading the introduction to the published play it would appear that what drew Ngugi and Micere Mugo together was an ideological[18] affinity rather than the obvious ties of their both being products of the English Department at the then Makerere University College of East Africa and fellow lecturers at the University of Nairobi.

However, the real unstated reason for the collaboration is probably that Micere Mugo - as a woman - was essential in helping to shape Ngugi's own vision of the woman as a central figure in the struggle for liberation - past, present and future. The role of the woman in directing the destiny of her people was one Ngugi had already sensed before but had only given partial expression to, for example, in the symbolic characters of Muthoni and Nyambura in *The River Between* and Mumbi in *A Grain of Wheat*. Now with the assistance of Micere Githae-Mugo, he hoped to elevate this symbolic role to that of an equal partner in the authorship of the play itself.

Right from its first conception *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* was aimed at reaching the local audience which was familiar with the history of the Mau Mau uprising and the heroic story of its legendary leader. To try and recreate such a story in a realistic light, and within the limitations of theatre, would have been futile as well as inappropriate since the authors had no intention of either merely informing the audience or giving certain historical facts, as some critics expect.[17] What the authors aimed at was to re-invoke the spirit of the revolt and re-kindle the fire of revolution that had apparently burnt down with the disillusionment of ***uhuru*** (independence). Cook and Okenimkpe sum up Ngugi and Micere's intentions as follows:

> Their ambition was to rally the aspirations of Kenyan workers, stifled by the vested interests of the new black elite almost as effectively as by colonialists, and, it might seem, more irreparably. One starting point in such a campaign was evidently to revive awareness of the freedom fighters' struggles in the forests during the 1950s, aimed at independence with social justice. Kimathi, a key figure, was to be re-created as an inspiration and inciter to fresh positive action. For this, it was not ... subtleties and historical balance that were needed. A crusade requires its heroes and flashpoints. Ngugi and Micere Mugo

> saw drama as providing these so as to fire a popular audience. To see drama in this way is to give it a role of immediate social significance.[18]

This is true, though it was only the first step towards reaching the target audience of largely "illiterate" workers and peasants for whom English was a foreign language which they neither spoke nor understood. And to compound it all, it was also an audience for whom the conventions of formal theatre, which the play assumes, are as remote as the physical theatre itself which was only accessible to the urban elite.

Ngugi's target, which is re-affirmed by the new phase in his writing that comes into being with *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*, is to incite the masses to rise again and take up arms to turn the vision of a glorious new earth into a reality. This went well with the Nairobi audience who understood the score and many of whom might have lived through the trauma of the Mau Mau liberation war themselves. In contrast, the audience at the Africa Centre in Convent Garden in London saw the play differently - especially once the Kenya government put diplomatic pressure on the British Government to view the play as harmful to bilateral relations between the two countries and the media took up the hue and cry about communist propaganda. These concerted pressures eventually led to the cancellation of the London production to the great delight of the authorities and the media back home in Kenya.[19]

When *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* was first performed at the Kenya National Theatre in Nairobi in 1976, it was one of the first authentic Kenyan plays to be staged there. As a colonial preserve, for decades that hallowed venue had been "national" in name only, its repertoire being as predominantly British as its audiences. This much publicized breakthrough was also an implied protest and there could hardly have been a more fitting vehicle than *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* to herald the end of an era and usher in the beginning of another. It is significant that for all the publicity the play received as Kenya's contribution to FESTAC '77 and in spite of overwhelming public demand for extra shows, its scheduled performances at the Kenya National Theatre were unceremoniously cut short to give way to some insignificant English play and

which was to be seen only by the usual clientele largely made up of British civil servants and the remnant settler community who patronized the National Theatre.

Nevertheless, for Ngugi himself, both as an individual and as a writer, *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* marked a turning point that was destined to be the first stage of his "homecoming" - his journey back to his roots where he would learn his language anew, re-discover his culture and find the tools with which to fashion his message appropriately for the ordinary workers and peasants whom he had begun to identify as the true heroes and heroines of Kenya's bitter struggle for freedom. He knew that the patriots who would one day rise up in arms to throw away the yoke of "imperialism and neo-colonialism" would come not from the tie-and-coat black bourgeoisie who would be filling up the auditorium but from the anonymous crowds for whom he had conjured up the image of Dedan Kimathi.

That *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* was permitted to show at all at the National Theatre was probably because the play was in English and was therefore deemed accessible only to the educated elite who could take its message without posing any threat to the status quo and Kenya's socio-political legacy. Being in the English language, the play was seen as addressing itself to the very classes that it accused of having compromised their nation's freedom. Its call for action was therefore destined to fall on deaf ears. Ngugi did not miss the point: next time he would write a play for the people in a language that they understood and spoke every day, to be staged at a venue to which they could enjoy unrestricted access - a people's own theatre!

The Trial of Dedan Kimathi was allowed only a limited run in schools as a set book for the Literature in English course and for the corresponding Swahili course in translation as *Mzalendo Kimathi*.[20] Both were later quietly dropped from the list of prescribed books without being officially banned from the bookshop or library shelves. In Kenya (as in most African countries) this is an effective enough ban as it automatically cuts sales down from thousands of copies a year to a few hundred only - a fact that those critics who travel

to Kenya and find Ngugi's books on the bookshelves may misconstrue when they assume that the ban is only Ngugi's exaggeration or a deliberate lie told by his supporters so as to win him sympathy.[21]

In theme, characterization and some aspects of style, *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* was the proving ground where Ngugi experimented with the ideas that not only later found full expression in his subsequent plays but which also had a more immediate impact on the novel he was writing at the time. The enthusiastic public response to *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* (in spite of the limitations imposed by the nature of the National Theatre) had confirmed to Ngugi that drama was a very potent medium for reaching the people - but only as a short-term vehicle.

2.1.3 The Transition Novel: *Petals of Blood*

In order to reach a lasting audience, Ngugi realized at the time of the production of *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*, he still needed the novel form. He knew that the novel he was writing - if it was to reach a wider audience than he had ever envisaged - would have to be unconventional in form. It had to be as familiar as can be to the literature of the people, orally passed down from generation to generation. Ngugi aimed at writing a novel based on the structure of the traditional epic tale in which narrative blends with song, dance and mime to create an entertaining work that is also educative.

The length and complex structure of *Petals of Blood* is the result of this attempt to make it all-comprehensive. Although Ngugi delved deeply into his Gikuyu culture to get the material with which to build a new kind of novel, he was also still consciously or unconsciously tied to the familiar classical model that he could not discard outright. Thus he was still only a traveller in transit to his ultimate destination. That he himself had reservations about the success of *Petals of Blood* is probably borne out by the fact that it

was never published in Gikuyu translation, as he was strongly opposed to the idea of working backwards. He preferred to devote his energies to the task of writing first in Gikuyu after which he could be translated into Swahili, other African languages and then other world languages - in that order!

Ngugi's own thoughts and theories on what he was doing constitute an important factor in getting a better understanding of his works as in the following extract from his discussion of the techniques for his previous novel, *A Grain of Wheat*, which he contrasts with the techniques for *Petals of Blood*, showing the progression from one to the other as follows:

> *Petals of Blood* had taken a stage further the techniques of flashbacks, multiple narrative voices, movement in time and space and parallel biographies and stories. The technique allowed me to move freely in time and space through the centuries and through all the important landmarks in Kenya's history from the early times and back to the twelve days duration of the present of the novel.[22]

Critics like Lisa Curtis view this technique as flawed because the "intrusions of personal motives on ostensibly social preoccupations... provide useful structural links in the plot of *Petals of Blood*, but significantly undermine the intention of collectivist expression"[23] resulting in what she sees as a divergence of art and ideology in Ngugi's later novels. Her views are taken into account in discussing the stylistic shortcomings that have made some readers uncomfortable with Ngugi's later works.

ENDNOTES:

1. Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 1981, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*, Heinemann/ James Currey/ Zimbabwe Publishing House (Nairobi, London, Harare), p. 20.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 21.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 21.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 21.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 13.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 8.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 22.

8. Griffiths, Gareth, *A Double Exile: African and West Indian Writing between Two Cultures*, Marion Boyars, London, 1978.

9. Peck, R., 1989, "Hermits and Saviors, Osagyefos and Healers: Artists and Intellectuals in the Works of Ngugi and Armah," *Research in African Literatures*, Vol. 20, No. 1, University of Texas, Austin, p. 26.

10. Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind*, p. 24.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 22.

12. Ashcroft, B., Griffiths, G., and Tiffin, H., 1989, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures*, Routeledge, London-New York, pp. 41-42, 131.

13. Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Homecoming: Essays on African and Caribbean Literature, Culture and Politics*, (Heinemann, London, 1972).

14. Interview, *The Weekly Review*, 9 January 1978. [See Appendix 2A].

15. Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Micere Githae-Mugo, *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*, (Heinemann, Nairobi, 1976; London, 1977), pp. vi - vii.

16. *Ibid.*, pp. vi-vii.

17. A point that was completely missed by Harry Hilton, a former Kenya policeman, writing on the troubled London performance of *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*: *The Standard*, 29 November, 1984 and 1 December, 1984. [See Appendix 2B].

18. Cook, D. and Okenimkpe, M., 1983, *Ngugi wa Thiong'o: An Exploration of His Writing*, (Heinemann, London), p. 160.

19. Arnold Raphael, *The Standard*, 18 October 1984 and 25 October 1984. [See Appendix 2C].

20. Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 1978, *Mzalendo Kimathi*, translated by Raphael Kahaso, (Heinemann, Nairobi).

21. On front page article by an unnamed reporter quoting a statement from the January issue of a newsletter of the International Society for Strategic Studies for Africa (ISSSA), *The Standard*, 5 February 1985. [See Appendix 2D].

22. Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind*, p. 77.

23. Curtis, L., 1984, "The Divergence of Art and Ideology in the Later Novels of Ngugi wa Thiong'o: A Critique", *UFAHAMU, Vol. 8, No. 1-2*, p. 187.

2.2 THE TRANSITION PLAY: *THE TRIAL OF DEDAN KIMATHI*

2.2.1 Plot and Structure

The plot of *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* is based on the familiar concept of trials within a trial. The main trial gives the play the basic framework or skeleton on which the plot is structured. This trial precedes the First Movement in a kind of prologue that shows it for the mockery it is; it starts the Second Movement in which it is the precursor for the racial, ideological and psychological conflict that follows; and it closes the Third Movement with the death sentence which is a foregone conclusion from the beginning. This is a pretty conventional structure based on western theatre tradition.

2.2.1.1 THE OPENING

The hollowness of the main trial as a whole is reflected in the ostentatious formality of the legal charge against Kimathi which he doesn't even bother to respond to. This formal piece of legalese is clearly meant to be seen from the beginning as an example of a trumped up charge in a case that would normally be treated as political and not criminal in an open system. To emphasize the court's basic indifference to real justice, the charge is turned into an obsessive monotone which is parroted no less than six times through the run of play, leaving no doubt that the whole trial is only a travesty of justice and a charade meant to expose the irony beneath the colonial insistence on fair play. The real trials are either ideological or psychological and therefore lie deeper than the surface charade. In this conflict of ideology, the British stand for an imperialist/capitalist system

of government which they want to hand down to their successors and allies who would maintain links with the Greater Empire. The nationalist liberators on the other hand are calling for complete capitulation and the establishment of a socialist system of government that would be completely free of any colonial fetters. What one sees as an unjust revolt, the other sees as a justifiable freedom struggle. The trial represents the might of the Empire being brought to bear against the will of the impoverished masses: Henderson in his various official guises given voice versus Kimathi in chains rendered speechless.

2.2.1.2 FIRST MOVEMENT

There are five successive scenes in the First Movement which covers only twenty-two pages of the play. Significantly, none of these scenes of earnest confrontation between the representatives of the two warring sides features the mock trial of the opening episode.

The movement opens with a street scene in which the natural vibrancy of the masses (as reflected in song, dance, mime and costumes) is contrasted with drab and constrained formality of the preceding court scene. In this sequence Africa's past of enslavement and oppression is enacted but only through the economy of mime. Past suffering and current oppression are then linked in the next three successive scenes in which a military operation[1] to isolate Mau Mau supporters is in progress, following an abortive attempt to release Kimathi from jail.

The colonial forces of oppression are presented as white soldiers supported by African collaborators who are either misguided soldiers themselves or cowardly informers who have to be hooded to hide their identities so as to protect them from Mau Mau reprisal. It should be noted that on stage (in Kenya) the only differentiation between the "white" soldiers and the collaborators would be in dress and mannerisms, dramatically exaggerated to further differentiate these actors from those representing the ordinary people. These elements of exaggeration, which also help to heighten the drama and provide comic relief,

are written into the text which - though it purports to present both sides - relentlessly exposes what "the other side" is like.

The oppressed people are represented on the one hand by the Woman, Boy and Girl, who give them verbal expression, and on the other hand by the crowd of singers and dancers who act as a kind of chorus and a direct link with the audience. The significantly nameless Woman[2] is a symbolic rallying point in the people's struggle and her handling of the white soldier is used to reveal both her initiative and her courage in spite of the underlying vulnerability that marks her as only human.

Nearly half the movement is devoted to the chance encounter between the Woman, Boy and Girl which constitutes a parallel secondary drama that runs across all the movements of the play. These sequences actually make up what comes closest to representing traditional Gikuyu oral narrative in which the Woman is the narrator while the Boy and the Girl are an extension of the audience on stage. These three nameless characters are significant because they speak for the anonymous masses. The antagonism between the Boy and Girl is used to show how divided the African people are (as one of the black soldiers points out) and to emphasize the magnitude of the task of bringing about unity and understanding before the struggle for freedom can become a reality. Idle Youth is depicted as standing in need of parental counselling from the experience of Age. At the end of the movement, however, the manner in which the Woman recruits the unsuspecting Boy into her plot to try and rescue Kimathi is perhaps a little rushed and reflects a simplistic optimism that leaves a lot to chance. Significantly, this optimism is later shown to be a human trait that even someone of Kimathi's stature is not immune to.

2.2.1.3 SECOND MOVEMENT

This movement is dominated by the five scenes in which Kimathi is depicted as being on trial, not only at the physical level of the formal court trial but much more importantly at the deeper level of social and moral consciousness. These trial scenes are inter-linked by the secondary drama in which the

Woman's plot to try and spring Kimathi from jail suffers setbacks which force her to adopt other equally inept contingency plans. This ineptitude show just how outmatched native wisdom was by British cunning in the Kenyan Liberation War, in spite of all the bravado that the freedom fighters put up.

The main trial is depicted as a mere show of formality, placed in a highly charged atmosphere in which racial tensions run high as the onlookers fall into two antagonistic camps: the white settlers who are fully armed and are privileged to occupy comfortable seats and the black people who are disarmed at the door and have only the rough-hewn bare benches to sit on. The air is charged with antagonism even before the trial starts, to say nothing of one side already presuming to be in the right. Again we have to note that in production this would be a confrontation between the well-dressed, educated type on one side and the bedraggled, illiterate type on the other - reflecting the rift in the audience itself and in the community as a whole as being the real point of contention at the centre of the trial on stage.

The ideological debate between the man of law and the man of conscience has no chance of getting anywhere in this atmosphere, and the Judge soon gives up and escapes from the arena just before the aggressive settler pulls a gun on Kimathi who has to be hustled away. The Settler then gives full vent to the frustrations he has suffered as a result of the destruction by the Mau Mau of his private empire and peace of mind, for which he swears revenge on Kimathi before he is escorted out in an epileptic fit. That Kimathi could personally have been guilty of the charges brought against him by the settler is highly unlikely but dramatically effective not only in re-emphasizing the unfairness of the trial and the obsessive stance of the British but also in rousing the emotions of the Gikuyu in the audience whose land had been appropriated by people like Settler Windhoek who then assumed a fanatically proprietary attitude towards both the land and its former owners who were co-opted to work as forced labourers. At the end of the scene there is no doubt left that the only "justice" which can be expected in this unequal confrontation is that of the gun, which only the irate settler is honest enough to admit.

This is followed by four scenes of trials within the trial in which Kimathi is relentlessly assailed by temptations which are given credence by his natural fear of death combined with the allure of reward. Externally, these temptations are presented as delegations that come to lure him with offers designed to make him abandon his cause and renounce his comrades-in-arms. In these scenes Kimathi should also be viewed as a man whose conscience is thrown open to the audience who witness his battling with himself.

The first trial/temptation finds Kimathi at his most vulnerable: pleading for forgiveness with the invisible figure of his sorrow-crazed mother. For a moment he is literally like a child as he confronts his jailer, the multi-faced Henderson: soldier, detective, prosecutor, judge, friend and betrayer of the Africans who silently slithers, slides and sidles into the cell like a serpent, offering sweet words of friendship that are in fact only thinly sugar-coated venom. When Kimathi angrily refuses to fall for his false overtures, Henderson's true colours begin to show and he bares his teeth in threat as he beats a quick retreat from the scene. This momentary victory on the side of Kimathi denotes a psychological mastery of the temptation to sacrifice principle for family or friendship which the revolutionary is often faced with.

The second trial (separated from the first by the song/dance/mime routine that punctuates the whole movement) depicts Kimathi in confrontation with the first "unholy trinity" of tradesmen, led by the white Banker, who would have him sell his people and his soul for money, couched in the colourful costumes of "investment, development, prosperity and happiness" for his people. In this symbolic foreign-dominated delegation there is also an Indian whose presence, in the East African context, marks the commercialism of his race and their traditional indifference to the political commitments of the Africans - hence the deliberate caricaturing of his speech for comic effect. There is also an African businessman who never utters a word but nods agreement to everything that is said. He is obviously brought in just to illustrate the practice of placing Africans in the position of fronting for their neo-colonial masters, which is associated with the perpetuation of neo-colonial domination in Ngugi's works. Kimathi, when he rejects their mercenary proposals, rightly

dismisses him as a Judas. The temptation of material wealth and its accompanying political power is one that had lured the collaborators at the time of the struggle and would lure their successors who would subsequently take up the reins of government at the time of independence. A victory over the temptations of Commerce, Industry and High Finance amounts to a moral triumph over what Ngugi in his subsequent works firmly associates with the forces of evil.

The third trial depicts Kimathi faced with the second "unholy trinity" whose true identity at first eludes him. This group, which is led by the African Business Executive who is dressed like an Englishman, also includes a Politician and a Priest: African Business, Politics and Church, a novel combination but in fact only old allies in new clothing. This delegation catches Kimathi in a moment when he is assailed by self-doubt and Business threatens to throw Kimathi further off-balance with his effusive declaration that the struggle is over. This cheque-book revolutionary has been bought off with the idea of "partnership in progress" just as the Politician in the same delegation has been bought off with the hackneyed idea that "half a loaf is better than none". The message is no different from that of Henderson and that of the first delegation. Kimathi rejects both the African Business Executive's and the Politician's overtures too and orders them out, turning to the Priest for some moral reassurance. But he is further affronted by the latter's sermonizing which is only a coverup for the Church's acquiescence to white domination of the black people. In the end Kimathi has to throw the Priest out too. Nevertheless, the Priest has the effect of enabling Kimathi to begin to see the inevitability of his personal sacrifice for the common good. Kimathi starts to realise that his real trial is not a physical one but a moral one: that it centres on the messianic need to sacrifice himself for a principle, resisting all the temptations to save himself.[3]

The fourth and final inner trial finds Kimathi ultimately ready to meet his destiny. Significantly, Henderson is the one who returns to put the final test to Kimathi. This time, Henderson's attitude is much more confrontational and menacing as he literally holds up the hangman's rope to Kimathi in one hand while proffering a prepared letter of surrender in the other, with the

whip not far behind. Kimathi refuses to yield to the combined psychological harassment and physical torture which he is subjected to. By the end of the movement he is broken only in body but not in spirit.

The inter-linking secondary drama involving the Woman, Boy and Girl failing to put together a rescue plan to save Kimathi is not merely included for light relief, for the mix-up it results in is more tragic than comic. These scenes also give a feeling of development to the trial scenes by providing dramatic action and saving the plot from appearing to be static. This movement starts with the Woman turning up disguised as the Fruit-seller, thus rousing the expectations of the audience. Then the secondary drama develops into a proper mix-up as the Woman and Boy fail to make contact and the plot to free Kimathi appears doomed to failure before it had even started. For variety, the first and second trials are linked by the song/dance/mime routine that also punctuates the latter. Then the Boy and Girl reappear to continue their personal feud until the Woman's voice intervenes to set the Boy on the course towards reconciliation. The Woman, who acts as the voice of conscience, cannot herself appear physically in the scene without shedding the disguise which she is forced to carry through to the episode between the third and fourth trial when the prison warder finally puts her on course towards linking up with her amateurish allies. All this happens while they hardly know what is happening to Kimathi, as his trials (like Christ's) are a cross he must bear alone.

2.2.1.4 THIRD MOVEMENT

This movement shows the slowing down of the tempo, as in the lull before a storm. It starts with the Woman and her team finally resolving the mix-up and getting together to take stock of the situation. That they are not really cut out for action is shown by the manner in which they sit back to talk about Kimathi and the past as though the passing of every moment did not really matter. This is like a scene from the traditional story-teller's repertoire when he/she takes a breathing space to paint an idyllic picture of the epic hero before coming to the moment of crisis. The Kimathi they portrayed is the

legendary leader who is reputed to have almost supernatural powers. Drama turns into folklore as the scene almost imperceptibly drifts from the reality of the moment to the dream-world of the past, illustrating just how human Kimathi is in spite of his fierce reputation.

It is against this background, which reminds one of the saying that "to err is human but to forgive is divine", that the playwrights then weave in the scene of the Guerilla Camp. This is a flashback to what is meant to be seen as a different, more humane kind of court than the colonial one. It opens with the fighters singing the song of Kimathi, not with recriminations and formal charges against the traitors. In a dramatic reversal of roles in which the man in the dock becomes the judge, Kimathi is pictured passing judgement on the colonial soldiers and their African lackeys who are sentenced to execution by firing squad. These prisoners of war in the mini-drama are subjected to the same summary justice as Kimathi himself is in the larger drama. This reversal of roles appears to show that "right", after all, depends on which side you are on. Apart from giving Kimathi the platform from which to speak about the need for vigilance, total commitment to the struggle and discipline, this scene, ironically, puts Kimathi in a situation in which his own principles are brought to trial. He is confronted with the traitors who had gone to negotiate with the enemy without authorization from the movement. These traitors include his own only surviving brother, Wambararia, whom he cannot condemn for the reason (unknown to his other generals who urge tough action) that his crazed mother had written a letter appealing to him to spare her youngest. Faced with these divided loyalties that were tearing him apart, as in the first trial within the trial in the third movement, Kimathi opts to be humane and is almost immediately let down by the men's ingratitude and betrayal. Although he then orders quick retribution, it is too late. With that the scene quickly changes back to the present moment when he is in court facing trial as if what has been going on (including the trials within the trial) has only been an illusion, a moment held in parenthesis, as it were, between the main acts.

In the court scene that follows the nearness of death almost threatens to weaken Kimathi's resolve until the Woman's entry helps to bolster it up again

by reminding him that he is not alone, for even in suffering he has someone to share it all with. In a dramatic development preceding Kimathi's sentencing, the Woman is herself arrested in open court and chained, just like Kimathi. And instead of lamenting her fate as she is led out to jail and to almost certain execution herself, she triumphantly breaks into the freedom song she had sang earlier. This is the signal for Kimathi to make his last stand against the colonial oppressors and their collaborators. He completely ignores the implications of his trial as he prophesies ultimate victory for freedom in Kenya and passes on his manifesto for liberation. When the judge pronounces the death sentence, Kimathi only reacts with the enigmatic laugh for which the real-life Kimathi was famed. To the Gikuyu audience, this is as if to say how futile it is for anyone to try and kill a legend. At that moment, the Boy and Girl then stand up with their concealed gun which they shoot together to usher in utter commotion, followed by a darkness which takes Kimathi back to the realms of myth.

The finale of the play is the People's Song and Dance that celebrates the spirit of resistance, sung in Swahili and clearly aimed at the local Kenyan audience to whip up the feeling of solidarity. The involvement of the audience in this and in the earlier crowd scenes is deliberately built into the structure of the play to generate a response designed to spill beyond the confines of the stage and theatre to the community as a whole for whom the re-invoking of Kimathi is a signal calling for political action.

The above discussion of *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* reveals that although the play may be conventional in its structure, the playwrights do make certain concessions to the local audience to conform with the African conception of theatre as a comprehensive performance involving narrative, rhetoric, fable, song, mime - all of them elements of traditional oral literature. And although the play is written in English and features relatively unfamiliar techniques like the flashback, a fair amount of Swahili is used as a direct overture to the local audience in Kenya while the familiarity of the legend of Kimathi makes the whole re-incarnation a flashback in itself. This would be

easily understood by a Gikuyu audience which is used to tales of fantasy that take one beyond the actualities of the real world.

2.2.2 Themes and Social Context

Although Ngugi's later plays and novels form a distinct grouping in his literary canon, they do not stand in isolation with regard to themes. They are part and parcel of the progressive emergence of the world view he develops over three decades of writing. But there is a subtle difference between the themes in the earlier works, which looked back to history and recreated the trauma of the colonial experience until independence, and the themes in the later works, which shift attention to the post-colonial period to try and find the answer to the failure of independence as well as the way forward to a better future, symbolically referred to as "A New Earth".[4]

Ngugi had always written with the Gikuyu people as the focus of his attention. However, the liberation struggle in Kenya had actually brought the different ethnic groups together and a nationalist spirit had been engendered which genuinely promised to usher in the dawn of a new day, the birth of the new earth of his vision of a better Kenya. This called for a change of perspective in his writing, which took him on a journey back in time in search for inspiration. That is the real beginning of his return to his roots and to the life and death of the legendary hero of the revolution that might have succeeded if it had not been betrayed. This search in the glorious past for a road to the future and towards a more just society finally finds a creative outlet in the writing and production of *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi.*

The thematic base of the play lies in the continuum that has already been established in Ngugi's literary canon and centres on the well delineated conflict between Europe and Africa, now lifted from a cultural confrontation of the earlier novels to an ideological contest of the immediate pre-independence era. The play may appear to be concerned with themes like justice, loyalty, integrity, etc, but the central theme is really the conflict

between imperialism and liberation. The others are mere off-shoots of this. In the play the might of the British Empire as represented by Henderson in his many guises is presented in head-on collision with the revolt of the liberation struggle as represented by Kimathi. The empire is as invincible as the tenacious Henderson and the struggle, by implication, is as unstoppable as the incorruptible Kimathi. One side has to give way and it is the better organised system that comes up victorious over the individual: the messianic Kimathi is offered as the sacrificial lamb for the cause which at the close of play celebrates victory in defeat.

The Church is slated in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* for being an agent of colonialism. In the conflict between imperialism and traditionalism, the Church has been depicted as having long supported the oppressors to subjugate the oppressed peoples. Commenting on Ngugi and Micere's attitude to religion, Chesaina points out that "the authors are inclined to the marxist view that Christianity and indeed religion as a whole is an opium to quieten the masses about their suffering and condition them for exploitation."[5] Judging from the company that the priest in the play keeps, he is clearly an ally of the exploiters who are more concerned with safeguarding the material acquisitions of their colonial masters than with cultivating the spiritual values of the impoverished masses. The Africanisation of the Church - like that of commerce, industry and government - is only an externalised change of clothing that leaves the basic tenets unchanged.

2.2.2.1 THE IDEOLOGICAL DEBATE

To look at the confrontation in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* as a "debate" may appear to border on understatement, but apart from the harassment of the villagers by the soldiers and the fact that Kimathi himself is "physically abused" in interrogation, the serious altercations between Kimathi and Henderson take place at the level of ideological debate. The minor incidents of racial conflict are treated lightly enough to provide comic relief with their excesses which are deliberately exaggerated to make dramatic capital out

of them. Otherwise it can be argued that the play as a whole - being a trial - is an intellectual discourse on ideology in which the two sides of the debate on "Imperialism and Liberation" are represented by Henderson and Kimathi, respectively, as the principal speakers. The supporting action is then viewed only as a demonstration of some of the less subtle aspects of the ideological contest.

The initial debate between Kimathi and Henderson (pp. 25-27) is used to show the two principal contenders weighing up each other like the prosecutor and defence attorney in the early stages of a trial before either assumes a hard stance. Henderson contends that the crime Kimathi has committed in breaking the law is serious enough to carry a death sentence. Kimathi counters that he will not even bother to answer to "An imperialist court of law" and "To a criminal judge, in a criminal court, set up by a criminal law: the law of oppression." But Henderson rationally counteracts this, saying: " Law is law. The rule of law is the basis of every civilized community. Justice is justice." When Kimathi asks whose law and whose justice he is referring to, Henderson promptly replies: "There is only one law, one justice." Kimathi rejects this assumption, saying: "Two laws. Two justices. One law and one justice protects the man of property, the man of wealth, the foreign exploiter. Another law, another justice, silences the poor, the hungry, our people."

At this point, when the debate is fairly balanced, Henderson gets rattled enough to let his claws show for he vehemently answers: "I am not talking about the laws of Nyandarua jungle." The reference to Nyandarua jungle -after what Henderson has said about "civilized community" - implies that Kimathi and the Mau Mau have no notion of justice, a point that is counteracted later in the flashback to the guerrilla camp when, ironically, Kimathi's "civilized" treatment of the traitors brought before him for trial directly leads to his arrest and trial. Yet Kimathi restrains himself from answering with anger at his betrayal or bitterness about his personal tragedy, preferring instead to give expression to his vision of "a new dawn" that had persevered, like the black people, in spite of colonial persecution. He goes on to enlist a catalogue of all the wrongs that the colonial system had levied on the black

people and ends with an impassioned demand for liberty and human decency that goes beyond a plea for his own personal freedom, for it is a challenge for the liberation of all the oppressed people of the world:

> There is no order and law without liberty.
> Chain my legs,
> Chain my hands,
> Chain my soul,
> And you cry law and justice?
> And the law of the people bids me:
> Unchain my legs,
> Unchain my hands,
> Unchain my soul! (p. 27)

Before a partisan audience, Kimathi's rhetoric and poetic intensity (like the rational arguments earlier on) are calculated to catch Henderson off-guard and indeed he falters and belatedly corrects himself when he says: "I know you are a poet, an orator, a politician. No society can be without laws to protect property ... I mean protect our lives ... Civilization ... Investment ... Christianity ... Order." (p. 26) In the first instance, this is a grudging admission of his suppressed admiration for his opponent as "a poet, an orator, a politician." Significantly, he omits one major occupation that Kimathi could lay claim to: that of being a soldier and a freedom fighter who had pitted his martial skills against Henderson and the best that the British could offer for years before he was finally betrayed by the defectors from his own side and arrested. Henderson makes a major ideological blunder by slip of tongue when he admits that the British interest in the war is principally the defence of "property". In other words, all the blood that had been shed had not been because of a political ideology or moral principle but merely in pursuit of the wealth the British had accumulated through appropriation of land and the exploitation of forced cheap labour. In terms of the play, it was all in the defence of Settler Windhoek and his kind. Henderson's belated attempt to cover up with big-sounding words falls flat. To the satisfaction of the audience, Kimathi gains moral victory with his passionate rhetoric in this first ideological debate while Henderson is forced to back down and opt out.

The first of the four trials within trial in the second movement (pp. 31-58) constitutes a more subtle ideological debate in which Henderson, like his many

acolytes in the subsequent encounters, is an external exponent of the inner debate that is taking place within Kimathi's own mind. This inner dialogue is skilfully dramatised to illustrate the conflict of interests and clash of ideologies that any individual is subject to, especially in a society which is in a state of fundamental social upheaval as Kenya was at the time of the Emergency. In this debate Kimathi is tempted by the serpentine Henderson to sign a letter of surrender that would not only flush out his Generals from the forests and bring a quick end to the war but would also signify ideological defeat of the liberation ideal and an admission of the superior might of imperialism. That this is an introspective, inner conflict is underlined by the soliloquy with which it opens which shows Kimathi at his weakest, psychologically, as he is filled with nostalgia for the idyllic scenes of his youth and pleads with his crazed mother for forgiveness for having chosen "the path of struggle". The conviction that "Victory will be ours/ Mother of us, your children," offers no real re-assurance as Henderson is quick to notice when he slithers in with a sly: "Hey, Dedan. Field Marshal. Guilty visitations?" (p. 32) This is no ordinary greeting, for it is meant to be provocative and insulting. The first name chumminess lacks conviction, the military title is a mockery, and the frivolous question in the end is gleefully accusatory. No wonder Kimathi is thrown off-balance: this is not the Henderson he knew, this is not the enemy who had hunted him over hills and valleys until he was finally caught off-guard.

Henderson comes in the guise of a friend: a one-time playmate of Kimathi, personally, and "a friend of the Africans" in general. As Kimathi tells him, he comes armed not with firearms but with words, speeches and sweet promises. The Africans he claims to speak for are the traitors: the loyalists and collaborators who had betrayed Kimathi and the masses by selling out to the colonial rulers. Citing the desertion of Kimathi's own brother, Henderson tries to trick Kimathi into conceding guilt of having acted out of selfish motives for fear of rivalry. This is one of the clearest indicators of the whole episode being an internal dialogue in which Kimathi queries his own beliefs and motives. Kimathi denies ever having acted out of such ulterior motives, saying: "I have only sought to protect the struggle from betrayal, opportunism and regional chauvinism." This over-statement suggests a

defensiveness which Henderson seizes on to flatter Kimathi into accepting the gift of life so that his leadership is not lost to the struggle. Kimathi is stung by what he sees as "British imperial arrogance" and, before the advantage is lost, Henderson is quick to point out that he has come to make a deal. That immediately puts Kimathi on his guard: "Deals! Pacts! Treaties! How many nations have you wiped out, and later said: well, according to this treaty and that treaty, they had ceded their land and their lives." (p. 33) This appears to suggest that Kimathi might have considered making a deal to save his life at one time before rejecting the idea.

The apparent breakdown in the subtle approach has the effect of making Henderson (who flatteringly admits to being no poet or dreamer himself) change tactics and try the direct approach: "You must plead in court tomorrow. And you must plead guilty." Astounded, Kimathi is almost lost for words before he finds tongue to lash out at Henderson for the different guises he had put on so as to try and trick his opponent into compliance. Perhaps deceived by a sudden lightness in Kimathi's tone and his enigmatic laughter, Henderson presses on, flippantly saying, "I give you my word as a British Gentleman. Plead guilty. We spare your life." The price of this is the confession of guilt that would effectively end the war as the other Generals would see no point in fighting on after that. Instead of immediately flaring up as he had done earlier in the court scene, Kimathi responds to this with good humour and the two adversaries exchange a few sarcastic remarks in which Henderson is lulled into admitting that "You challenged our interests: we had to defend them." (p. 34)

It is Henderson again who suddenly changes tactics by going on to talk of the childhood when they had played together "on the slopes of Mount Kenya". It was then, as children playing horse and rider, that Kimathi had first rejected white domination and thrown off the burden imposed on him. This is a light-hearted diversion that has no foundation in reality but is introduced to show the change of fortunes between the two men for, as Kimathi puts it: "When the hunted has truly learnt to hunt his hunter, then the hunting game will be no more." Ironically, the hunted was always Kimathi and he had learnt to hunt Henderson but it is the latter who had brought the deadly game to an end by

finally catching his prey and continuing to lay traps for him even now when Kimathi is in captivity. Seeing the irony, perhaps, Henderson points out that the liberation fighters are the losers in the war to which Kimathi replies: "With the British, we have been losers all the way ... but this is a new era. This is a new war ... This time we shall bleed for our soil, for our freedom, until you let go." (p. 34) Henderson goes back to flattery to try and get Kimathi to co-operate but the latter emphatically replies: "Kimathi wa Wachiuri will never betray the people's liberation struggle. Never!" Thus whenever he experiences any self-doubt, Kimathi rebounds back with even more resolve to stick to his cause.

The monologue that follows (with Kimathi having turned his back on Henderson in a gesture of contempt that could also signify capitulation) the latter for the last time yet again changes strategy by avoiding a frontal attack to press home his apparent advantage. Instead, he lays a more subtle trap by seeking to create a feeling of empathy between him and Kimathi, saying that, as a Scotsman, like Kimathi he too is a victim of British Imperialism and appearing to concede that Kimathi is right in embracing the cause of liberation. Dropping all the vestiges of office, and talking as a friend and fellow Kenyan, he sums up his argument with a convincing eloquence that makes him fail to realise the danger of over-playing his hand:

> Dedan Kimathi: you must plead. Life comes before pride. You once vowed that no white man would ever get you. But now you are in custody. Hanging between life and death. Plead, plead, plead guilty. It's a game, yes. You can name your prize. You'll have your life. Only, we must end this strife. Plead guilty for Life!
> (p. 35)

Kimathi's explosion at being confronted with this sustained insult to his principles marks the end of the ideological debate which suddenly degenerates into a physical assault accompanied by a salvo of verbal expletives that force Henderson to cry out for help. He goes out swearing revenge, his true colours showing, his diplomatic mission to undermine the cause of liberation a total failure. By the end of the episode, though the playwrights have tried to show the two sides of a coin, it is evidently one side that comes up trumps: the side of the liberation struggle, for this is a debate played up to a partisan

audience which would have no trouble choosing sides. The playwrights plainly state this in the Preface when they say:

> In this we believe: that Kenyan Literature - indeed all African Literature - and its writers are on trial. We cannot stand on the fence. We are either on the side of the people or on the side of imperialism. African Literature and African Writers are either fighting with [i.e. on the side of] the people or [they are] aiding imperialism and the class enemies of the people. We believe that good theatre is that which is on the side of the people, that which, without masking mistakes and weaknesses, gives people courage and urges them to higher resolves in their struggle for total liberation. So the challenge was to truly depict the masses (symbolised by Kimathi) in the only historically correct perspective: positively, heroically and as true makers of history.
> (pp. viii-ix)

The masses thus depicted in the play as the true heroes of the revolution are not necessarily the audience for whom the play was originally written or the audience before whom it was initially performed. This political ideology behind the play undermined its chances of getting accepted as a set text in schools[6] while its being written in English for the educated elite and urban audiences with access to theatre severely limited its revolutionary impact.

2.2.2.2 THE AUDIENCE

It is important to bear in mind the kind of audience Ngugi and Micere had in mind as they wrote *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*. The play was not conceived in a vacuum or written for purely academic reasons: it was deliberately designed to make a political statement. In the Kenyan situation, any writer who chooses the legendary Dedan Kimathi for subject would know that he had to make a strong statement to "justify" his or her presumption. Ngugi and Micere have written their play partly as a response or reaction to Kenneth Watene's *Dedan Kimathi* [7] which seeks to reduce the myth surrounding the guerrilla leader by presenting him as a historically correct and artistically rounded character with human weaknesses that counterbalance heroic qualities. Ngugi and Micere's play "epitomises the peasants' values, their political aspirations, their courage and determination to become a dignified people."[8]

Cook and Okenimkpe in their comprehensive study of Ngugi's writings,[9] sum up Watene's play as depicting Dedan Kimathi to be a conventional hero of the revolution: a leader who controlled his men with an iron hand and sometimes made mistakes because it was human to err. Ngugi and Micere are not interested in a hero who can be subjected to such critical examination and analysis. What they favour is a figurehead of heroic stature who can be the mouthpiece for the new voice of liberation that is needed to drum up support for what looks like a cooling zeal in the national quest for a more just society. The two approaches to the same character and the same situation are drastically different, as Cook and Okenimkpe put it:

> Watene is not neutral: he presents Kimathi as a heroic figure. But to Ngugi and Micere Mugo as they developed their crusading socialist nationalism, the equivocal picture that emerges from Watene's play must have seemed to play down a cause which they sought to blazon. Their ambition was to rally the aspirations of Kenyan workers, stifled by the vested interests of the new black elite almost as effectively as by the colonialists, and, it might seem, more irreparably. One starting point in such a campaign was evidently to revive awareness of the freedom fighters' struggles in the forests during the 1950s, aimed at independence with social justice. Kimathi, a key figure, was to be re-created as an inspiration and inciter to fresh positive action. For this, it was not Watene's subtleties and historical balance that were needed. A crusade requires its heroes and its flashpoints. Ngugi and Micere Mugo saw drama as providing these so as to fire a popular audience. To see drama this way is to give it a role of immediate social significance. This is not the only important function of drama. But it is easy to see how impatient activists may feel with those who promote its less militant possibilities seemingly at the expense of its revolutionary drive.[10]

The difference between the two plays boils down to a question of audience: the educated elite that can respond to an objective assessment versus the illiterate masses responding to myth and a more direct and emotional appeal. The general acceptance of Watene's portrayal of a "neutral image" of Kimathi by an audience dominated by students, teachers, civil servants, secretaries, etc, who constituted an urban African theatre-going elite, was instrumental in influencing Ngugi and Micere's portrayal of a more fiery, revolutionary Kimathi as the focus of socio-political consciousness for an intended audience of workers and peasants. The latter felt that the re-creation of a legend

called for unconventional depiction, not the benign realism chosen by Watene. Ngugi and Micere were not satisfied with just another "school-production" type of play about Kimathi that would be seen, admired and in due course relegated to oblivion. What they wanted was an event: a performance that could have a ripple effect on the whole community which would forever change its course, as Kimathi had changed the course of Kenya's history. The idea of a trial offered a political platform for an ideological debate that the real life Kimathi had been denied in his own time.

The simplification of themes and characterisation down to basics somewhat compensates for the playwrights' having to write in English for a non-English speaking audience with no experience of western theatre traditions. It is for this mass audience that the supporting action is designed to speak for itself and it is for them that the crowd scenes and the narrative sequences with Woman, Boy and Girl are included to bridge the gap between them and the actors on stage in the manner of the traditional Gikuyu oral performance. In the Preface to the play the playwrights say:

> We agreed that the most important thing was for us to reconstruct imaginatively our history, envisioning the world of the Mau Mau and Kimathi in terms of the peasants' and workers' struggle before and after constitutional independence. The play is *not* a reproduction of the farcical `trial' at Nyeri [in which the real life Kimathi was found guilty and sentenced to die]. It is rather an imaginative recreation and interpretation of the collective will of the Kenyan peasants and workers in their refusal to break under sixty years of colonial torture and ruthless oppression by the British ruling classes and their [the peasants' and workers'] continued determination to resist exploitation, oppression and new forms of enslavement. (p. viii)

It follows, therefore, that if Kimathi is not meant to be seen as a realistic character and if the masses are indeed the true heroes of the liberation struggle, then characterisation in the play is an important factor in revealing the authors' dramatic techniques. It also changes the focus of attention from an analytical examination of Kimathi as a character to a more general perception of his role as symbolic of as well as dependent on the cause of the liberation struggle.

2.2.3 Characterization

2.2.3.1 THE HERO AND OGRE SYNDROME

In ordinary drama, as in real life, no character is either completely good or completely bad or evil. However, in folk ritual some characters invoke certain aspects of life or human conduct that cannot be interpreted two ways while the old mystery plays, like *Everyman*, present characters who stand for specific moral virtues or vices which are mutually exclusive. Similarly, traditional Gikuyu oral literature abounds with narratives depicting heroes or ogres representing either generally accepted norms or generally repudiated conduct. While *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* is based on the experience of real life characters, "imaginatively recreated", it comes close to depicting the world of fantasy in which the idea of trial is lifted to an ideological plane which parallels the moral level of the folk tale.

Viewed from this perspective, the dramatic development which is polarized to a Kimathi/Henderson axis shows a strong hint of the traditional hero/ogre model, signified in post-colonial terms as a colonised/coloniser conflict between the dominated and the dominating.[11] In their real life combat, opinions differed as to which of them was the hunter and which one was the hunted, depending on which side one sympathised with, for the two were regarded as quite a match for each other. To the Gikuyu audience, however, while Kimathi is an obvious hero figure, Henderson is seen as the ogre - the stranger who comes with cheap trinkets, honeyed words and false promises to trick the "maiden", who in this instance is the "enslaved" community as a whole and the appropriated land of the Gikuyu as only "symbolised" by Kimathi who is appropriately in chains throughout the play. But, just as the authors refrain from trying to present *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* as a historical play, they also stop short of making a messiah of Kimathi (like Matigari is subsequently), though they come close to identifying Henderson as the ogre.

2.2.3.2 STEREOTYPES: PATRIOTS, TRAITORS AND OPPRESSORS

By design, this being an allegorical, symbolic play, though the major characters are well defined, the minor ones are not developed into well-rounded individuals. But these are not merely co-opted "to swell the action" but by the nature of the play, they are an extension of the audience, representing communal participation in the drama.

A look at the range of minor characters confirms the authors' concern for representative roles rather than individually identifiable characterisation. Apart from Kimathi, Henderson, and the Mau Mau Generals and ex-Generals as a group who are historically identifiable figures, the other characters are left nameless.

In terms of action, the men behind Kimathi play only a minor role in the play, and apart from Kimemia who is given the task of condemning the collaborators, none of these characters is distinguished as an individual. Indeed, of the minor characters in the play, only the Woman, Boy and Girl on the side of the people and the sadistic Waitina, the inexperienced Johnnie and the boorish Windhoek, the Settler, on the side of the authorities have anything to be said for them as individual characters. Nonetheless, each of these characters has his or her role to play which may not be distinctive but is functional and necessary in the general development of the drama to its inevitable conclusion.

The white characters in the play (in the Kenyan production mostly played by black actors which both heightens the drama and highlights the ironies) fall into three categories that constitute a clique that looks after each other's interests: the law men or administrators who wield power at the most conspicuous level; the banker who represents the might of the financial and business empire behind him; and the settlers who, though pampered, are jittery about the new political developments which threaten their already shaky hold over land and property they had appropriated over the years.

The first group is headed by Shaw Henderson, the renowned catcher of "the notorious Dedan Kimathi", who is supported by his lackeys: Waitina and his company of predominantly African gun-bearers and collaborators with a sprinkling of white jailers and raw recruits like Johnnie. The anonymous, faceless banker is backed by a multi-racial conglomerate of newly formed "partners in progress" who number politicians and churchmen in their company. The settlers put up a crude show of strength to counter their fear of a sell-out by their more suave fellow empire-builders in what they regard as unpardonable negotiations for a new deal.

2.2.3.3 DEDAN KIMATHI

For the dramatists, as for the intended audience, the portrayal of Dedan Kimathi is complicated by the problems of distinguishing a legend from a historical figure. In spite of the playwrights' attempt in the play to present Dedan Kimathi[12] as a two-sided character, the action is calculated to make him look like some kind of one-dimensional ghost recalled from purgatory to vindicate a cause. But Kimathi goes beyond merely striking an "attitude" in the manner of Kongi in Wole Soyinka's *Kongi's Harvest*.[13] Kimathi is presented as a poet, a politician and an orator - attributes acknowledged by even his opponents. But a great deal that might have "fleshed" up his character is left to the imagination of the partisan audience for whom the play was originally written - an audience that knew the real life Kimathi as a man of the people who was just as much loved, respected and revered by his people as he was feared and hated by his opponents.

From his first appearance in the opening scene of the play in which he is pictured in the dock in chains, Kimathi is portrayed in a clearly symbolic role in which his personal loss of freedom is equated to the enslavement of the Black people through the ages, as immediately illustrated by the miming of the Black Man's History that follows. He stands as an image of oppression: solitary, chained like a slave and heavily guarded even in court where under normal circumstances he would not even be hand-cuffed while in the dock.[14]

But in spite of the chains (or perhaps because of them as they speak for themselves), Kimathi maintains a dignified silence while the formal charges are read out to him. The formality underlines the prisoner's defencelessness and serves as a reminder of the fact that the real life Kimathi had been tried, found guilty and summarily executed without being offered a genuine opportunity to defend himself in a normal court of law - hence the need for this recreation of his story in which the playwrights feel justified in taking the dramatic licence to devise an imaginary platform for his defence.

The Kimathi whom we see in the court scene is not the image of the real historical man but rather the symbol and the voice of resistance: defiant, articulate and totally, irrevocably committed to the cause of liberation. As Kimathi and Henderson spar with each other, the impression given is that they are an even match for each other. Their exchange reveals kindred spirit in spite of the irreconcilable ideological chasm that separates them, which hardly appears to establish a case for criminal prosecution. The debate between them is devoid of real venom and it certainly rises above the level of the irate settler whose hatred is motivated by selfish reasons, which Kimathi rightly refuses to be dragged into as he himself is not fighting a personal vendetta. Henderson is thus able to pay Kimathi what can only be termed a compliment, however ironic the circumstances may be: "I know you are a poet, an orator, a politician." (p. 26) Even the incensed settler, Windhoek, indirectly acknowledges Kimathi's power to influence the Gikuyu populace with his "black mumbo jumbo." (p. 29)

The Kimathi of the trials within the trial is meant to reveal another side to the confident, defiant firebrand of the preceding court scene. This one is a man who is human enough to be susceptible to occasional bouts of self-doubt when left alone to ruminate his fate. He emerges from these psychological trials as a man of great courage and strength of character who is able to withstand any onslaught on his principles and stand firm by what he believes. Tempted by the devil himself (i.e. ogre) in his many guises, Kimathi is able to stand up against worldly temptations and even hold the natural fear of death in check. He emerges triumphant over forces that seek to subvert his

mission and send his soul to perdition - a theme that Ngugi was to develop more fully later in *Devil on the Cross*.

In the flashback that takes the action back in time to an earlier scene in the guerrilla camp in the forest, we see yet another facet of Kimathi's character. At first we get a familiar glimpse of him as the decisive man of action and dispenser of justice who sentences the colonial prisoners of war to execution by firing squad without any compunction. Then we see him faced with the dilemma of whether to judge his own men (including his only living brother) strictly by his own book of conduct or to be humane and risk the danger of appearing to apply double standards. Caught off-guard as a result of his crazed mother's appeal to him on account of his brother, Kimathi succumbs to compassion, which is very soon proved to be an error of judgement. Therefore, even though he emerges as a man who is not afraid of making an unpopular decision or a decision which might make him appear weak, he is also seen as a man who can make mistakes - a concession to Watene whose play portrays this image of Kimathi. When Kimathi learns that his trust, generosity and compassion have been abused, he does not hesitate to condemn the men and order that they be executed on sight. But the audience knows from the earlier court scenes (and from real life) that this was a decision too late and one that was to cost Kimathi dearly.

Finally, the Kimathi we see in the last court scene is still the same angry man as at the end of the forest scene. He is pictured ranting angrily and almost incoherently as the judge swiftly brings the main trial closer to its unavoidable conclusion. But he quickly regains control of himself to make his final statement for freedom and proclaim his legacy to the Kenyan oppressed before being sentenced to death. Although Henderson had promised to have the last laugh at the end of the first trial (p. 36), it is Kimathi who responds to the death sentence with an enigmatic laugh that leaves the audience wondering if he was laughing at the futility of power in general or at the short-sightedness of the white man who could not see that the elimination of one individual could not stave off the inevitability of the African people's ultimate attainment of freedom. Like the phantom he is - an apparition

conjured up from the dead by the dramatists - Kimathi vanishes from the scene as chaos breaks loose when his latest disciples (the Boy and Girl) take action which only appears to be a gesture denying the reality of Kimathi's mortality.[15] The defiance of the people's song that closes the play is testimony to the living spirit of Kimathi which is the spirit of the liberation that would never die.

2.2.3.4 SHAW HENDERSON

Henderson is presented in the play as a kind of modernized ogre of the traditional folk tale. He is the devil-man who is able to assume the garb of friendship and good will to mask his real identity and intentions which are to trap Kimathi by any means possible into making a submission for surrender which would completely undermine his cause and bring an end to the Mau Mau revolt. Henderson's duality owes more to borrowing from the traditional folklore form than to actual historical facts as the real life Shaw Henderson was noted for his singular, fanatical obsession with hunting down Dedan Kimathi through hill and valley, fog and forest until he finally got him, as vividly recounted in his thrilling account of the venture.[16]

Henderson is described at the beginning of the play as multi-faced character who could also play Judge, Prosecutor, etc, in addition to playing his own role. He is a kind of devil in disguise (ogre) who can be seen lurking behind the many obstacles that the hero has to overcome. His first appearance in the play, therefore, is in disguise as Judge, presiding over a racially segregated court of questionable justice. He hides his fangs behind the apparently neutral formalities of the prepared charge sheet which is only a mask for deception and entrapment in this masquerade of justice.

Henderson's duality of character is also evident in the actual court trial in which he unconsciously descends from the role of Judge to that of Prosecutor by carrying out the cross-examination of the prisoner himself. Although he tries hard to give the impression that he is impartial and only concerned with preserving law and order, he either inadvertently or deliberately lets his

mask slip as an act of wilful intimidation when he snarls at Kimathi with charges like: "Maybe your long stay in the Forest has ... I mean ..." (p.25) which ends in either a retraction or a tactful reminder of the change of circumstances. The fist in the glove is not really an accident but a tactical device, a threat that is meant to be seen behind the tone of reasonableness. Nevertheless, Kimathi is able to ruffle the Judge's feathers and elicit a sharp retort that betrays the latter's hidden resentment as revealed when he bursts out and then suddenly retracts his claws (as cited above) and a moment later when he barks a statement like: "I am not talking about the laws of Nyandarua jungle." (p. 26)

Although Henderson as Judge insists on the necessity of law in maintaining order in society, he is easily provoked by Kimathi into revealing that his real concern is with the protection of colonial interests, neatly tucked behind the respectable guise of Civilization, Investment and Christianity. It is only by slip of the tongue that he mentions "property" - i.e. the land that had been appropriated from the Gikuyu and the wealth that had been accumulated over the years through the blood and sweat of the forced labourers. Trapped into making these admissions and unable to respond to Kimathi's challenging view that there can be no law without liberty, Henderson hurriedly adjourns the court and beats a hasty retreat from a trial that had taken an unexpected turn to an ideological high ground that puts him on a level with his opponent.

Henderson is a master strategist who is shown as having engineered Kimathi's trial, not with the aim of proving him guilty (that goes without saying), but with the more grand intention of forcing or inducing him to make a declaration of voluntary surrender, calculated to have the effect of making his generals give up the fight and come out of the forest. That would be the end of the Mau Mau revolt and (as understood) of Kimathi who would then be hanged for the atrocities he had committed in challenging his colonial masters. The frontal attack in open court having failed to elicit the required result, Henderson then resorts to the more covert tactics of trying to win over his opponent by approaching him in the privacy and isolation of his prison cell. The idea is to try and get by trickery what could not be obtained through an apparently rational appeal coupled with hardly veiled intimidation. In this new guise,

though he appears to come as himself, Henderson wears the unlikely mask of the well-meaning "friend" whose primary concern is to persuade Kimathi to save himself. Behind this false facade is the real relentless intention to entrap the wily Kimathi by any means.

The two delegations that come to woo Kimathi into surrendering in the other trials-within-trial should be viewed as motivated by Henderson who will resort to any means to try and break his prime enemy's resolve. State, Business and Church are shown to be mutual partners working towards a common end and Henderson does not deny this when Kimathi throws it at him on their next encounter. (p. 54) When all these strategies fail, Henderson appears in the guise of an interrogator who bursts into the cell with a mock request, which is also an obvious threat: "I want to pay my last respects to Prime Minister Sir Dedan Kimathi," he says, implying that Kimathi is as good as dead already. There is no longer any need for pretence and play-acting; the interrogation that follows is both direct and brutal. Henderson the interrogator is not beyond resorting to physical abuse and lashing out at the "stinking Mau Mau terrorist" but he has no stomach for the real torture which has to be delegated to the sadistic Waitina and applied out of sight. This is clearly not Henderson's style and we can assume that the brutality he displays is only another shock tactic he tries in his attempt to coerce Kimathi into submission.

In the final encounter Henderson is once again the Judge in "the court of jesters" as Kimathi calls it. This time for a moment he appears to succeed in provoking Kimathi by reminding him of the imminent threat of death and Kimathi has to battle with himself to suppress the sense of doubt that creeps on him. Henderson goes through the motions of trying and sentencing his sworn enemy in total oblivion of the turmoil that is set in motion by Kimathi's ritualistic leave-taking. The significance of this is thus shown to be completely beyond the comprehension of the colonial forces of oppression which could not see that the mantle of struggle for freedom was being passed on from Kimathi to the people. Thus in the end Henderson is seen as an embodiment of a blind system which does not even realize that it is the colonial administration (and not Kimathi) that has been tried, found guilty and sentenced to be ousted by

the people's power. Henderson is the head of the ogre that the people must ultimately cut off in order to try and save the hero who has been swallowed into its insatiable belly.

2.2.3.5 WOMAN, BOY and GIRL

These three minor characters whose action nonetheless spreads all through the play are significantly unnamed because their roles are symbolic rather than individualized. They stand for the masses and are singled out in the play to go through the trauma of unjust trial with Kimathi on behalf of the people. Not only do they give verbal expression to the silent masses whose voice cannot otherwise be heard, but they are also put in a position to take ritualistic action - however futile that may be - and thus give vent to the people's suppressed frustrations.

Of the three characters, the Woman is clearly the central figure who gives real meaning and a sense of purpose and direction to the other two. She is the archetypal figure of folklore who is depicted as an almost ageless woman who commands both the wisdom of age and experience and the beauty and vigour of youth. She is the original prototype on whom the heroines of Ngugi's subsequent works are modelled. In this play she is also the character who comes closest to being a narrating persona who acts as a link between the audience and what is happening on the stage. She stands for all peasants and workers (regardless of gender) and has all the qualities of leadership to qualify for one of Kimathi's generals. It is significant that in the end she voluntarily chooses to make a gesture of protest as if to ensure that she goes down with Kimathi.

That the Woman has genuine experience to back her claim to prominence is confirmed by no other than Kimathi himself in the guerilla camp flashback in which he lauds her brave actions in the most glowing terms. (p. 72 -73) She is the affirmation of the vital role that the Gikuyu women had played in the liberation struggle. When she speaks in favour of tough disciplinary measures being taken against the traitors irrespective of the familial links that bound

them to the forest fighters who had themselves left their families behind to serve the cause, it is not without an awareness of the personal dilemma that Kimathi is faced with, for it was she who had brought to Kimathi the letter from his crazed mother. She is not afraid of cautioning Kimathi against making a decision that could undermine the revolution but, like the other generals, she is also considerate enough to grant him complete freedom to decide one way or the other.

It is significant to note that, for Kimathi's final court trial and sentencing, the Woman comes to court without the disguise she has used until then to mask her true identity. She is also dressed like a lady[17] who should have been treated like one. She makes sure that she is easily identifiable as a final challenge and the collaborators recognize her at once. Her entry is calculated to disrupt the formal proceedings and to draw attention to her identification with Kimathi which is carried out to the point when she is finally arrested and escorted out to be chained like Kimathi. She seals her commitment to the struggle with the liberation song that she had introduced earlier in the play which again floods the courtroom. Like Kimathi's, her job is done and the rest remains to others who will come after them to carry on from there. Significantly, when the Boy and Girl enter the courtroom soon after the Woman has been taken out, they squeeze into the space she had just vacated. The Woman's conspicuous entry and exit having completely diverted attention from anything else, no one notices the Boy and Girl (her successors) until the moment after Kimathi's sentencing when they rise up together and fire the shot that closes the action. The symbolic significance of this act is the invocation of the youth to take over the struggle one day and fire the last shot for Kimathi, for justice and for freedom.

2.2.3.6 WAITINA, JOHNNIE and WINDHOEK

These three hardly constitute a group comparable to the Woman, Boy and Girl and the only thing they have in common, apart from the colour of their skin, is their commitment to the defence of realm and empire. They are not

representative of the white community in Africa though they each stand for a certain type of white man associated with colonial rule.

Waitina, unlike Henderson - the man of law with the turn of tongue to match Kimathi's rhetoric - is a career soldier who has been side-lined by accident into police work which he brutally carries out like an automaton. He has no idea how to handle civilians and during the operation to round up Mau Mau suspects he tries to make the villagers march like soldiers. His atrocious Kiswahili and this futile effort at enforcing order and discipline where it is not needed invite laughter at his expense and at the expense of the system that employs him. All he knows about maintaining law and order is the action it involves. He delights in dishing out corporal punishment which he readily offers to carry out for its own sake. When set loose on Kimathi, like a hound, his interrogation shows no shred of diplomacy and it is only an excuse to inflict more punishment.

Johnnie is a young soldier without the cruel streak of Waitina. In the operation during which he runs into the Woman, he is almost as frightened by the commotion as she is. He is not beyond recognizing a pretty woman when he sees one and he is brazen enough to chat her up while he helps himself to her bananas. He cuts a funny figure when he gets scared of her *kiondo* and orders her to put it down and step back but is naive enough to be teased into reassurance by the more experienced Woman. Instead of interrogating her, as his seniors would have done, it is he who begins to tell her stories. When he gets to the bread in which the gun is hidden and threatens to have a bite at it, she gets down on her knees and comes very close to tackling him. She begs him not to eat the bread and again he permits himself to be flattered into failing to see how extreme her reaction is. Her sexual appeal and apparent womanly weakness fool him in one sense but he also leers at her lasciviously and only abandons his amorous intent when he is disturbed by the imminent arrival of others which makes him dash off with a big knowing wink. One is left wondering if, indeed, he would have been her match had he tried anything, for the Woman is actually less frightened of him than she is of being caught with a gun.

The Settler[18] (Windhoek) is presented as an outright racist, a crude farmer with a deep grudge against the Mau Mau in general for having poisoned the "simple minds" of *his* "boys" and destroyed his wife, his daughter, his property. He is a man who had carved his own personal empire from the land of the people and their sweat. They had ultimately turned on him and brought him tumbling down from his self-made pedestal. In his eyes, Kimathi is the embodiment of this treachery for which he cannot see any justification. For him the idea of a legal trial for Kimathi is like a slap in the face and he is prepared to take it out on anyone - including the court clerk on whom he pounces for calling for silence in court which he takes for a racial slight on the white. To add insult to injury, the Judge when he comes in not only bandies words with Kimathi but prolongs the agony by adjourning the mockery of justice to another day. Windhoek can hardly control his anger and grapples with the white officers in a futile attempt to take the law in his own hands and mete out justice on Kimathi. By losing self-control and resorting to racial abuse, the Settler forfeits whatever sympathy he might have roused with his impassioned plea.

2.2.4 Stylistic Adaptations

For a play that purports to be of the people, for the people, *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* is in many ways remarkably unlike the plays that follow it. Apart from the fact that it is the only one of the three that is written in English by two of the most ardent proponents of a Gikuyu literature written in the Gikuyu language, the play uses hardly any of the oral narrative devices discussed in Part One above. There are hardly any "authentic" proverbs in the play and the dance-songs are limited to only a few, though these have the desired effect of involving the audience. We also get a glimpse of the traditional story-teller in the role of Woman. It is almost as though Ngugi's collaboration with Micere restrained his free adaptation of dramatic devices from the oral traditions, yet there could be no reason for this. On the contrary, the collaboration should have brought a profusion of such

adaptations. One is forced to conclude that Ngugi began to research these oral elements more earnestly some time in 1977[19] between the writing of *Petals of Blood* and *Ngaahika Ndeenda*. For the writing of *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*, it has to be assumed that Ngugi and his co-author are quite satisfied with doing the opposite of what he settles for in the plays that follow: they adopt conventional theatre traditions to suit their intention of reaching a wider, traditionally non-theatre going audience of peasants and workers. In the process they also work at winning the alienated elite back to the cause of revolution by re-igniting an awareness of the "unfinished business" of the struggle to establish a truly liberated nation, not one that has only been "given" nominal "constitutional" independence.

2.2.4.1 DRAMATIC TECHNIQUES

Ngugi and Micere go to great pains to specify stage directions meant to ensure that the presentation of the play produced the expected results. Flashbacks and blackouts are used at certain key points to maximise dramatic effect as are cinematic devices like the voice-over of the Woman which prompts the Boy to keep to his commitment, which acts like his conscience. Realism is pushed into the background, as when Waitina and one of his over-zealous subordinates take Kimathi out of sight but not out of hearing to be tortured. The "eclectic dramatic tools" used make the play build rapidly towards "the freedom of the collective spirit of the people", culminating in a renewed call for action.[20]

The playwrights' helpful hints start with the list of characters where they suggest the doubling of certain roles like that of Henderson. In the case of the lesser characters, this makes practical sense for a play with close to thirty speaking parts, to say nothing of the crowds of peasants, singers, dancers, guards and guerrilla fighters. Only Kimemia among the listed Mau Mau Generals is given a speaking part and the rest are only required for the Camp scene. The Generals and the guerrilla fighters are all faceless representatives rather than distinguishable individuals and therefore they can

and should be deployed elsewhere in the course of the performance. The same goes for the African soldiers, guards, warder and the collaborators who all fall short of being individual characters and would be drawn from a common pool in casting the play. This playing down of strict differentiation would actually help emphasize the fact that these are all "one people" who have only been divided by foreigners who have set them against each other.

In the case of Henderson, the multiplicity of the roles he plays are part of his character: he is a man who hides his true identity behind different masks and disguises at different times for professional reasons. Though he might seem to be different from Kimathi, it is only because the latter is out of his natural environment where he is reputed to be the master of disguise himself.

For the purposes of this play, it is essential that Kimathi should stand out as distinguished, immovable and larger than life right from the brief opening scene in which the formal charges that are read out to him are less important than the blatant racism that manifests itself in the courtroom, making any expectation of justice questionable. A good producer would make capital of this while a bad one would either omit it or rush through it as a mere formality.

The playwrights also suggest a simple stage set that can easily be changed from street, to courtroom, to prison cell without too much disruption of the flow of the action. The only major departure from this is the guerrilla camp scene set in Nyandarua forest but even this is not meant to differ substantially from the other scenes in the play as the episode is designed to be an extension of the Woman's recollections from the vantage point of the present. In stage production, it could be given a dream-like quality to distance it from the present. The Woman would be presented looking on as a spectator before disappearing to play her own role. This unusual quality to be in two places at once is anticipated earlier on when her voice haunts the Boy even when she is not physically there to assert her authority over him and influence his actions.

Alternatively, the guerrilla camp inset could be handled as in the Nairobi production where it had the effect of "liberating" the audience by taking them away from the confines of the colonial court (i.e. an acute awareness of the National Theatre environment) to the freedom of the forest where they would get fully involved with a familiar Kimathi: operating in his true environment, controlling the power of life and death, and telling it as it should be. This has the added advantage of preparing the audience for the grand finale in which the death sentence pronounced on Kimathi can be ignored (he himself laughs it off) as the audience in the auditorium joins the audience on the stage in singing the revolution song of ultimate victory and inevitable liberation - an additional testimony to the prevalent myth among the Gikuyu that "Kimathi will never die." (p. vii)

2.2.4.2 THE CHOICE OF LANGUAGE

It is a wonder that *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* was written in English, and it is even more surprising that it has never been translated into the Gikuyu language. The reason why it was written in English is that at this stage - though he was quite convinced that he should be writing in his own language - Ngugi was not yet very confident of his ability to communicate fully in his native tongue. This is where Micere Mugo might have made another kind of contribution had she herself been more confident about mastering the Gikuyu language for creative expression. The fact that the play was not entirely conceived for a local audience but was also intended to travel to Lagos for FESTAC '77 must have tipped the balance in favour of writing in English. Whatever the case, it is harder to understand why after that the playwrights never translated the play into Gikuyu for the local audience. The answer to this may simply be that the play had made the statement they wanted and reached the audience it was aimed at, for it had also been subsequently published in Swahili for the benefit of the majority who didn't know English. To repeat it (especially in view of the likelihood of the production in Gikuyu being misunderstood for a tribal political campaign of sorts) was to tempt fate and Ngugi appears to have preferred to get on with other plans that he

had up his sleeve rather than become embroiled in what would not necessarily achieve any more than he already had.[21]

The language in Ngugi's writing has always been simple in syntax and diction. In *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*, where the playwrights were acutely aware of the need to get through to a local audience, the majority of whom spoke little if any English, simplicity of expression was a paramount consideration.

Basically, this was a play the local audience was expected to follow even if they didn't understand most of the words that were said on the stage. In spite of the temptation to make the most of the eloquence of Kimathi, his rhetoric is not allowed to come in the way of simple direct communication. It is the message and the manner in which it is delivered that make the play effective rather than the beauty of the language which is purely functional and is often stripped down to bare necessity even in the mouth of Kimathi.

The local audience was compensated in a different way for this apparent stringency of language. The subtleties of diction and intonation are often brought into play when Swahili words are used to convey double meanings. One of the most memorable of these cases is when Johnnie, the white soldier, asks the Woman for her *kipande* (passbook) and insists that she should address him as *afande* (sir). The Woman says the right words but intones it in such a way that her answer is comically dismissive rather than respectful. The "broken" Swahili which the soldier uses in this scene is only meant to highlight his naivete. But the same language put on the brutal lips of the sadistic Waitina in the first movement (pp. 6-8) has got the effect of marking him from the beginning as an enemy of the people who thinks nothing of breaking them body and spirit the way he breaks their language.

In terms of dramatic presentation, however, the most effective use of the local languages as a unifying factor is in the revolutionary songs and chants that set the tone of the play from the beginning to the end. Swahili - which is the national language of Kenya and is a unifying influence because it is fundamentally non-ethnic - is the language used in the well known liberation

song that opens the play after the mocked-up formal charge. It is also the language of the revolutionary chant that follows the mimed flashback of the Black people's history. These, together with the Woman's Gikuyu liberation song which comes up twice at critical moments (p. 14 and p. 81), create the desired rapport with the audience which is carried over to the closing "People's Song and Dance" at the end of the play which in production in Kenya had the effect of spilling over to the community outside with the audience enthusiastically joining in. It has the effect of holding everything else in between in a sort of state of parenthesis - which is exactly what the play itself is in the context of the liberation movement and the community's commitment to it which was always voiced in these songs when any verbal form of expression (regardless of language anyway) was prohibited. To the Kenyan audience, therefore, there could be no greater testament than this to the play's claim to being of the people, for the people.

ENDNOTES:

1. Such operations were commonly used as a psychological strategy to discourage the peasants from either sheltering or aiding the Mau Mau with food and weapons. Quite often whole communities were rounded up and isolated in detention camps just in order to keep them out of reach.

2. There were too many ordinary peasant women who bravely served the Mau Mau movement for any one of them to be singled out to fill this important role that ranks next only to Kimathi's. The more famous ones of these women (who get individual commendation elsewhere in Mau Mau lore) are all represented in this one character who traverses both civilian and military ranks, in friendly and hostile camps.

3. Kimathi's trials and momentary self-doubts can be compared to the last trials of Christ before being betrayed, tried, sentenced and crucified on spurious charges.

4. The original "working" title for *A Grain of Wheat* which Ngugi deferred and has yet to use again.

5. Chesaina, C.C., "Who is on Trial in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*?" *Busara Vol 8 No. 2* (1976).

6. The present researcher, working for the publishers, had arguments over this with Ngugi in the early stages of publication of the play in which the author prevailed.

7. Watene, Kenneth, 1974, *Dedan Kimathi*, (East African Publishing House, Nairobi).

8. Dusaidi, C.B., 1981, *East African Drama: a Critical Study of the Plays of Elvania Zirimu, John Ruganda, Francis Imbuga and Ngugi wa Thiong'o* (M.A. thesis, University of New Brunswick), pp. 115-148.

9. Cook, D. and Okenimkpe, M., 1983, *Ngugi wa Thiong'o: An Exploration of His Writings*, (Heinemann, London), p. 159-160.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 160.

11. Ashcroft, *et al*, 1989, *The Empire Writes Back*, pp. 29-33.

12. Note that although Kimathi is called by his more famous name in the title of the play, on the List of Characters he is given his full family name, Kimathi wa Wachiuri, and the Christian name Dedan is dropped in favour of African tradition, just as the two authors had done in their own

individual cases. In the play, Henderson in a facile gesture to accuracy (either in ignorance of the subtleties involved or as an intentional rejection of the ideology) merges the two names and implied characters into one by insisting on the literary translation: Dedan Kimathi son of Wachiuri.

13. Soyinka, Wole, 1967, *Kongi's Harvest*, (Oxford University Press, London).

14. According to British law, a prisoner is presumed innocent until proved guilty. For this reason, he is only hand-cuffed while on the way from custody but not while in the dock. Being actually chained is an extreme measure used here to emphasize the total denial of human rights to Kimathi. As a matter of fact, Kimathi is usually pictured hand-cuffed while in captivity.

15. See Introduction, *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*, p. vii, for the hostile reaction of the people of Kimathi's village to the intimation that he is dead.

16. Henderson, Shaw: *The Hunt for Dedan Kimathi*, (published in the 1950s and read as a thriller by those who were uninvolved in the Kenyan struggle for liberation, now out of print and unmarkatable in Kenya since independence because of the strong sentiments of nationalism that are roused by the author's colonial bias).

17. She is deliberately contrasted to the fighting Gikuyu women whose ferociousness had made them look like men. Here is one who looked every inch a lady yet was just as tough and daring as any general.

18. In Kenya settlers were the very antithesis of the Mau Mau who were largely drawn from the displaced squatters forced to work on the land that had been expropriated from them.

19. *Decolonising the Mind*, p. 57.

20. Nwankwo, C, "Sifting the Grain from the Husk: An Overview of Ngugi's Writing" in *The Literary Half-Yearly Vol 25 No. 1* (1984): p. 7.

21. The next five years were destined to be the most critical in Ngugi's life. During that period he travelled and widened his scope; he experienced detention at home and he matured as a writer - extending his literary canon with the addition of the works in this study as well as several other works of non-fiction. [See Bibliography].

2.3 THE TRANSITION NOVEL: *PETALS OF BLOOD*

2.3.1 Linear Plot versus Cyclic Narrative

Petals of Blood is divided into four parts which are each headed by a segment of a line taken from W.B. Yeats's poem, "The Second Coming" which is augumented with poetic extracts from various other sources: Walt Whitman, William Blake, Amilcar Cabral and the Bible. These, together with the epigram to the whole novel, which is taken from Derek Walcott's *The Swamp* (from which the title, *Petals of Blood* comes), build up the image of a symbolic journey, thus laying down the foundation for Ngugi's own traumatic "homecoming", projected in the collective, universal quest for justice as an ideal, and for retribution as an inevitability underlined by the steady advance of "the second coming" which determines the novel's structure:

Part One : Walking ...
Part Two : *Toward Bethlehem* ...
Part Three : *To be Born* ...
Part Four : *Again ... la luta continua!*

These divisions form the linear framework within which the plot and narrative are structured. The splitting of the line from Yeats's "The Second Coming" demonstrates the relentless forward movement of the plot. This is counterpoised by a cyclic narrative structure in which multiple narrators are caught up in a quest that builds up towards the beginning of a new cycle of events.

The basic plot consists of four stages corresponding with the four divisions of the novel:

(1) **Part One: Walking** - the arrival in the forgotten village of Ilmorog of the four principal characters from outside over a leisurely period of time in an apparently purposeless manner which hides the hand of fate that brings them together for a purpose;

(2) **Part Two: Toward Bethlehem** - the epic journey or pilgrimage to the city in quest of salvation from the ravaging drought, which brings limited material recompense and promises to lay the village open to the ravages of a worse spiritual drought;

(3) **Part Three: To be Born** - the period of renewal and harvest in Ilmorog, following the coming of the long-awaited rains and the beginning of new-found love, both of which are threatened by the intrusion of the corrupt outside world, epitomised by the city, and the cancerous blight within the community itself, exemplified by Munira's obsessive jealousy;

(4) **Part Four: Again ... la Luta Continua!** - the build-up towards the cleansing fire that opens the way to a new beginning, underscored by the rise of the workers' union under the tutelage of Karega who, ironically, is himself festering in custody (like Kimathi in the preceding play) and is quite uncertain of his own liberty, thus symbolising the plight of the community as a whole.

The narrative is also cyclic in that it begins with an event from the end, like a detective novel, and works its way forward towards an exposition in a quest for justice which parallels that of the principal characters. This is achieved by maintaining three parallel time scales throughout the novel:

(a) the present: as recorded in Munira's police statement, or as observed by the other principal characters after the big fire, or as reported by the anonymous narrating persona or as revealed by the hidden omnipresent, omniscient author;

(b) the immediate past - which comprises the bulk of the narrative: partly as recalled by Munira from twelve years before the fire, and partly as revealed by the narrating persona or the author;

(c) the distant past, going as far back as the mythical Ndemi who (like Gikuyu and Mumbi) founded Ilmorog, but also going back as recently as the lives of the principal characters before they arrived in Ilmorog, narrated as set-piece recollections within the main flow of the story as in (b) above.

These three stages are all inter-linked with each other, not just by a cause and effect linear progression but by a recurrent pattern of coincidences in each story that relentlessly leads them towards an inescapable final outcome.

As in any good thriller, Ngugi succeeds in introducing the crime, the prime suspects and the detective agency in the first few pages of the novel and then sustaining the suspense as to "who-done-it" for well over three hundred pages. And in the end there is no conventional tying up of all the loose ends: instead, Ngugi leaves each of his principal characters on the threshold of "the new world" they have been striving for, each in their own way: Wanja has survived her final baptism by fire, has been re-united with her mother and is expecting the child she had always longed to mother again; Abdulla, having been expiated of his guilt of non-action, is free to make a new beginning, possibly with Wanja who (though yet unknown to him) it would appear has given him the chance to be reborn through the child she is expecting; Munira, the uninvolved spectator, the stranger at the gate, has knocked and has been admitted to his second birth in Christ as his personal saviour, by his own confession thus virtually opting out of this world; and Karega, though victimized like Kimathi,[1] J.M. the lawyer[2] and many others,[3] can look forward to his "tomorrow" of struggle for the common good of the oppressed and down-trodden through the solidarity of workers who had heard his message.

Thus, as in the ending of *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* before it, *Petals of Blood* closes on an optimistic note that promises continuity, not merely in a vague ideological sense but as carefully catalogued in real human terms.

2.3.2 Narrative Technique: Blending the Old and New

It is crucial to determine from the outset whether or not Ngugi primarily had the Gikuyu audience in mind or not when writing *Petals of Blood*. The fact that it is written in English, with no attempt to simplify either the concepts or level of language, would appear to refute any claim that the novel was ever intended for a popular readership by a partisan Gikuyu audience. Yet this was the audience the author had been painfully aware of wanting to reach for almost a whole decade since his last novel:

> After I had written *A Grain of Wheat* I underwent a crisis. I knew whom I was writing about but whom was I writing for? The peasants whose struggles fed the novel would never read it.[4]

But his reading of western literature, particularly Conrad and Lawrence,[5] and his experience as a writer still influenced how and what he wrote. Of the two influences, Lawrence may have initially had the greater impact on the younger Ngugi but it is Conrad whose influence lasted longer and resulted in the stylistic accomplishment of *A Grain of Wheat* which Ngugi finds himself looking back to as he contemplates his new novel. In this instance, though Ngugi admits disagreeing with Conrad at an ideological level, the allure of the Conradian style wins over his concern for the target audience:

> I found Conrad's vision limited. His ambivalence towards imperialism - and and it was imperialism that supplied him with the setting and subject matter of his novels - could never let him go beyond the balancing acts of liberal humanism. **But the shifting points of view in time and space; the multiplicity of narrative voices; the narrative-within-a-narration; the delayed information that helps the revision of a previous judgement so that only at the end with the full assemblage of evidence, information and points of view, can the reader make full judgement - these techniques had impressed me.**[6]

These techniques are evident in the conventional western nature of the basic structure of *Petals of Blood* as outlined in section 2.3.1 above. It is these that externally give the novel its universal vision. This is reinforced by the concept of the second coming from Yeats's poem and the epigrams to the four divisions which all serve to place it on a timeless scale and on a canvas larger than Kenya, Africa and the Black diaspora. The idea of the second

coming, however, is not confined to Christianity, for it is discernible in the Gikuyu liberation mystique as recurrently rendered in Ngugi's earlier novels and later explored more fully in *Matigari*.

The universality of outlook - also implying a targeted universal audience - is similarly enhanced by the suspense of the modern detective story which the author uses to create a complex time structure in the novel. There is no customary opening to a fixed formula (as in the later *Devil on the Cross*) that immediately identifies the beginning of the traditional narrative. It is not hard to come to the conclusion that the intended audience here (as in the earlier works which, though popular, are not populist) is not yet the indigenous Gikuyu one that the author is targetting but still an outside one to whom the rationale of the collective actions of the Gikuyu must be explained in universal terms. Yet there is a very strong traditional element that runs through the novel in which devices of the Gikuyu oral narrative, like proverbs, riddles, poetry and songs, are frequently deployed to underscore its vision of an African peasantry held in the throes of oppression and exploitation. These roots of tradition on which the narrative is founded lie deeper than the surface of universality that Ngugi gives his novel which can certainly be said to be of the people though it may not quite be for the people as the subsequent novels unequivocally are.

However, it is the unconventional narrative techniques adopted by Ngugi that reveal his ultimate concern with trying to reach a wider audience. These centre on the multiplicity of voices that the author uses to narrate the story. Apart from the different main characters who each narrate their personal stories in turns - as if around an evening fire like in traditional oral story-telling - the overall narration is ostensibly attributed to Munira whose recollections from police detention give the story its basic framework.

But behind Munira there is an anonymous narrating persona who comments from the sidelines, and behind the anonymous narrator there is the author's voice distinguished by its didactic interpretative intrusions into the narrative to make important comments. This direct intervention is nowhere more evident

than on the symbolic journey to the city (p. 120ff) which is narrated by a conspicuous authorial voice in the form of a lengthy pseudo-historical account which seeks to inform the outsider and is clearly not for a native audience which would be familiar with the details given. But such repetition of familiar myths is common in Gikuyu oral narratives as Vansina[7] points out, for it is the technique of narration that matters more than the content of the narrative which may itself be commonplace. The idyllic picture painted here, the departure into the realm of mythology and the sudden shift in tone to the simplified viewpoints of an ordinary villager recounting a tale in which legend turns into history, all bear the hallmarks of a versatile story-teller with an eye and an ear for a popular audience.

That Ngugi was fully aware of the wealth of Gikuyu oral narrative forms when writing *Petals of Blood* is quite evident throughout the novel and the author's sensitivity to the Gikuyu culture constantly comes through. He painstakingly explains the age-set system, particularly after World War II, to enhance an understanding of the naming that might otherwise cause problems for the younger generations among the Gikuyu (p. 27). Munira's shock on overhearing the shameless corruption of the Gikuyu circumcision song at the party in Chui's house (p. 162/3) is underscored by the lawyer who calls it an abuse of the Gikuyu culture by the elite - a view the author evidently agrees with.

In a reference that later illuminates both *Ngaahika Ndeenda* and *Maitu Njugira*, as the Ilmorog delegation arrived in the city, "the women ululated the Five Ngemi usually sung for a male child and a returning victorious hero" (p. 181). Another reference, which anticipates *Matigari*, is when Wanja says: "perhaps we all carry maimed souls and we are all looking for a cure" (p. 73). Players of Gichandi, Litungu and Nyatiti - the traditional prophets and spokesmen in the Gikuyu community - are talked of in the narrative (p. 67/8) as are the various Gikuyu dance forms: Gitiro, Muthu, Ndumo, Mumburo, Muchungucu and Mwomboko. There are constant references to elements of Gikuyu myths and legends which all form part of the general context of the larger narrative: Gumbas (p.45); the roll of thunder and flash of lightning (p.68); the humped longhorns (p. 74); Mugo wa Kibiro (p. 89); the hill of the uncircumcised boys (p. 126); the

rivalry of sun and moon (p. 134/5); the antelopes that were once women's goats (p. 139); how rain, wind and sun once went wooing earth, sister of moon (p. 196); two-mouthed ogres (p. 210); Ndamathia the iron monster spitting fire and steam (p. 213); and the mysterious islands on the lake which boys gave erotic connotations (p. 218).

Besides these aspects of oral tradition, there is a wealth of Gikuyu proverbs and riddles as well as songs for different occasions which are all brought into the narrative to enliven the style and add depth to the author's message for his readers and the community at large. There is frequent reference to the Gikuyu custom of showering saliva as a blessing - especially by the old woman, Nyakinyua. The ancient rite of brewing the magical theng'eta is recreated and glorified, later becoming one of the most vivid illustrations of the exploitation and degradation of African traditions by the commercialism of the capitalist encroachment. This is all indicative of the author's concern with authenticating his narrative style and bringing his writing closer to home.

Ngugi's use of language and imagery to enhance his narrative provides further proof of his serious intention to find the idiom of his people and integrate it into his writing as a step towards writing not just about them but for them - ultimately in their own language. There are numerous examples that show how he tries to adapt to their level. At the beginning of the story, for example, Munira's bicycle is described as a metal horse - a description that fits the credible perception of an Ilmorog dweller who has only had limited contact with the outside world. For these people, living in the remote backwaters untouched by "civilisation", the city and all that is associated with it (like Wanja's possessions, p. 31) is another world, an evil world from which they initially feel secure though it has already claimed their sons and daughters. The old men of Ilmorog emphasize Munira's being an outsider by talking of the seasons in terminology that he does not understand.

At another level, Ngugi anticipates what he was to do in the Gikuyu language later[8] by introducing discussion of complex subjects such as Conservation at the level of the ordinary people of Ilmorog (p. 82). One notes that the

first occurrence of an expression which is to recur in the subsequent works as a rallying cry of unity first makes its appearance in *Petals of Blood*: "A bean fell to the ground and we split it amongst ourselves." (p.136) One also notes that among the Gikuyu a measure of literacy is attained by many who teach themselves how to read from the Bible - a factor which also accounts for the predominance of Christian doctrines in their perceptions of life as acknowledged in Ngugi's writing about them. Just as *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* used Swahili as a nationally unifying language, in *Petals of Blood* too Swahili words frequently occur and furthermore it is the language which the girl Akiinyi[8] is said to use when she talks to Karega, bringing a message of hope for the future from his fellow workers whose victory would usher in the dawn of a new day.

But the narrative style in *Petals of Blood* at times appears to falter and falls to the level of reportage as he resorts to extensive prose passages of information unrelieved by dialogue, thus failing to rise to the potential for dramatic presentation found in the performance-oriented oral narrative that the author is striving to emulate. A good example of this is the court scene (p. 184) in which the trial of Munira, Karega and Abdulla for disturbing the peace in the city is only summarily reported with details which suggest it could have been presented in more dramatic form for the audience's full appreciation of the moral victory illustrated therein.

The lawyer's monologue on his sojourn in America earlier on (pp. 162-166), which seems to ramble endlessly without any dialogue to enliven it is another example of an apparent lapse in narrative technique that fails to take cognisance of the audience. However, one should note that at this stage Ngugi is dealing with written prose which only has to be convincing on paper compared to the traditional narrator who deals with material that has been handed down over generations and whose presentation has been refined in the process. Often too, the oral narrator is at liberty to take a break and express a direct opinion or sum up what might be of secondary importance to the tale in hand and should not unduly hold up the narrative. Or it might

just be a stylistic device to create variety in a lengthy tale that might otherwise become monotonous.

In Ngugi's novel there are times when such reportage can itself be an indirect indicator of the narrator's evaluation of the incident or character so reported on. Such is the case with Nderi's visit to Ilmorog which starts as a great disappointment to the people who had been deceived into working hard to prepare for what they believed as going to be a visit by the minister. Instead, it is Nderi and his henchmen - who had previously been chased out of Ilmorog for trying to make a collection from the impoverished villagers - who arrive and the subject he chooses to start with is the same fund collection which mocks the Ilmorogians' plight:

> He started by arguing that an MP could only be judged by how far he had brought and could bring development to an area. He, Nderi, had already done that by having a road pass through Ilmorog. Now people would not, as had been known to happen in the past, have to walk for miles through dry and dangerous plains on donkey-carts: there were now matatus and buses and lorries... (p. 267)

The use of indirect speech is so appropriate in deflating these lies and half-truths with which Nderi tries to bluff the hapless villagers and the hardly masked threats with which he tries to intimidate them into giving him their undivided loyalties. His basic dishonesty and vindictiveness are similarly exposed further on in the same passage which undercuts his role and trivialises what he has to say, thus marginalising him by down-playing his role in Ilmorog. This could not be too subtle for the peasants of Ilmorog (or the Gikuyu masses), who after all can see through the likes of Nderi wa Riera even when he tries to capitalise on understatements like: "Our culture, our African culture and spiritual values, should form the foundation for this nation" (p. 182). Surely, they need no member of parliament to tell them that their culture is the foundation of the nation - or is he merely paying lip service to this idea while conveying to them the fact that their nation now has another foundation, another culture with different values that determine the way the new leadership acts?

Lisa Curtis raises the question whether the novel form "with its conventional tendency to understatement is the appropriate form to embody dogma."[10] She

notes the greater effectiveness of the narrative style in Ngugi's earlier novel, *A Grain of Wheat*, in which the author - by "placing the concerns of individuals at the centre of focus... suceeds in humanising his political experience." In contrast, Curtis notes that in *Petals of Blood* Ngugi often reverses this tendency by making "the broadly political" take precedence over the personal and by overstating "the immediate relevance of the political disposition."[11] But although it is difficult to dispute Curtis's view that the structure of *Petals of Blood* "forcefully expresses patterns of historical inexorability against which its revolutionary sentiments are pitted," this need not be seen as implying a "strained separation of form and material intentions in the novel."[12] As Ngugi's first step towards finding an alternative to the western form of novel, *Petals of Blood* is a tentative experiment in which the burden of discord is carried by the voice of the author as only another narrator among the several narrators whose individual parallel stories make up the narrative. In this novel the author/narrator is still viewed as the western-type omniscient and omnipresent voice compared to the narrator in Gikuyu oral narrative who is basically a performer whose manipulation of the material at hand does not rule out a deliberate use of understatement or hyperbole to provoke audience response. Curtis admits that the "gap between ideology and its realization is occasionally bridged by an omniscient voice which narrates events beyond the reach of any of the individual characters."[13] That, however, is no excuse for the occasional lapses and ambiguities that the author lets slip into the narrative which appear to levy criticism where, surely, it is not meant as in the following passage:

> For a whole month after the group's triumphant return *they* came: church leaders who conducted prayers for rain and promised a church for the area; government officials who said the area clearly needed a District Officer of its own... and who promised to write a report to recommend a high-powered commission of inquiry into the development needs of the area; charity organizations which promised to sell more raffle-tickets in the area... and a group of university students who later wrote a paper relating droughts and uneven development to neo-colonialism, called for the immediate abolition of capitalism and signed themselves as the committee for students against neo-colonialism.
>
> (p. 185)

Thus the students, whose ideology is the same as the author's, find their response to the plight of Ilmorog associated with that of the senseless bureaucrats and sham organisations with whom they are apparently inadvertently lumped together. Such ineptitude is not characteristic of Ngugi and one can only assume that he had reached a point of being genuinely disillusioned with the students' propensity for uttering pointless verbiage in situations that called for positive action. Or could it be that Ngugi, being anxious to finish this novel and go on to write the Gikuyu novel that would more faithfully adhere to the structures of the oral narrative, was loath to undertake a painstaking revision of the already compromised *Petals of Blood* which, significantly, has never been translated into Gikuyu though a Swahili translation (which has been moderately successful) exists.

2.3.3 Psychoanalytical Figures and Traditional Character Profiles

The principal characters in *Petals of Blood* are given an extra dynamic by being placed in a dramatic setting. Instead of the story being simply told about them, they are each given the theatrical role of enacting their personal histories in the form of recollections that are carefully selected to support the general flow of the narrative. These are not merely ornamental flashbacks: they form an integral part of the plot they provide vital information that adds detail to the breadth and depth of the individual characters. At the end of the novel the characters are portrayed as active participants in a communal ritual of cleansing by fire in a manner that is distinctly theatrical (like the catharsis in a tragedy) rather than novelistic.

This should remind us that in spite of the modern psychoanalytical lines on which they are developed, and the setting of the larger universal symbolism in which their individual journeys through life form a collective quest for justice and retribution, they are also the main actors in a narrative that has

its roots in the oral traditions that Ngugi answers to, and which the author thus brings into enriching his own narrative style.[14]

The four major characters at the centre of the novel form a kind of pyramid with Wanja at the apex and the three men she is involved with forming the triangle at the base. She emerges as a symbolic character who is both the image of the fallen angel (like Eve) who has much sinned and is much sinned against, and a reincarnation of the legendary Mumbi, the mother figure of the Gikuyu - two aspects which are reconciled at the end of the novel when the rehabilitated Wanja is depicted as the expectant mother of the new breed of liberators to come. The men she gets involved with in Ilmorog are each skilfully matched with his own antithesis from the wicked outside world who is held responsible in part for the sins for which Wanja has to be absolved: Kimeria, the traitor and callous opportunist who loses Wanja from the very beginning, looms large behind Abdulla, the gentle and caring patriot who gains her in the end; Mzigo, the pretentious exploiter and sycophant, who happily reaps where he never sowed, slyly stands behind Munira, the self-effacing loner who never aspires to acquire any property; and Chui,[15] the disappointing reactionary and turncoat, who falls when he thinks he is rising, threateningly hovers high above Karega, the ardently committed revolutionary who thinks he might have fallen when others know he is on the rise.

2.3.3.1 MUNIRA

Munira is not a conventional hero. He has more in common with Mugo, the recluse in *A Grain of Wheat*, than Kimathi, the popular leader in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*. His portrayal is the most comprehensive psychoanalytical profile anywhere in Ngugi's writing. On one hand he is presented as a symbolic character, bearing the mantle of the allegorical quest for justice which runs through Ngugi's works. As such he is potentially a heroic figure whose journey towards self-definition starts with his rejection of the superficial and hypocritical values of the neo-colonial system embraced by his own father. On the other hand he is depicted as a highly individualised

character whose seemingly eccentric conduct is minutely examined to illustrate what makes him act the way he does. In the context of psychoanalysis he could be classified as a schizophrenic character with a Freudian complex which finds expression in his enigmatic rejection of both his father and the women in his life. In the context of traditional folklore, he is neither an epic hero nor an ogre, which would make him just an ordinary man. Yet Munira is presented as no ordinary man: he is an enigma. As Peck points out, "Munira is recognizably Ngugi's stock hermit/saviour figure" whose guilty psyche or conflicted personality stems from a deep awareness of not having participated in the community's struggle for freedom.[16] Ngugi's shift of sympathy from Munira, and from the educated elite (like the earlier Waiyaki) to the common people in the quest for a saviour, is symptomatic of the author's own re-integration into the community or homecoming from an ideological exile.

In the beginning, when Munira is driven into the wilderness of Ilmorog - the external, physical manifestation of an inner purgatory - he does not even realise that this is a `homecoming', the chance for a new beginning. His complete isolation - effected by internal and external forces he has tried to escape from in vain - makes him conscious only of being an outsider, an uninvolved spectator whose rejection of the people around him undermines his chances of being integrated into society and thus escaping perpetual alienation. The underlying cause of Munira's guilty psyche is brought into sharp focus when he learns that Abdulla had fought in the liberation war:

> Munira's stomach tightened a little at the revelation. He always felt this generalised fear about this period of war: he also felt guilty, as if there was something he should have done but didn't do. It was the guilt of omission: other young men of his time had participated: they had taken sides: this defined them as a people who had gone through the test and either failed or passed. But he had not taken the final test. Just like in Siriana. (p. 62)

So it is really this failure to participate in the people's struggle that marks Munira as an outcast. His coming from the distantly appealing outside world into the diminishing community of Ilmorog, which others his age had long abandoned, at once creates suspicion as to his intentions which he is too inept to dispel. He is not propelled by a messianic vision or an idealistic compulsion for missionary service in an isolated village as Gurr suggests.[17]

His presence there rouses curiosity rather than any real or lasting animosity. However, although he very soon finds the acceptance he craves for, Munira continues to see himself as an outsider, a stranger at the gate, an uninvolved spectator held in "the twilight of doing and non-doing" (p. 47) who prefers enclosed spaces to the broader society of the outdoors.[18] Besides the derelict school, the only other place he begins to frequent is the equally dilapidated shop run by Abdulla, himself another refugee from the outside world, who recognizes kindred spirit and welcomes Munira like the fellow-traveller he is.

In traditional Africa, the man who stands alone (like Ndung'uri in the parable in *Devil on the Cross*)[18] is often seen as a wizard and an ogre-figure: yet Munira, who craves for acceptance and a chance to forget the past, contradicts himself by preferring isolation and uninvolvement:

> Otherwise he felt secure: to be so liked, honoured, venerated, without the mess which comes from hasty involvement in other people's lives: this struck him as a late gift of God. He tried to forget his fears, his guilt, his frozen years: he stifled any unpleasant memories of his father or his wife or of his childhood and youth with a drink or so. (p. 17)

He yearns to be one of the people, yet he remains aloof and afraid of the impulse to open up and to join in their conversations and open debates on the things that bind them, as this calls for commitment:

> Munira did not take part in such talk: he felt an outsider to their involvement with both the land and what they called `things of blood'. Any talk about colonialism made him uneasy. He would suddenly become conscious of never having done or willed anything to happen, that he seemed doomed to roam this world, a stranger. And yet, yet, why this ready acceptance of undeserved homage, why this secret pleasure at the illusion of being of them? (p. 18)

> Otherwise the village never intruded into his life: why should he - stranger-watchman at the gate - interfere in theirs? (p. 25)

If he has any qualities of the messiah, then these end with his self-chosen isolation and his avowed non-involvement in other people's lives. But though `closed in', Munira is basically a neutral character from the beginning when we witness his modest and inauspicious homecoming (rather like Ngugi's own figurative one). He comes on an "iron horse" (like Christ's humble donkey

ride to Bethlehem) to a derelict, abandoned house in a makeshift school located in the remote, forgotten backwaters which he comes to regard as his "escape-hole" (p. 49). Ilmorog is Ngugi's original fictitious appellation for the absolute outpost where those rejected by society can escape to in the desperate hope of finding the bottom of the void from which to begin climbing back to life. The school to which Munira is posted is only a marginal educational institution catering for a handful of periodic pupils who are liable to migrate overnight with their herds in search of better pastures, leaving the teacher stranded with no one to teach. The fact that he manages to stick it out when others before him had given up and left is both a measure of his tenacity and that of his despair of finding a better foothold anywhere else. The freedom that he relishes most is the escapist and cowardly liberty of not having to make any conscious choices in life:

> Munira relished twilight as a prelude to that awesome shadow. He looked forward to the unwilled immersion into darkness. He would then be part of everything: the plants, animals, people, huts, without consciously choosing the links. To choose involves effort, decision, preference of one possibility, and this could be painful. He had chosen not to choose, a freedom he daily celebrated walking between his house, Abdulla's place and of course Wanja's hut. (p. 71)

For all his self-willed isolation, however, Munira himself recognises the bond that held them all together:

> We are all searchers for a tiny place in God's corner to shelter us for a time from treacherous winds and rains and drought. (p.46)

But he initially refuses to acknowledge this bond even when Wanja challenges his perpetual passiveness, saying:

> "You always say you don't understand. But what's there to understand? You too are in flight. What made you run away to an area like this? Tell me truthfully. What were you running from?" (p. 73)

Munira could never bring himself to answer such a direct question, even to himself, and his reaction is predictable: "He winced: he felt prickly sweat in his skin. He panicked but kept his voice controlled", followed by a faltering explanation which is only an excuse.

The inertia that holds Munira back from reaching out to other people is a manifestation of an impotence that goes beyond the physical and psychological level to the ideological, as testified by the void in which he sinks when Ilmorog, his safe haven, is invaded first by Karega, who brings "the eerie feeling of a dead past suddenly being resurrected before me who had been totally unprepared for the second coming" (p. 53), and then by the rapacious outside world of investors who descend on the settlement like a bunch of vultures:

> Yet Munira had experienced the events and the changes as chaos inside and outside himself, and he a comic spectator with the comic passions of an old man, unable to act. It was only in Theng'eta that he had found personal reality and he was then able to view the burnt-out cigarette-ends of his life, his illusions, his desires. (p. 269)

Munira's inability to take a stand in life and get involved in matters that affect the lives of the people around him, has a direct correlation with his fear of Karega:

> A cold fear of Karega's visit settled uncomfortably in my belly. But what was it that scared me? That I would have to face something I had forever left behind? Or was I simply afraid of being drawn into somebody else's life and inner struggles, an unwilling witness of another's wrestling with God?... Let me go, let me go, I cried to myself: why awaken voices from the past?
> (p. 54)

This is the same reaction that he Munira had shown towards Wanja earlier on when she butted into his life. In spite of his ambiguity and isolation, however, he finds himself sexually attracted to Wanja, inexorably drawn towards the vortex of her being. But his deep-seated inability to make a move and commit himself, coupled with her own attitude of waiting, prevents them from starting a relationship. Initially, he actually resents her intrusion into his seclusion and tries to escape, like a moth which is afraid of the light towards which it is inexorably attracted. Even with her he feels that he is "only an outsider, fated to watch, adrift, but never one to make things happen." (p. 23) And when he gets involved in spite of himself he moans: "What is happening to me, a spectator?" (p. 34) But later on when she goes away after their brief affair, he finds he can hardly contain the sense of loss:

> Munira had hoped that with Wanja's going he would recapture his previous rhythm and aloof dominance. But this was an elusive dream, he had soon realised, and for a month after she had gone Munira could be seen galloping all over Ilmorog... (p. 80)

> For him Ilmorog without Wanja had been a land of drought. (p. 83)

The suppression of his natural instincts earlier on had led to his developing sexual fantasies that further undermined his flagging self-confidence. This neurotic trait, like his rejection of his father and his mistrust of women, are subtly traced back to a sexual guilty complex originating from a childhood incident in which he had visited a house of ill repute where he had paid to be initiated into sex by an experienced woman who had also humiliated him and sewn the seeds of remorse by remarking on his juvenile inadequacy. He had reacted to this guilt then by seeking atonement through obliteration by setting an effigy of the woman's house on fire - thus anticipating the fire to come, which he would eventually bring off in reality. This incident becomes part of his guilty psyche, undermining all his subsequent relationships with women: his wife Julia, who finds a convenient hiding place behind religion and his father's protection; Wanja, who yearns for the total commitment he can not give and who is forced to try elsewhere for a child; and Lillian, who is never really there when she submits to him in body while her heart is on heavenly matters. Compounded to the sexual guilt is the ideological rift between father and son who appear to belong to totally different and diametrically opposed worlds, resulting in the tension between them whenever he goes home to their home in Limuru in which Munira feels like as much of a stranger as he does in Ilmorog:

> But coming into the place he always felt in himself a strong tension between this vigour [of landscape and climate], this energy that was Limuru and that long night of unreality that was his past: between the call of life and involvement in living history and an escape into a family seclusion with a morality rooted in property and the Presbyterian Church; between an inexplicable fear of the people and an equally inexplicable fear of his father; between the desire for active creation and a passive acceptance of one's ordained fate. His father's face now loomed large in his mind... (p. 88)

The face that "now looms large" in his mind is the sudden realisation (as he writes his memoirs in police custody) that the inaction and uninvolvement that had typified his life had all been caused by the influence of his father's character on his life. The failures that he attributed to himself are in fact the failures of his father who had himself turned his back on the suffering of his people and exploited the situation for his own gain. Could the father then have transferred his own guilt to his eldest? It would appear so. And it is only now, almost too late, that Munira finally comes to grips with the real reason whey he had been on the run all along:

> Life for him had always been a strain. His father thought him a loss. And he, Munira, always felt a need to break loose. But he always hesitated. It was as if he would not have known what he was running away from and what he was running toward. (p. 91)

Munira had not been aware of this earlier on when Wanja challenged him (p.73), making him fumble for an answer. He had not known it all along when he accepted the role of an outsider and a stranger at the gate or when he failed to make choices and take actions that might have altered his life: like that time when the initiative to lead the delegation to the city passed from him to Karega because he, who was senior in age and experience, had opted to sit on the fence and watch, thinking: "I seem unable to settle: I keep on moving, driven by other people's promptings: can I never will my own actions and decisions?" (p. 114)

Munira ultimately ends up consumed with jealousy and frustration, forced into a celibate isolation until Lillian (the Madonna-like whore-prophetess) eventually transforms him into a fanatical convert to her eccentric sect, a zealot whose obsession is to stop others from sinning and whose vision of a new world is not that of the more just society which Karega espouses but a utopian heaven on earth in whose service he casts himself, initially, in the passive role of watchman before later becoming an actively involved avenging angel of retribution:

> I was God's watchman in a twilight gloom somewhere between sleeping and waking, and should I not rest there, and not trouble the twilight stillness with passionate insistence? (p. 243)

But Wanja's absolute rejection of him, as she becomes involved with Abdulla after Karega, will not let him rest in peace, and it closes the last door to the possibility of his rehabilitation:

> Unwanted, excluded from their communal rite of making money, he felt a tremendous loneliness descend upon him and he was haunted by the past that had always shadowed him. An outsider. A spectator. (p. 270)

Such is the complex psychological background against which Munira's propulsion towards a self-willed annihilation is depicted. Ironically, it is Munira's short-lived intimacy with Wanja which finally drives him into performing the most momentous act that sets the whole story in motion: the murder of Kimeria, Mzigo and Chui that virtually guarantees his own exit. Munira's inadvertently heroic act should be viewed as a cleansing ritual that restores moral order to the community for which he has put his own life at stake, thus echoing the messianic possibilities in his character. However, in the end it is not any messianic social impulses that drive him to church and finally compel him to act, though there is an inference of the imminent advent of the second coming of Christ (p. 306). What motivates him to act is a highly individual and neurotic personal morality that stems from his long established guilt complex leading to an admission of his own worthlessness. The conversion to religion acts like opium on this disturbed personality, relentlessly driving him into reaching the resolution to perform a cleansing ritual which, in essence, involves his own self-annihilation:

> I was an accident. I was a mistake, doomed to a spectator's role outside a window from a high building ... (p. 297)
>
> How could I let this mistake continue, standing outside the gate of things, and I a teacher? I was on the verge of decision ... (p.298)
>
> Munira had been so convinced that this world was wrong, was a mistake, that he wanted all his friends to see this and escape in time ... (p. 332)
>
> It was enjoined on him to burn down the whorehouse - which mocked God's work on earth. He poured petrol on all the doors and lit it up. He walked away toward Ilmorog Hill. He stood on the hill and watched the whorehouse burn, the tongues of flame from the four corners forming petals of blood, making a twilight of the dark

> sky. He, Munira, had willed and acted, and he felt, as he knelt down to pray, that he was no longer an outsider, for he had finally affirmed his oneness with the Law. (p. 333)

This last vision brings back the image of a messianic character standing high above and looking back to see the fire of Christianity rage through the world, cleansing it of sin to make a better world. It is as if Munira's contentment is that of finally being out of this world, the Law he feels a oneness with being the Law of God rather than that of Man. His euphoria is easier to comprehend if we view him at that cathartic moment not just as a psychotic man who has finally crossed the rubicon by overcoming the inertia of his own inactivity and uninvolvement, but also as the recluse in the traditional setting who has just destroyed the ogre by burning down his den and can rightfully expect to be rehabilitated back into society, however briefly, as a conquering hero.

2.3.2.2 KAREGA

Although Karega is the last of the four principal characters to arrive in Ilmorog, and although he is the youngest of them, he is no less important to the story than any of them. He is the committed intellectual, the equivalent of the western figure of the knight in shining armour whom the author chooses to carry the banner on which his vision of ` A New Earth' is emblazoned. Though something of a dreamer and a visionary (in the author's own mould) Karega is not an enigma like Munira to whom he is the perfect foil: the man of action who, when faced with the idea of the need for a new order, simply answers: "Then we must create another world, a new earth" (p. 294). Yet Karega's role is not glorified: he identifies with the ordinary people with whom he shares his vision and he makes no special claim for leadership in the struggle in which he realises that he is not indispensable, for the struggle "will go on without him, as indeed it does while he is imprisoned."[20]

Right from the beginning Karega is portrayed as a young man of intellect, foresight and the courage to act by his convictions: one who at one stage finds it difficult to continue teaching when he felt that "theory seemed a mockery of reality". (p. 113) Although he had been expelled from Siriana, like Munira, it had not been by accident as is the case with the latter, and he makes no claim to being a victim of what he did not do. His had been a conscious choice and commitment to what he ardently believes in. Compared to Munira, Karega is portrayed as a genuine intellectual with an inquisitive mind that will not accept what he thinks is wrong. But of the two, in the end it is Karega who comes closest to being the model for the future leader in whom the hope for political salvation lies. Glenn sees Karega as Ngugi's compromise over the educated elite (like the author himself) who are given the role of managers of the revolution.[21] It is for this reason that the author uses Karega to give a contrary definition of the new earth to Munira's which is associated with the amargeddon, the flowering of petals of blood which spells ultimate destruction by fire. Karega's vision, which is reminiscent of central symbolism in *A Grain of Wheat,* is that of a more positive and regenerative evolution of society to a new age, a "human kingdom" as he terms it:

> ... a world in which goodness and beauty and strength and courage would be seen not in how cunning one can be, not in how much power to oppress one possessed, but only in one's contribution in creating a more humane world in which the inherited inventive genius of man in culture and science from all ages and climes would be not the monopoly of a few, but for the use of all, so that **all flowers in all their different colours would ripen and bear fruits and seeds. And the seeds would be put into the ground and they would once again sprout and flower in rain and sunshine.**
> (p.303, my emphasis)

This would come about as a result of a collective effort rather than the individualistic act like Munira's which Karega does not condone because it can only lead to martyrdom without getting to the heart of the problem and uprooting the seed of corruption. Yet even Karega (like Munira) once comes close to losing sight of the ideals that he ultimately sets off in quest of:

> And so in that moment of despair, he came very close to the fatal mistake of losing faith in people and in the possibilities of truth and beauty and ideals in a world where people were daily struggling for bread and water. (p. 253)

The contrast between Karega and Munira - the man who waits for the flower of faith to blossom and the one who anticipates its blight - is developed right from the beginning. When Karega first comes to Ilmorog, it is in the hope that Munira, who had suffered the same fate as himself in Siriana and had subsequently been his teacher, might help him answer the questions that bothered him. One of these is the inexplicable transformation of Chui from a radical to a reactionary and an unprincipled cultural mulatto[22] who is totally committed to undermining the very goals he used to espouse. But instead of the Munira he had hoped to unearth, he finds a man who is insular, guarded, and not the least bit interested in intellectual matters. Not having been prepared for any meaningful role in society by the inadequate system of education he had come to query, and having been repulsed by the only teacher on hand he could get to, Karega's subsequent entry into life becomes a harrowing experience in which he touches rock bottom before being rescued, ironically, by Munira and Wanja who take him back to Ilmorog: all of them "this time driven neither by idealism nor the search for a personal cure but by an overriding necessity to escape." (p. 106)

In spite of his experience with Munira's sister, Mukami, Karega is not a soft romantic[23] at heart. His relationship with Wanja may not have been realised if she had not pursued him herself when she was ready for a commitment. This only happens on her initiative after she has undergone the process of renewal and purification by the sweat labour and the spirit of theng'eta on the night of harvest after the ritual of circumcision. This relationship finally turns him from a boy into a man and it also earns him the mortal enmity of Munira whom he appears to displace from Wanja's life. Until his expulsion at the instigation of Munira, Karega takes to his teaching in earnest, putting everything he can into imparting knowledge to the young receptive minds. He is not content merely to inform but tries to open up the eyes of his pupils so that they can query things and not simply accept them at face value. Karega appears to mature fast as the story develops, preparing to assume leadership as he does by the time they set off on the symbolic journey to the city. This is recognised by even the old men in the delegation, like Muturi who calls Karega "a later messenger from God" (p. 136) and adds: "God puts wisdom in mouths of babes".[24]

It is during the epic journey that Karega finally attains his potential, his awareness fully stimulated by his encounter with the lawyer whose knowledge and experience he seeks to draw from and emulate. But it is also a point of departure from the lawyer's philanthropic liberalism to becoming a hard-core revolutionary with roots in organised labour. By the time he returns to Ilmorog after years of wandering through Kenya (rather like Wanja) he is irrevocably committed to the idea of uniting the people to create a new world in which they would be masters of their own destiny and of the products of their endeavour, thus putting an end to the perpetual exploitation of labour by capital. He becomes the nucleus of the trade union movement that come to Ilmorog in the wake of the massive capital invasion that transforms it from a sleepy village into a new town. Following the murder of Kimeria, Mzigo and Chui - which he is surprised but not pleased to learn was a non-political act by Munira - he is put in detention without trial - the fate of revolutionaries, as the author himself knows from experience.

At the end of the novel, Karega's spirits are raised by Akinyi's[25] reassurance of his inevitable freedom and triumph over the divisive forces that had already started to fall apart. As she tells him, rumour had it that another of the big shots had been gunned down while extorting rent in one of the poorer city estates - which points to Abdulla's current landlord, one of the leeches who had been bleeding Ilmorog, who is in all probability Nderi wa Riera who is also the prime suspect in the lawyer's assassination. In terms of the traditional folk tale, Karega in the end is the youthful hero with the moral backing of the community that wills his victory over the ogres which have temporarily checked his advance in the lull preceding the storm of retribution. To his imagination is assigned the prophetic vision that echoes back to Kimathi's predictions in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* and carries forward to images central to Ngugi's next novel, *Devil on the Cross*: that of the blood-drinking, man-eating ogres who would seek to thwart the collective endeavour by the people to transform Kenya into a more just society:

> Tomorrow it would be the workers and the peasants leading the struggle and seizing power to overturn the system of all its preying bloodthirsty gods and gnomic angels, bringing to an end the reign of the few over the many and the era of drinking blood and feasting on human flesh. (p. 344)

2.3.3.3 ABDULLA

Abdulla, the liberation war veteran, who had lost a leg in the struggle and had lived to see the traitors rewarded while the patriots suffered poverty and humiliation, is the antithesis of Kimeria, Nderi and their kind. In the novel Abdulla is also the mystery man who adopts a name to hide his real identity and the sense of failure as a liberation fighter and a Gikuyu man, the psychological as well as physical cripple who growls and curses like an ogre. But as the events unfold, his past unravels itself slowly and almost imperceptibly. He finally emerges in his heroic grandeur during the symbolic pilgrimage to the city which sees him transformed into a folk hero and a first rate story teller whose ogre stories attain the heights of the tales in *Devil on the Cross* in their concise vividness. It is only then that the secret of his heroic past begins to unravel as we get to learn of his traumatic homecoming which is expressed in terms that anticipate *Matigari*:

> I longed for the day that I would return. Our day for a Family Reunion." (p. 285)

Significantly, in a scenario where the self-annihilating Munira and the sternly righteous Karega both fall short of showing compassion for the fallen Wanja, it is the gallant Abdulla who comes to the rescue and thus becomes the father of the child who symbolises the possibility of a new beginning. Abdulla is also the symbolic foster father to the heirs of Kimathi, notably Karega, who falls under the veteran's spell on the journey to the city, and Joseph, who begins to show revolutionary promise as the story draws to an end. Behind the camouflage of the gruff and grimy exterior, Abdulla is a kind, compassionate man with the heart of gold and a tower of strength. His self-chosen mask of austerity only slips out of place when the need of another person demands it. It is for this reason that he is ultimately chosen to be the agent of Wanja's salvation, the one who is destined to rewards her perseverance by giving her a second chance to be a mother and by pulling her out of the fire of destruction. Ironically, he ends up destitute and placeless after all the hospitality he has shown to his fellow travellers, effectively taking over the mantle of recluse from Munira as he descends into a

despondent acceptance of his circumstances as an inevitable fate of man. This is expressed in imagery that echoes Shakespeare as well as Gikuyu belief, thus reflecting the dichotomy in Ngugi's characters in this novel:

> He was talking like Karega, Abdulla thought, but he did not say anything. Maybe ... maybe, he thought, history was a dance in a huge arena of God. You played your part, whatever your chosen part, and then you left the arena, swept aside by the waves of a new step, a new movement in the dance. Other dancers, younger, brighter, more inventive came and played with even greater skill, with more complicated footwork, before they too were swept aside by yet a greater tide in the movement they had helped to create, and other dancers were thrown up to carry the dance to even newer heights and possibilities undreamt of by an earlier generation. Let it be ... Let it be ... His time was over. (p. 340)

Abdulla is thus presented as a tragi-comic figure who represents Ngugi's de-mystification of the ex-Mau Mau veterans whose role in the new struggle has been taken over by younger soldiers like Karega. These are not just the ravings of a common bum in a drunken stupor but the rational thoughts of a man who has been ill-used by life and has seen evil-doers rewarded while honest people get punished for their efforts. Furthermore, he is personally not even allowed the consolation of knowing either the high esteem that Wanja has for him or about their unborn baby. Thus his reward, after a life of hardship and betrayal in which he had managed to stay humane, is held in suspense. This conforms with the traditional belief that only God in heaven rewards the righteous and it is not up to man to demand reward for good deeds on earth.

2.3.3.4 WANJA

Central to Ngugi's vision of a revolutionary society is the role of the women, here represented by the inspirational old woman, Nyakinyua, and her grand-daughter, Wanja, who is temporarily derailed from her true mission in life but - like Mumbi in *A Grain of Wheat* - is allowed the reprieve of a symbolic pregnancy and the motherhood of another generation to continue the struggle. Thus the author integrates what is essentially a universal vision with ideas that come close to the Gikuyu ethos through familiar characters and situations the ordinary people could identify with. Wanja herself emerges as a symbolic

character who is both the image of the fallen angel (like Eve) who is much sinned and sinned against and the expectant mother[28] of the new breed of liberators to come. Unlike the three men in her life who are dreamers and visionaries, Wanja is a hard-core realist who, though admitting guilt, says: "I don't think I can ever burn myself," even though she admits that:

> There are times - not too many times - but a few times - when I remember a few things - that I have felt as if I could set myself on fire. And I would then run to the mountain top so that everyone can see me cleansed to my bones. (p. 65)

Behind this enigmatic Wanja stands the timeless and larger-than-life figure of Nyakinyua through whom the past and the future are linked. Nyakinyua, though a widow, is supported by the never too distant presence and integrity of the old men of Ilmorog: Njogu, Njuguna, Muturi and Ruoro - and not forgetting the mysterious Mwathi wa Kibiro.[27] She is cast in the mould of the older women in Ngugi's writings, most notably: Wambui in *A Grain of Wheat* and Wangari in *Devil on the Cross*, with the unnamed Woman in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* being a cross between these and the younger heroines like Wanja.

In *Petals of Blood* Wanja, like Munira, is also given a symbolic as well as a highly individual profile. She descends from famous stock (notably her famous grandfather, Nyakinyua's late husband) which also has a weak strain (notably her own father, who had opted to sit on the fence) that shows up in her character. Like her father, who had shunned the war of liberation and had found himself counted on the side of the colonial government, Wanja at the critical moment finds herself stranded on the ambiguous grounds between the workers and peasants, who are fighting for survival, and the oppressors and exploiters, whose only concern in life is making money and accumulating wealth, regardless of the people on whose backs they climb in order to attain their selfish ends. Ironically, Karega who points an accusing finger at her is also the only man she ever loved passionately. That she stands resolute and refuses to bow out is because she inherits her tenacity of spirit from her grand parents: Nyakinyua, the guardian of the community's age-old traditions, and her famous husband, who had died a hero's death in defiance of colonial oppression.

Her profile is developed from an early age, growing up in a poor home where there were constant feuds between her father and mother, which partly accounts for her craving for affection and approval. It is also what makes her vulnerable to predators like Kimeria who, in addition, have unscrupulously attained the wealth to flaunt before the impressionable youngster from a poor home who could hardly resist his advances. When the inevitable happens and she gets pregnant, he quickly backs out, leaving her in the lurch. This is a common story which establishes Wanja's identity with the earlier Girl from *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*, who is later re-invoked in the roles of Gathoni in *Ngaahika Ndeenda*, Wariinga in *Devil on the Cross*, Nyathira in *Mother, Sing for Me* and Guthera in *Matigari*.

Wanja's life is a chronicle of suffering in a world dominated by greedy men, just like Kimeria, whom she meets everywhere. In time she is able to concentrate just on survival and, as she gets older and wiser, she begins to regret having destroyed her child. Burning with the suppressed fire of revenge (fire being a motif that runs through her life) and desperately wishing for another child, she finds herself drawn to Ilmorog, a deserted village of old people in which the only men who were anywhere near eligible are Munira, the solitary school teacher and Abdulla, the crippled shopkeeper. But not even the local seer can work miracles and Wanja's interest in the village wanes when nothing happens to make her flower. Although she leaves Ilmorog for a while, she finds herself inexorably drawn back by a force beyond her control which also links her life with Munira, Karega and Abdulla: the three good men whom fate parallels through her to Mzigo, Chui and Kimeria. That all these men revolve around her is a measure of the great power she knows she has over men, for only she "knew how they could be very weak before her body" (p. 56). In a sense, therefore, it is their combined weaknesses that add up to her strength: with the exception of Karega, who shows he can not only resist her but can reject her outright, the others all pine on her to the end. The worst hit, perhaps, is Munira whose permanent love-hate complex she exploits until she drives him to distraction.

Wanja's ultimate love for Karega does not find expression until after the journey to the city when it comes so close to never being realised as she looks at him in her moment of humiliation in Kimeria's house and perceives the enormity of the gap between her debasement and his elevation to purity:

> She looked at him again, briefly, saw the dancing intensity in his eyes, and almost hated him for his youth and his innocence. She was in that second conscious of the moral gulf of knowledge and experience between them and she steeled herself against crying. (p. 156)

It is only much later that she finally allows herself to give in to Karega. This happens at the time of harvest, on the night of Theng'eta drinking following the circumcision ritual earlier in the day. That night, with the effect of the Theng'eta still on them, Karega leads the way to the top of Ilmorog Hill and Wanja willingly follows him for a night of love-making under the open sky that leaves them so spent that they do not wake up until dawn. This marks the beginning of Wanja's transformation, initially with the promise of renewal but ultimately in resignation to the very forces of corruption that had earlier ruined her life.

Ironically, Wanja's fall from grace as she descends back into the abyss from which she had managed to climb is also her victory over circumstances that had vanquished even the hardy Abdulla. Psychologically, her resilience (symbolically presented as a recurrent encounter with fire parallel to Wariinga's later nightmare about the Devil) can be interpreted as the survival instinct of the female of the species, though Munira views her determined effort not to go down as a cold and callous indifference and a personal vendetta directed at him for driving Karega away:

> She was exacting her vengeance: she was his ruin. She watched it, supervised it, coldly, detachedly, and yet, somehow, she always seemed vulnerable, dancing just within reach, just outside of reach. (p. 269)

Munira is probably right in his assessment of Wanja, for that is just how she finally lures Kimeria, Mzigo and Chui to their doom. And it is Wanja who warns Munira earlier on of the consequences of disregarding her wishes:

> Whatever you do, he [Karega] must not leave Ilmorog. Either that or else ... Munira ... I am a hard woman ... and somebody, either

> now or later, will have to pay. I want you to understand that: that it will be ... I don't know how ... but should he go, either you or Mzigo or both ... (p. 251)

She herself admits to being hard and unforgiving as she recalls the beginning of her resolve to avenge herself on the man who had ruined her life:

> I nursed the pain in my soul. I am a hard woman and I know I can carry things inside my heart for a long time. (p. 38)

This is the resolve she re-affirms on the epic journey when Kimeria again intrudes into her life and humiliates her before the man she loves, when she had vowed to forsake men until she attained something in her life:

> She looked at him and there was cruelty in her eyes. There was cruelty in her heart. One day you'll pay for this, she said inside her, one day you'll pay for this. (p. 154)

It is no wonder she neither forgives nor forgets the hurt that Munira causes her by intruding into her affair with Karega. But Wanja's power over men is only a part of her natural charm as an individual and a story-teller of extraordinary skill, as Munira testifies:

> What struck him most, listening to her the other night, was the way her experiences took the form of stories, a kind of ballad of woes with a voice that demanded and compelled a hearing, and which ended by binding the listener to her life and fate. (p. 139)

Eventually, disappointed by the socially impotent Munira (an uninvolved spectator lately turned into an obsessive zealot) and rejected by the impetuously unforgiving Karega (who firmly puts her in enemy camp), she finds herself propelled towards the kindly and accommodating Abdulla. Ironically, it is through the additional bond between her and Abdulla of the mutual desire to exact revenge on Kimeria that Wanja's salvation is realised when Abdulla plucks her out of the fire that would have destroyed her.

Wanja's rehabilitation to a symbolic status - like that of the heroine of the traditional folk tale who is rescued after having been seduced by the ogre - is attained without any fuss. Having attained more revenge than she had ever hoped for and escaped her own baptism by fire, she also realizes that she is

pregnant. When her mother, who had unexpectedly arrived on the scene to take care of her, asks whose child it is, Wanja (whose artistic flair had only surfaced once before on a light note in Abdulla's shop) replies by getting down to sketch a portrait[28] which falls between the picture of the suffering yet laughing Kimathi and the crippled Abdulla who was capable of such compassion in the face of so many adversities.

Thus in the end the woman in Wanja, who rises above the menial position of mere barmaid and prostitute, attains the status of motherhood, the recognition of love and the possibilities of a new beginning in a new earth through the unborn child, heir to a proud heritage bequeathed by men and women of heroic stature.

2.3.4 Themes: Renewal and Continuity

The themes in Ngugi's later writings do not change but are constantly renewed and re-cycled. Common themes firmly establish the link between *Petals of Blood* and the play that precedes it as well as the works that come after it. In this way *Petals of Blood* is a direct descendant of *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* whose ideologies it advances from the pre-colonial stage of contention, debate and negotiation to the post-colonial stage when the ideals of the liberation struggle have already been compromised. Ngugi's resolute concern with the individual and communal quest for a more just society, which is explored in the earlier play, is sharply focused on the single overriding theme of the threat of **Capitalism** in the new nation of the novel. Secondary and complementary to this are the themes of the **Church** as an agent of neo-colonialism and the violation of African **Culture** by the advance of "progress" on the rural setting, following its subversion into a tool of exploitation in the urban situation.

2.3.4.1 POLITICAL IDEOLOGY: THE THREAT OF CAPITALISM

Capitalism takes over the hot seat of contention when Colonialism bows out of the scene in Ngugi's writings. However, it is only a change of drivers and not a change of direction. The black elite who were handed the steering wheel at the time of independence had merely accepted the role of chauffeurs to the big boys - neo-colonialism and imperialism - who still pulled the financial strings that determined the speed and direction of drive from the comfort of the back seat. The puppeteers and their marionettes together keep the wheels of capitalism running in what is termed "partnership in progress," to use the aphorism favoured by the nameless African Business Executive in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* and Kimeria, Mzigo and Chui, his parallels in *Petals of Blood*.

Apart from the banks and the general trade under the umbrella of commerce and industry, the most important partners in the deal are the policy-makers: the men and women who lay down the rules of the game. Ngugi's most vitriolic attacks are directed against this class on whom he squarely blames the betrayal and failure of independence. They knew what they were doing when they signed away the people's right to self-determination in return for selfish short-term goals that left the field open to any sharks that came along. Money was the name of the game and it didn't matter how you made it as long as you had it and the politicians made sure that they got enough to make more even if it meant selling their souls to do so.

In *A Grain of Wheat* there is the nameless MP who is caught cheating the very people he was meant to serve. He goes behind their backs to negotiate a loan for himself to buy the very farm which they had requested his assistance in acquiring for a co-operative group.

In *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* there is the politician who is content to wait for the country to be "given" independence and wants the liberation war to be stopped by Kimathi because it's time to fight with words. One is left wondering how much the Hendersons have paid him to join the delegation to Kimathi's cell and the subsequent delegations to Lancaster House.[28]

What is merely a verbal attack of the manipulations of capitalism in the play finds fuller expression in *Petals of Blood* where the trio of Mzigo, Chui and Kimeria are depicted as capitalist lackeys representing only the tip of an iceberg whose submerged mass is of unknown dimensions. The man who comes closest to knowing what is lying below the surface is the lawyer who consequently gets assassinated, presumably on orders from above, carried out through Nderi wa Riera the MP for Ilmorog and the shady but menacing KCO. The KCO fund-raising campaign led by Nderi is only another way of raising capital from the people without having to go to the central bank or to the treasury to take it from the tax-payer's pocket.

The evil of the capitalist system is clearly illustrated by the destruction of Ilmorog in the name of development and progress towards which the story skilfully builds up. The invasion of Ilmorog starts with the construction of the capitalist Trans-Africa Highway[30] which is symbolized as the road to the exploitation of the interior of the continent. Its negative effect on Ilmorog is felt long before it even arrives to cleave the village into two irreconcilable halves. The intruders who come to survey the road cause tension in the village, not only on the ground with their chain links that recall to mind the chain gangs of slavery but also in the air where they swoop down like an evil bird which the helpless village crane their necks to see without being able to do anything to dispel it. When it crashes on them, killing Abdulla's heroic donkey, it is the signal for the invasion of Ilmorog to begin.

Significantly, Wanja is the first entrepreneur to "capitalise" on this unexpected boom of sightseers whom she and Abdulla find extremely lucrative to cater for. But the real invasion by the big fish with the big bucks does not come until the road is done, leading to the demarcation of Ilmorog into the new town on one side of it and the old village on the other.

New Ilmorog (in which only Wanja and Abdulla of the Ilmorogians have made the money to have the capital to develop a plot) is developed into a commercial centre which is like the city on a small scale. This is the side of the capitalists. Pitted against it on the other side of the road is the old

village, cynically named New Jerusalem, where the peasants have been forced to convert their traditional landholding into plots to get title deeds with which to secure bank loans for developing their plots. Without any proper training and discipline to handle such loans, it is only a matter of time before the majority of them default. Then the banks put up their land for auction and the bids go to the same capitalists who had already entrenched themselves on the other side of the road. The displaced villagers steadily turn into cheap labour for the industries that spring up in Ilmorog, the largest of which is the Theng'eta Brewery, employing hundreds of people, whose establishment plays a major part in the story as an example of capitalist corporate takeover. Labour unions soon take root and the conflict between labour and capital starts in earnest - just like in the big city.

But this is not just a business game for in the process of modernizing Ilmorog and developing it into a progressive community, there are lives that are trodden on and broken. Slippery entrepreneurs like Mzigo and evil men like Kimeria don't care on whose backs they climb to get what they want. Unprincipled men like Chui can't use the board-rooms to make capital yield any grounds to labour. Basically simple and decent people like Wanja and Abdulla can't hope to survive in this new man-eat-man jungle, for all their worldly experience. Munira is washed out, if he's lucky enough to ever get out of prison.

Only Karega is ideologically equipped to deal with this new order on its own terms because he is a man who has given up the past, for all it can teach, and adapted himself to the new role of the universal worker who knows he has got to bargain collectively for the sale of his labour on the best possible terms. Ngugi thus points towards some kind of future compromise between Capitalism and Collective Labour or Unionism in any future dispensation.

2.3.4.2 RELIGION: THE CHURCH AS AN AGENT OF NEO-COLONIALISM

There are two characters in the novel whose position compromises the Church: Ezekiel Waweru, Munira's father, who had acquired his wealth and influence by

exploiting religion; and the Reverend Jerrod Brown,[31] alias Reverend Kamau, who not only turns away the strangers with a sick child from his house without food but starts a church in Ilmorog which is viewed in the same light as the other commercial enterprises that contribute to the destruction of the village. These representatives of the Church are the successors of the Priest in the earlier play, and another in a later play,[32] whose ties with the colonial government make them turn a blind eye to the "secular" matters of government.

Waweru, who in the earlier days of the struggle had condemned the secret oathing practices of the Mau Mau in exchange for material favours of the state, is exposed for the hypocrite and opportunist he is when he castigates his son, Munira, for feeling humiliated on being tricked to take a similar oath for ethnic reasons under the Kamwene Cultural Organisation (KCO) sponsorship. He actually speaks up in defence of the practice and its perpetrators for acting on what was needed to protect the ill-gotten riches of the ruling class which had hi-jacked the fruits of independence.

Jerrod Brown (alias Kamau) is exposed for the hollow sham he is: a white-washed black man (who had even dropped his native name for the Anglicised Jerrod Brown) who only paid lip service to the tenets of Christianity (offering only the spiritual bread of Jesus to the needy) and who became one of the first to jump onto the "gravy train" to Ilmorog, not to save souls but to set up a collection centre for the American church that sponsors his lucrative crusade.

2.3.3.3 CULTURE: A PEOPLE TORN APART

The Gikuyu culture is the backbone of *Petals of Blood*. Its idiom, song and dance are the seasoning with which Ngugi makes the English language less irksome to his own ears. In the hands of the rustic Ilmorogians, their

culture is their natural way of life and the old people treasure it as the heritage entrusted to them to pass on responsibly to the future generations.

One startling example of how this responsibility, which is usually taken for granted, can go wrong is the disastrous case of the *Theng'eta* brew. In the hands of the old woman, Nyakinyua, the brewing of the *Theng'eta* is a serious ritual that follows certain specific prescribed steps. The result is a magic portion, sipped in modest quantities and passed around communally in a ritual that follows strict protocol by age of those present. Taken in the right spirit, the *Theng'eta* has the phenomenal effect of releasing the conscious mind and stimulating the inner eye into seeing visions that are normally accessible only to inspired poets and the messengers of God. Under the supervision of Nyakinyua, it works wonders for them all that caps the spirit of the harvest and heralds new beginnings - especially for Wanja and Karega whose love blossoms from that evening.

That is a different brew from either the adulterated concoction that Wanja and Abdulla begin to trade in or the commercialized *Theng'eta* which the brewery that puts them out of business begins to produce on an industrial scale. The former may have been made correctly, but the spirit in which it is drunk turns it into just another intoxicant which Nyakinyua dismisses as mere poison. The latter is made to an alien scientific formula after laboratory experiments and all so that at the end of the production line it is just another brew, not *Theng'eta* at all. To make matters worse, it is even bottled in plastic bags that can be carried in the pocket and drunk anyhow. What had started as an ancient magic portion, a treasured cultural heritage, ends up becoming a commonplace alcoholic poison produced to maximize profit and exploit the people who are only looking for the means to drown their problems in oblivion.

Apart from the abuse of culture by the educated elite like in the case of the party in Chui's house in Blue Hills where a traditional Gikuyu circumcision song is given an obscene twist and is sung out of context for entertainment, which is just a case of bad taste and crude manners, the most reprehensible subversion of culture to serve selfish ends is in the whole idea of the

Kamwene Cultural Organization (KCO) which poses as an organ for the promotion of the traditional ways when it is only an agent for coercion and illicit accumulation of capital for the few who are behind it to use in ventures like the development of Ilmorog out of existence. Significantly, it is Nderi wa Riera, the MP for Ilmorog - for all his protestations in defence of culture - who is the patron behind the new cultural venture in Ilmorog which is meant to promote African culture to tourists but is in fact only a front for prostitution like the other ventures Nderi runs all over the country in partnership with his foreign financiers.

That the culture of the people survives all these assaults is perhaps best symbolised by Wanja's being plucked back from the jaws of the monster of Capitalism. This is marked by the reconciliation between Wanja and her mother who steps in to fill the gap left by Nyakinyua who, after all, had only been a caretaker mother to the girl who, like Mumbi in *A Grain of Wheat*, is symbolically rehabilitated and cast in the role of mother of the future generation whose heritage might be the golden opportunity to turn the idea of A New Earth into a reality. However, unlike a traditional oral tale that usually deals with the past and leaves the future to the optimistic promise of "And they lived happily thereafter," Ngugi's narrative adopts an open ending that leaves the main issues unresolved and the loose ends in the threads that bind the principal players untied.

2.3.5 What Readership, What Audience?

In the final analysis, *Petals of Blood* leaves the reader with the impression that Ngugi was still looking to a Western-educated, elitist, reading audience while writing the novel and that the gestures that he makes towards a Gikuyu audience at this stage are still only emotional and ideological. The problem that he faces is that of finding an adequate theoretical framework within which to structure a radically different kind of novel. To extend the accepted boundaries of a genre, the writer has to proceed with some caution, making

adjustments that usually result in a form of 'hybridization' that Ashcroft *et al* acknowledge as a logical condition of post-colonial literatures. They go on to say:

> Inevitably the sensibilities of individual writers will be influenced by the literary and aesthetic assumptions of their own cultures. More often the use of local tradition will be quite conscious and deliberate; for example, the use of traditions derived from oral performance art and religious epic in the Indian novel, orature and proverb in West Africa...[33]

This accomodation is not quite what Ngugi seeks at this stage in his writing, for it only points the direction in which he is going without really getting there: emphasis may have been transferred to the nationalist perspective, but the "theoretical assumptions, critical perspectives, and value judgements made"[34] are still largely those of the accepted Western norms. Language stands between the writer as interpreter and his audience while Form acts as a barrier to the dissemination of Content.

ENDNOTES:

1. Dedan Kimathi, the freedom fighter and leader of the Mau Mau revolt who had been betrayed, arrested, summarily tried and executed in a bid to end the uprising.

2. Joshua Mwangi (J.M.) Kariuki, only referred to earlier in the novel as "the lawyer" but later identified as "J.M.", his popular acronym, the humanitarian politician and philanthropist who had been assassinated.

3. Like Pinto, the Indian politician who had been jailed in the colonial era for his support of the liberation movement and was assassinated in the Kenyatta era after independence for his outspoken support of the masses.

4. Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind*, p. 72.

5. By his own admission, Conrad and Lawrence rank as the greatest influence on Ngugi ever since he started writing. [See interview in Appendix 2E].

6. Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *op cit.*, p. 76 (my emphasis).

7. Vansina, Jan, 1985, *Oral Traditions as History*, James Currey, London/ Heinemann, Nairobi, p. 26.

8. *Caitaani Mutharaba-ini (Devil on the Cross).*

9. Akiinyi is a common name for women among the Luo of Kenya and it means Morning or Dawn - a meaning that adds symbolic emphasis to her role in this novel.

10. Curtis, L., 1984, "The Divergence of Art and Ideology in the Later Novels of Ngugi wa Thiong'o: A Critique," *UFAHAMU Vol XIII, No. 1-2*, p. 188.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 191.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 198.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 201.

14. In spite of Ngugi's own objections to this, expressed in *Decolonising the Mind*, p. 8.

15. Chui means leopard in Kiswahili - a deliberate reference to his abrupt changing of his political position from anti-colonial to arch-conservative.

16. Peck, R., 1989, "Hermits and Saviours, Osagyefos and Healers: Artists and Intellectuals in the Works of Ngugi and Armah," *Research in African Literatures*, Vol. 20, No. 1, University of Texas Press, Austin, pp. 26-49.

17. Gurr, A., 1982, "The Fourth Novel: Ngugi's *Petals of Blood*", in Douglass Jefferson and Graham Martin's *The Uses of Fiction: Essays on the Modern Novel in Honour of Arnold Kettle*, Open University Press, Milton Keynes, pp. 159-170.

18. Palmer, E., 1979, "Ngugi's *Petals of Blood*", *African Literature Today 10*, Heinemann, London, pp. 153-166.

19. The parable of the man who sold his soul to the devil for wealth, *Devil on the Cross*, pp. 63-66.

20. Peck, R., *op. cit.*, p. 38.

21. Glenn, I., 1981, "Ngugi wa Thiong'o and the Dilemma of the Intellectual Elite in Africa: A Sociological Perspective," *English in Africa 8*, pp. 53-66.

22. A product of two cultures, neither of which he represents as he has turned his back on his own culture and tried to adopt that of his former colonial masters with obvious limitations.

23. He is not sentimental, for he is more often ruled by the head (reason) rather than the heart (emotions) in his relationships with other people.

24. A relic of Ngugi's stock saviour figures, unjustified in this novel where Karega is clearly cast in a different mould.

25. Akinyi is a Luo name which means morning or dawn, suggesting a new beginning. Being a non-Gikuyu, her association with Karega points to a future of national unity in contrast to the goals of the shady KCO.

26. Adagala, Kavetsa, in her paper, "Wanja of *Petals of Blood*: A Study of the Woman Question and Imperialism in Kenya," (Department of Literature, University of Nairobi, 1980) sees Wanja as the embodiment of the vision of "Mother Africa".

27. Obviously descended from the original seer of all seers: Mugo wa Kibiro, featured in *The River Between*.

28. Like Gikonyo in *A Grain of Wheat* who plans to carve a symbolic stool for his estranged wife, Mumbi, as a peace gift

of reconciliation that would prepare the way to a new life for them and their promised offspring.

29. The London address where the constitutional negotiations for the independence of most ex-British colonies and protectorates were usually carried out.

30. An imaginary road symbolising the penetration and hence the capitalist exploitation of the African continent from coast to coast.

31. Here is another cultural mulatto, like Chui and Kimeria, who has found if expedient to drop his African identity late in life in favour of an Anglicized concoction, which is very surprising in a man of the collar.

32. *Maitu Njugira*. [See Part Four, Section 4.2].

33. Ashcroft *et al*, *op. cit.*, p. 182.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 18.

PART THREE:

H O M E C O M I N G

3.1 INTRODUCTION

3.1.1 The Second Stage: Homecoming

The second stage of the new phase in Ngugi's writing also starts with a play which precedes the publication of a follow-up novel. This time the issue of language was foremost in Ngugi's mind. Drama had proved to be the medium that gave him the desired direct communication with his audience. Having stirred up enough popular support to convince him that there was a large audience wishing to hear what he had to say, Ngugi took the earliest opportunity to give expression to his ideas and, moreover, in his native tongue for the very first time ever. Furthermore, his collaborative effort with Micere Mugo had proved a success since theatre is essentially a cooperative venture. Another close associate, Ngugi wa Mirii, who was running an adult community education project, happened to be looking for ideas of mobilising the masses and theatre seemed like a good beginning. These factors led to the joint scripting by two Ngugis in 1977 of the defiant and militantly titled *Ngaahika Ndeenda*,[1] that is within a year of the completion of the previous play, *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* and as the latter was still being rehearsed and tried out with local audiences in preparation for FESTAC '77 later in the year. This time sequencing is important to note as it implies that the two plays had already taken shape as *Petals of Blood* was being published, which probably explains the presence in the latter of elements of Gikuyu oral literature which Ngugi most certainly gathered in the process of researching for *Ngaahika Ndeenda* in January to September 1977.[2]

Closely linked to the play is the novel, *Caitaani Mutharaba-ini*, written when Ngugi quite unexpectedly put the year when he was in maximum security imprisonment to very good use. Although he was effectively denied access to

books and any writing materials as well as being allowed only very limited contact with his family, Ngugi gained invaluable insight into the ordinary people of Kenya from his fellow inmates and was able to work secretly on a new novel that would consolidate this experience as well as that of the play that had opened up new horizons to him. Because he had no access to stationery, he was forced to write the manuscript on rolls of toilet paper which were then smuggled out of prison.[3] The subsequent publication of the Gikuyu novel became nearly as momentous an event as the performance of the Gikuyu play had been.

The play and novel together mark Ngugi's eventual literary homecoming: his attainment of a form that advanced his aim of writing what could be truly called a people's literature. That both were written in the Gikuyu language was only part of the success story: a translation could have achieved that without making much difference in bringing the works any closer to the people. What makes this play and the novel different from their predecessors is that they are not only written in the language of the Gikuyu but also written in their idiom and in the form of their oral literary traditions. *Ngaahika Ndeenda* represents a celebration of Gikuyu culture with all its rituals and ceremonies, songs and dances, proverbs and sayings, folklore and politics. *Caitaani Mutharaba-ini* complements the play by incorporating all the above elements of Gikuyu culture into a narrative structure which is a combination of the traditional *ng'ano* (epic tale) and the *ng'ano cia marimu* (ogre narrative) discussed in Part One above.

3.1.2 The Play: *Ngaahika Ndeenda* (*I Will Marry When I Want*)

3.1.2.1 THE PEOPLE'S THEATRE

As a result of a surprising turn of events, part of the credit for scripting the play or at least shaping it into genuinely authentic traditional form must

go to the workers and peasants from the Kamiriithu trading centre. These ordinary folk (farm labourers and factory workers) were the people Ngugi wa Mirii had under his command in the Adult Education and Community Development programme. As the man behind the newly formed Kamiriithu Community Educational and Cultural Centre in a village near Limuru (which is also Ngugi wa Thiong'o's birthplace) Ngugi wa Mirii held the key to an ideal audience for just the kind of play that Ngugi wa Thiong'o had in mind.

It was not just any play or even just any audience that was required: the venue itself was decisive as there were no theatres that were accessible to the ordinary workers and peasants in Kenya. The Kenya National Theatre, which had begrudgingly opened its facilities to Ngugi for a few days for the performance of *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*, was out of the question - not only because that concession had not passed without adverse comment from the powers that be, but because the mass response to the new play which Ngugi envisaged demanded an unconventional venue. He was looking to nothing less than a people's theatre. The ideal venue, therefore, was the Kamiriithu Centre where the people were mobilized to build an open amphitheatre that could hold in excess of a thousand people at a sitting.

As it turned out, the centre also provided the actors and dancers who were to perform the play. Although almost all these were just ordinary men and women without any formal education, previous acting experience or knowledge of theatre, they were able to take to their assignments with natural ease. They transformed the script by revising the native idiom and expressions and also made invaluable suggestions in rehearsal for the direction of the play. Ngugi himself acknowledges his indebtedness to these simple folk in an interview in which he freely admits that *Ngaahika Ndeenda* showed him the road he should have travelled since he first started his writing career:

> This play was not a one-man act. It was the result of co-operation among many people. For instance, the whole of the *Gitiiro Opera* sequence in the play was written word for word at the dictation of an illiterate peasant woman at Kamiriithu. And anyone who saw the play could tell you that the *Gitiiro Opera* sequence in the play was one of the most beautiful, the most wonderful aesthetic experiences on the Kenyan stage.

> Again, if you see the high level of acting and presentation by the peasants and workers and Kamiriithu in the play, you will realize that we have much more to learn from the peasants and workers than we can give them. If you see how they utilize language, how they have collectively designed and constructed their open theatre, then you will realise what potential there is in Kenyan people when allowed to rely on their resources.[4]

That interview was granted shortly after Ngugi's release from detention, following the massive response to the performance of the play, which became an unprecedented event in itself. *Ngaahika Ndeenda* enjoyed overwhelming success in the brief run it was allowed before the authorities descended from the city and clamped a ban on it. The production was seen by thousands of Kenyans from all walks of life, the great majority of whom were just ordinary workers and peasants who came in bus-loads from near and far to witness this remarkable phenomenon themselves. The humble Kamiriithu centre had succeeded in turning the play into an event, a festival celebrating African culture. As in traditional oral literature, it was the performance that mattered. At this level the message of the play was less important than its sentiments: only the Gikuyu speakers fully understood the former while the other people in the audience were content with the latter.

3.1.2.2 THE PEOPLE'S PLAY

Ngaahika Ndeenda made history by earning numerous accolades in record time. It was acknowledged to be the first major play to be written and performed in a Kenyan language; the first play in Kenya's theatre history to be entirely performed at a professional level by ordinary men and women with no previous theatre experience; the first mass production before an audience comprising thousands of people from all walks of life most of whom had never seen formal theatre; and the Kamiriithu amphitheatre itself, as the first of its kind ever anywhere in East Africa, became the centre of a pilgrimage to which people flocked even when there was no performance going on. It is conservatively estimated that no less than ten thousand people saw the play in the four weeks it was in production before it was banned.[5] No other play staged anywhere in

the country had been seen by such a large number of people and from such diverse backgrounds.

That the play received such an overwhelming response in spite of the fact that it was in Gikuyu, which a large number of the audience neither spoke nor understood, vindicated Ngugi's choice of drama as the medium with the greatest potential to get to the ordinary people, bring down the barriers between the ethnic groups in Kenya and perhaps even reach out to the wider world beyond. In this instance it was not only the language barrier that had been overcome in getting the essential message across but also the literacy and/or class barrier separating the peoples of Kenya from each other. For the first time in their history, the ordinary men and women of Kenya had been recognised at a national level as makers of culture. The potential of culture in mobilising the masses was also realised, ironically, with dire consequences for Ngugi himself. Ngugi's triumphal homecoming was interrupted when the authorities banned the production and arrested him on New Year's Eve, 1978, sending him to Kamiti Maximum Security Prison "like a convicted criminal"[6] to serve a year of detention without trial. That was in the last year of President Kenyatta's rule and Ngugi was not released until exactly one year after his arrest when Kenyatta's successor, President Moi, released political prisoners in a general amnesty.

Ngugi was to a certain extent compensated for this inconvenience in the most unexpected manner. *Ngaahika Ndeenda* made publishing history by outselling any other previous East African play. It confounded even its publishers[7] whose original sales estimates for the first year of publication had to be drastically revised upwards when the initial print-run was sold out in a matter of weeks. Two other reprints followed within months and the final sales for the year were ten times the original estimate. The book continues to sell in the original Gikuyu edition as well as in Swahili[8] and English[8] translations. No other East African play has sold as many copies in so many editions, not to mention the foreign editions in other world languages. On its own home ground, *Ngaahika Ndeenda* gave the lie to the commonly held view that plays don't sell because nobody ever reads them.[10]

In *Ngaahika Ndeenda*, Ngugi cuts into the heart of the class conflict in Kenya more directly than in any of his previous works. Furthermore, this play was directed at a mass audience, a large number of whom were able to see it in performance, whereas those other works are written in English, a language that is accessible to only a tiny minority whose position in the Kenyan society is as compromised as that of the ruling class. *Ngaahika Ndeenda* was different because it reached out to the masses in a manner that made it possible for them to identify with its sentiments. The message of the play was therefore vividly brought home where it was perceived as likely to breed discontent and lead to revolt. For this reason, it had to be silenced before it proved contagious.

The authors of this "plague" could not be expected to get away unscathed, and especially Ngugi wa Thiong'o whose detention, however, was declared to have nothing to do with the banned play.[11] This is borne out by the fact that the co-author, Ngugi wa Mirii, remained at large until after Ngugi wa Thiong'o's release when both of them were subjected to constant harassment. Ngugi wa Thiong'o had been receiving regular death threats by phone for some time, after his release, when he and Ngugi wa Mirii were eventually arrested on a trumped up charge of drinking beyond licensed hours and causing a disturbance at the police station when apprehended. The case was later dismissed in court but it left no doubt that the two authors would eventually be driven to exile.

3.1.3 The Novel: *Caitaani Mutharaba-ini (Devil on the Cross)*

Devil on the Cross (Caitaani Mutharaba-ini), like the preceding play, *I Will Marry When I Want (Ngaahika Ndeenda)*, was also originally written in Gikuyu. It is partly set in the same Ilmorog as *Petals of Blood* and ridicules the same class of imperialist puppets that had come under attack in the earlier novel. But *Devil on the Cross* adopts a lighter, almost comic, tone with a cutting

satirical edge. It has all the elements of traditional folklore to make it authentic and it unfolds like an African opera, for it was meant to be visualized as a performance presented before a live audience through communal readings, as indeed was widely done.[12]

Like the play that preceded it, which was also published in 1980, the novel, *Caitaani Mutharaba-ini* was a great success that more or less matched the play in sales, copy for copy, making it hard for one not to deduce that the people who bought one also bought the other. Likewise, the Gikuyu novel also exceeded all expectations and the publishers had to reprint it twice within the first year of publication in order to meet the demand for it. *Caitaani Mutharaba-ini* also gave the lie to another commonly held notion, namely, that books in the native tongues had no market because those who could read them would rather read the English translation. For each copy of the play or novel sold, there were probably scores of other readers who borrowed it as well as hundreds of listeners who attended the communal readings. These readings narrowed the gap between the novel form and drama, for each gathering, however small, was like a live performance - many of which took place wherever Gikuyu-speaking people gathered.

The scope of the novel was further extended when it was published in Swahili translation under the title *Shetani Msalabani* [13] before being eventually issued in English as *Devil on the Cross.* [14] Above all else, Ngugi had yet again demonstrated that illiteracy was no insurmountable barrier to communicating with the masses and in so doing he had taken one more step towards becoming a traditional story-teller in the mould of the renowned West African griot.

In his contemplation of the African novel in an African language as a feasible form of communication in the present times, Ngugi himself testifies to *Caitaani Mutharaba-ini's* place in his homecoming as he asks himself the following rhetorical questions:

> Amidst massive illiteracy, amidst the conflicting phonetic systems even within the same language, amidst the new superstitions of the

> bible and the church, how can we talk meaningfully of the African novel? How could I contemplate the novel as a means of my reconnection with the people I left behind? My targeted audience - the people - were the two classes represented by Kamiriithu. How could I take a form so specifically bourgeois in its origins, authorship and consumption, for such a reconnection with a populace ridden with the problems [illiteracy, etc].[15]

These are the questions to which Ngugi had to find answers as he lay in Kamiti Maximum Security Prison, Cell 16, with nothing else to do but think of the form and content of what he intended to write as soon as he got the opportunity:

> I had been able to cope with the problem of language in theatre. What about a novel? Would I be able to overcome the problems? Kamiti Maximum Security Prison finally resolved the issue.[16]

As it turned out, he did not wait to be given the opportunity: he had to create it in defiance of his detention. He was already an accomplished writer, he had gathered his raw material as he researched for the play, *Ngaahika Ndeenda*, and he had all the time to think of nothing else. He also knew the basic connection and the common denominator between the novel form and that of the traditional oral tale:

> The African novel as an extended narrative in written form had antecedents in African oral literature. The most essential element in the oral tale as in the novel is the story, the element of what happens next. The artistry lies in the various devices for maintaining the story.[17]

The first thing that came from his prison pen, however, was not the Gikuyu novel, written on crisp institutional toilet paper of the poorest kind (but the best to write on as he often testifies in his public lectures), it was an article challenging the authorities that had imprisoned him, published the issue of *The Detainees Review Tribunal* of 23 June 1978 which concludes with a strong plea for writers to be encouraged and not persecuted for returning to their roots:

> Kenyan writers have no alternative but to return to the roots, return to the sources of their being in the rhythms of life and speech and languages of the Kenyan masses if they are to rise to the great challenge of recreating, in their poems, plays and novels, the epic grandeur of that history.[18]

Here he is talking of getting to something nearer home than what he had attained with preceding novel, *Petals of Blood*, in which he had began the process of re-writing that history. This is the essence of Ngugi's own eventual homecoming, realised - ironically - from behind the prison walls and not from where he should have been experiencing "the rhythms of life and speech and languages of the Kenyan masses". But that did not deter him from using his imagination and the ample material he had stored in his memory - including his past experience of writing *Petals of Blood* whose techniques he realised differed from what was required for the kind of reader he anticipated. He was basically still under the influence of European novelists like Conrad whose style he admired though he also had serious reservations about the setting and the content of Conrad's works, particularly the latter's ambivalence towards imperialism. The following appraisal of Conrad's style, however, reveals how much Ngugi's own style owes to Conrad, for it corresponds closely with what he goes on to say about his own techniques in *A Grain of Wheat* and *Petals of Blood* (See Section 2.1):

> But the shifting points of view in time and space; the multiplicity of narrative voices; the narrative-within-a-narration; the delayed information that helps the revision of a previous judgement so that only at the end with the full assemblage of evidence, information and points of view, can the reader make full judgement - these techniques had impressed me.[19]

On considering techniques for *Caitaani Mutharaba-ini*, Ngugi was as concerned about his audience as he was in writing *Ngaahika Ndeenda*. This was to be different from *Petals of Blood* which he admits he wrote in the European tradition, adopting a technique which is a development from what he had used earlier on for *A Grain of Wheat*. In spite of his convictions on what makes a good novel, Ngugi had reservations about adopting the same conventions - flashbacks, multiple narrators, parallel biographies, free movement in time and space, etc - to the Gikuyu novel, which he expresses as follows:

> But all this assumed a reader acquainted with the convention of reading novels, and particularly the modern novel in European languages. Would similar techniques carry the kind of reader who had been to see *Ngaahika Ndeenda (I Will Marry When I Want)* at Kamiriithu? And yet how would I return to the linear plot? [of his earliest novels] I was, in other words, much more conscious of

> my new audience. Or maybe it was a matter of languages. Would my use of Gikuyu language dictate a different kind of novel?
>
> Whatever the case, I wanted to go for a simpler plot, a simpler or clearer narrative line, stronger story element (the element of what happens next!) without looking down upon or patronising the intended worker/peasant readership.[20]

This is how Ngugi arrives at the decision to adapt elements of the Gikuyu oral narrative to his style. It is important to note that it is not the converse that is true: Ngugi does not adapt his style to the traditional oral format but rather draws from the latter. In his own words, he took three steps to resolve the problem of the conflict of style and audience:

(a) I went for a fairly simple structure, that of a simple journey. *Caitaani Mutharaba-ini (Devil on the Cross)* rests on two main journeys ... A gap of two years separates the two journeys. There are a number of flashbacks. But they are all controlled by the time and space progression on the two layers of parallel journeys that suggest other journeys.[21]

(b) I also borrowed heavily from forms of oral narrative, particularly the conversational tone, the fable, proverbs, songs and the whole tradition of poetic self-praise or praise of others.[22]

(c) I also incorporated a biblical element - the parable - because many literates would have read the bible.[23]

Ngugi's concern in blending all these elements is with how best to reach an audience which, though largely illiterate, is thoroughly conversant with their own oral narrative traditions in which the idea of the symbolic journey is well established. This is also an audience whose brush with Christianity and the teachings of the bible had left an indelible mark, in some cases including even a modicum of basic literacy. It is for these reasons that Ngugi felt that he was right in his decision to incorporate these elements in his writing style in an effort to attain his objectives:

> People would be familiar with these features and I hoped that these would help root the novel within a known tradition.[24]

But Ngugi still felt that form alone was not going to be enough to bring him success in attaining more than a tenuous hold on his new audience: he had to blend form with content to achieve this:

> Language; plot; realism of social and physical detail; features of oral narratives: all these were elements of form and I knew that form by itself, no matter how familiar and interesting, could never hold the attention of my new kind of reader for long... Content with which the people could identify or which would force them to take sides was necessary. Content is ultimately the arbiter of form. A proper marriage of content and form would decide the reception accorded the novel. So the most important thing was to go for a subject matter, for a content, which had the weight and the complexity and the challenge of their everyday struggles.[25]

Ngugi also decided to abandon strict realism and to adopt the element of shock as the best means of capturing the attention of his would-be readers, and for this he had to delve into the oral traditions again to develop the idea of a fictitious ogre-dominated community which can be equated to the capitalist-dominated Kenyan community. Also influencing his emerging vision of such a scenario was the recurrent Faust theme in European literature which he says had intrigued him for a long time,[26] causing him to seek parallels in African folklore:

> I always suspected that the story of the good man who surrenders his soul to evil for immediate earthly gains of wealth, intellect and power was universal and was rooted in the [folk]lores of the peasantry. Elements of it are to be found in many national traditions.[27]

The affirmation of the existence of such a theme in Kenyan oral literature was all that Ngugi needed to get him started on the first manuscript with the working title of *Devil on the Cross*, in English, which he subsequently abandons because of his engagement with the production of *Ngaahika Ndeenda*. Although that original story-line was lost for good and he could not remember a single incident of what he had written when he tried to recall it from prison later on, the idea of telling a story centred on the man-eating *marimu* or ogres remained on his mind as he continued to look for the narrative structure that still eluded him though he had come so close to finding it.

Ngugi's reading of the works of the Korean poet, Kim Chi Ha, had also impressed him with its effective exploitation of "oral forms and images to

confront the South Korean neo-colonial realities."[28] It was this that had set him on the course to using satire rather than straight narrative in his proposed novel: in terms of the Gikuyu oral narrative, the *ng'ano cia marimu* rather than the plain *ng'ano*. This was just what he had been looking for:

> And then one day I got it. Why not tell the story of men who had sold their souls and that of the nation to the foreign devil of imperialism? Why not tell the story of evil that takes pride in evil? Why not tell the story of robbers who take pride in robbing the masses?
>
> That was how I came to write the novel *Caitaani Mutharaba-ini* in Gikuyu language.[29]

While most critics agree that this marks a new phase in Ngugi's writing, opinions differ on the effectiveness of the translation of the spoken to the written word. Lisa Curtis takes exception to the key "simplistic satirical parable" that constitutes the central focus of the novel which she sees as severely limiting the possibilities of dramatic action "since the moral stereotypes are predetermined and all that remains is for the author to provide the particular context."[30] Such a reading risks the danger of isolating elements of the novel and focusing on them outside the context of the whole narrative structure and in universal terms that should stem from a fuller appreciation of the oral traditions from which these elements derive. Nevertheless, her criticism will not be overlooked in the following discussion of the novel.

ENDNOTES:

1. Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Ngugi wa Mirii, *Ngaahika Ndeenda*, (Heinemann, Nairobi, 1980). This title is variously translated by Gikuyu speakers as "I Will Marry When I Choose" or "I Will Marry When I Like" or "I Will Marry When I Wish".

2. Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind*, p. 57.

3. Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary*, p. 5.

4. Interview, *The Weekly Review*, 5 January 1979. [See Appendix 3A for the full text].

5. Reported in Friday Magazine, *The Daily Nation*, 10 January 1979. [See Appendix 3B].

6. See Appendix 3A for details of Ngugi's own bitter reaction to this experience.

7. Heinemann Educational Books where the present researcher was Publishing Manager when most of the titles being discussed in this study were first published.

8. *Nitaolewa Nikipenda*, translated by Clement M. Kabugi, (Heinemann, Nairobi, 1982).

9. *I Will Marry When I Want*, translated from Gikuyu by the authors, (Heinemann, Nairobi/London, 1982).

10. Ngugi discusses this overwhelming reception of *Ngaahika Ndeenda* and *Caitaani Mutharaba-ini* in *Decolonising the Mind*, pp. 82-85.

11. Ngugi himself believes that his detention order had been signed long before *Ngaahika Ndeenda* was performed. He was never told why he was detained and the various reasons advanced in the press were mere hearsay. [See Appendix 3C].

12. Ingrid Bjorkman, *Maitu Njugira: The People's Theatre in Kenya*, (Zed Books, London/New Jersey, 1989), p. 3, confirms this from her interviews with Gikuyu speakers covered in Part Four of this study.

13. Kabugi translation, *op. cit.*

14. *Devil on the Cross*, translated from Gikuyu by the author himself, (Heinemann, Nairobi/London, 1982).

15. Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind*, p. 67-68.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 73.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 69.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 73. Originally published in Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 1981, *Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary*, Heinemann, London, p. 196.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 76.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 77.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 77.

22. *Ibid.*, pp. 77-78.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 78.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 78.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 78.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 80.

27. *Ibid.*, pp. 80-81.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 81.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 81.

30. Curtis, L., 1984, "The Divergence of Art and Ideology in the Later Novels of Ngugi wa Thiong'o: A Critique", *UFAHAMU, Vol. XIII, No. 1-2*, p. 208.

3.2 THE HOMECOMING PLAY: *NGAAHIKA NDEENDA* (*I WILL MARRY WHEN I WANT*)

3.2.1 Introduction

Ngugi chose drama over fiction as the initial medium in which to explore new ideas because theatre comes nearest to oral literature. The link between the two media is **performance**, as stated by Vansina,[1] Kabira and Karega,[2] Kenyatta[3] and Kabira[4] in their respective works.

Unlike an oral performance, which only exists in itself, *Ngaahika Ndeenda* is also a written play, which has an independent existence as a transcribed text of the performance that can be emulated by other artists. The transcription offers two levels of mediators: the dramatist on the one hand and on the other hand the characters in the play. The dramatist determines the structure of the play, its dialogue and its utilisation of other literary forms as well as its possible interpretation through direct intervention in the form of stage directions to be followed by the subsequent producer/director, acting on his/her behalf. The characters in the play tell the story through the given dialogue and the actions required of them by the playwright/producer/director combination.

This split of functions - which is a characteristic of modern drama - is what draws the distinction between Ngugi's *Ngaahika Ndeenda* and a genuinely oral performance, in which they would all be undertaken by the single performer in a dramatic monologue. However, an analysis of the play and a study of the playwrights' use of oral forms is necessary in determining to what extent it

departs from the conventions of western drama to embrace the traditions of Gikuyu orature.

Since this study is more concerned with form than content, the analytical approach that is made here does not follow the conventional concern with plot, themes and characterisation, though these will be mentioned as and when necessary. Instead, the study centres on the literary forms found in Gikuyu oral literatures outlined in Part One, that is: Narrative, Dance-Song, Poetry and Proverbs.

Although it might appear unusual to start an analysis of a play by considering its **narrative** techniques, there is nothing unusual about it in the context of Gikuyu Oral Literature in which narration is equated to a total performance encompassing dance-song, poetry, proverbs and riddles. The following investigation will therefore start with an examination of the play as a narrative; the play as an African musical; and the play as a record of traditional wisdom.

Poetry will not be discussed as a separate genre because a good knowledge of the Gikuyu language is essential for a detailed analysis of the traditional verse form. A closer examination of the use of verse in the play as studied in translation would not accurately reflect the nature of the original - although it is accepted that the presentation of the entire play in verse form reflects the lofty style of the Gikuyu version itself.

Cook and Okenimkpe in their comprehensive study of Ngugi wa Thiong'o's writings say: "The main function of the verse structure is to emphasize the speech rhythms and patterns and thus make the text more intimate and easier to read."[5] What they don't say is that they are talking about the English text and not the original Gikuyu version, which alone can approximate the actual performance and "the speech rhythms and patterns" of the Gikuyu language. What needs to be said about the poetry in general is covered in the section on the narrative form which incorporates all genres, as is the tradition in Gikuyu narratives.

3.2.2 The Play as Narrative

On the surface of it, especially when viewed as a text, *Ngaahika Ndeenda* is technically similar to what could be labelled a "musical" in the western convention. Bjorkman reservedly acknowledges that "The numerous songs, dances and traditional ceremonies contained in the play make it *almost* a folk opera."[6] Cook and Okenimkpe likewise say: "the songs and dances are thematically relevant and so take on a certain operatic quality."[7] Like opera, it integrates narrative, dance and song into its structure; its plot, though not adhering to the familiar Shakespearean five acts, is rigidly structured into three movements which are divided into scenes; it attempts to follow strict unity of place, time and action; and it portrays a multiple interaction of characters whose dialogue is pre-determined and constant from one performance to another.

However, the play also shows characteristics that bring it close to the form of oral narrative. To begin with, the concept of a musical is not peculiar to western theatre. The simplest African oral narratives - even those told in the night as bed-time stories with no visuals - have always been accompanied by song. The most elaborate of oral narratives, as pointed out by Vansina[8] and Kabira and Karega,[9] usually amount to a virtuoso performance with songs that call for a multiplicity of singing voices as well as exceptional acting skills required to enact several roles that would normally be played by different actors in a conventional production. This is the total entertainment that a traditional Gikuyu audience expected and the playwrights set out to provide it.

It is essential to consider *Ngaahika Ndeenda* (even in English translation) from the point of view of the Gikuyu audience as the performance of an elaborate narrative *(ng'ano)* in which there is more than the usual single narrator representing several characters. In this carefully balanced play, what we find demonstrated is the same dichotomy in the nature of man that is reflected in the classification of the Gikuyu oral narrative into two diametrically opposed categories representing man's capacity for heroism and

messianic goodness on the one hand, and man's capacity for treachery and satanic evil on the other hand. Therefore, as an imitation of a Gikuyu oral narrative, *Ngaahika Ndeenda* can be interpreted as a dramatic inter-play of a straight epic/heroic narrative *(ng'ano)* and an ogre narrative *(ng'ano cia marimu)*. The play in thus portraying heroism as counterbalanced with villainy draws a picture of a balanced society with its saving graces as well as its unavoidable evils that are perpetually locked in battle. In the authors' socialist view, and in the Gikuyu people's "communalistic community," the ordinary peasants and workers (with whom the audience closely identifies) are cast as heroes while the well-to-do bourgeoisie are the villains. One has to bear in mind the fact that this enactment is not a trial but a celebration: it is an occasion for praising the deeds of the heroes of the liberation and the common people who had stood by them (many of whom were in the audience in Kamiriithu) as well as an opportunity to denounce the traitors and their successors who had "stolen" all the rewards of independence. The former called for a narrative of epic proportions, to lift the spirits, while the latter called for satiric treatment, to purge the penned-up animosity through laughter.

3.2.2.1 NARRATORS AS HEROES

The concept of heroism in *Ngaahika Ndeenda* agrees with the simplicity and ordinariness which Kabira associates with narrators in what she categorises as "communalistic communities," which are distinct from feudal communities that revere the extraordinary heroes.[10] In this play the heroes are the ordinary workers and peasants of the Kenyan revolution, represented by the relatively naive Kiguunda (a peasant labourer) and his self-appointed mentor, the more politically aware Gicaamba (a factory worker), and their corresponding spouses, Wangeci and Njooki - not to mention Gathoni, Kiguunda's peasant daughter who is described in the opening stage directions in terms that are closer to the idealism of folklore than to the strict requirements of theatre: "Although poorly dressed, Gathoni is very beautiful." (p. 3)

These characters are not distinctive individuals whom the playwrights examine in any depth but rather representatives of the working class and spokesmen of the masses in general. But Gicaamba stands out as a voice that is heard elsewhere in Ngugi's writings, beginning with Kimathi in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* and leading on to Karega in *Petals of Blood*, Muturi in *Devil on the Cross*, Kangethe and Kariuki in *Mother, Sing for Me* and Ngaruro wa Kiriro in *Matigari*. Kiguunda's role, however, is more challenging and perhaps more memorable as that of the simple man whose fall to the temptations of wealth and social connections and whose rise back to the recognition of the dignity of his own individuality offers more breadth for an actor to play with. And the women, though simple like their husbands, have to be seen as the militant daughters of Mumbi whose role in fighting injustice Ngugi recognises as one that will have to be increasingly acknowledged.

Although Gathoni's potential as a heroine is subverted by the opposition that corrupts her, she is firmly placed in the role of the despoiled maiden of folklore who first surfaces in the Girl in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* and subsequently recurs in more fully developed form in the roles of Wanja in *Petals of Blood*, Wariinga in *Devil on the Cross*, Nyathira in *Mother, Sing for Me* and, finally, Guthera in *Matigari*. Gathoni's liaison with the young man from the other side - considered a non-character whose shadowy presence is felt but never seen - is the equivalent of the strong-headed maiden's fall for the allure of the ogre in Gikuyu folklore (Appendices 1B and 1C). She is therefore as much a victim of circumstances as her parents are and although she is not given much opportunity to tell her side of the story, her very presence in the play is symbolic of the attractive qualities for which the workers and peasants are exploited by the ruling class. In that sense, Gathoni is the unspoken heroine of and heir to the ongoing liberation struggle originally started from such humble beginnings.

The four principal characters are the spokesmen for the silent masses. They are pitted against Kioi (a wealthy landowner and industrialist) who represents the post-independence ruling elite and their foreign partners who are accused of exploiting the masses and the nation. Kioi himself is surrounded by his

supportive wife and an ingratiating protege, Ndugire, with an equally supportive spouse - not to mention the grotesquely enormous Ikuu wa Nditika whose obesity reflects the oppressive weight which the wealthy class place on the have-nots. In the clash between Kiguunda and Kioi - which is depicted as a class conflict - the moral victory and the playwrights' sympathy are clearly with the underdogs.

In *Ngaahika Ndeenda*, although the playwrights avoid the direct use of a narrating persona, the voices of the principal characters - especially Gicaamba - often come close to echoing that of the conventional narrator who is often used to provide continuity in the play. This is particularly prominent in situations where the characters are reminiscing about the past. That the dramatists portray their protagonists in the image of the traditional oral narrator who put everything into his performance, as asserted by Vansina[11] and Kabira and Karega,[12] is evidenced by the detailed description often given in the stage directions, particularly in connection with Gicaamba's rhetoric skills: "He uses a lot of movement, gestures, mimicry, miming, imitation, impersonation, any and every dramatic device to convey his message" (p. 33). To some extent this is evidence of the novelist in Ngugi anxious to lay it all down, for this reflects the narrator back-stage talking behind the narrator on-stage as it were. The novelist's eye for details that exceed the requirements of the stage and would be lost in a normal production is also evident in the stage directions on pages 42-43.

In the following passage, Gicaamba, on recollecting the trauma of colonial repression of the spirit of nationalism, speaks in a voice which might as well have been assigned to a conventional narrator:

> It was soon after this
> That the colonial government
> Forbade people to sing or dance,
> It forbade a gathering of more than five.
> But we went on meeting clandestinely.
> We the workers in factories and plantations said in one voice:
> We reject slave wages!
> Do you remember the 1948 general strike? (pp. 67-68)

This leads to the portrayal of that historical confrontation in an almost cinematic flashback that differs from the technique of the oral narrator who often has only his acting skills to dramatise his account. The use of the collective "we" has the effect of forging unity between the actor on stage and the audience, thus heightening the emotion and whipping up a sympathetic response as any good orator would do, to the point of even manipulating the audience as Kabira and Karega suggest.[13] Gicaamba plays the same role when he recalls the beginning of the Mau Mau guerrilla warfare and his own role in it as follows:

> It was soon after this that
> I too fled into the mountains
> To join the people's guerrilla army
> Here in Limuru
> We were led by Waruingi and other patriots. (p. 70)

The use of real names, as in the above passage, is restricted to historical facts. These are the names of Mau Mau warriors who, like Dedan Kimathi, had gone from history to the realms of legend and myth. Waruingi's name would be well known to the local audience - and especially to the partisan audience at the Kamiriithu Cultural Centre where the play was hatched and premiered. Otherwise, Gicaamba in his historical account deliberately omits actual names in telling a story that applies to the community as a whole: "Remember the son of...eeeh...you know who I mean" (p. 35). This is a common feature in oral narratives where names, if used, are not very specific to particular individuals and are often figurative rather than real.

Kiguunda, on recollecting the birth of the spirit of nationalism, speaks in the collective voice of a commentator giving background information, a role that is reminiscent of the chorus in classical drama who served a similar purpose:

> Oh, seven years were not even over
> When we began
> To sing new songs with new voices,
> Songs and voices demanding
> Freedom for Kenya, our motherland. (p.25)

This is also the lead-up to the dramatization of the spirit of freedom that Wangeci then supportively takes over with her recollection of the courageous and heroic stand of "The Olungereni women" against colonial harassment:

> I myself have always remembered
> The Olungereni women,
> The ones driven from their lands around Nakuru
> To be exiled to Yatta, the land of black rocks.
> They passed through Limuru
> Caged with barbed wire in the backs of several lorries.
> But still they sang songs
> With words that pierced one's heart like a spear.
> The songs were sad, true,
> But the women were completely fearless
> For they had faith and were sure that,
> One day, this soil will be returned to us. (p. 26)

The lyricism and depth of emotion in these words are all part of the Gikuyu oral tradition. Enacted on the stage, the words would have a profound effect on the local audience to whom they are addressed. To this audience, it is not just history recalled for the sake of reminiscing: these are the dispossessed masses whose land was expropriated by the colonial government and passed on to the new ruling elite at independence. For them, the prospect of one day getting back their land - as so eloquently expressed here - is a very emotive one. After all the disappointment with the freedom these people fought for and made sacrifices for, the playwrights realise that the sagging spirits of this *iregi* generation need to be bolstered and the fire of revolution rekindled for another fight for social justice. In this they become the modern story-tellers, like Kabebe in Kabira's study,[14] who speak of the past while actually addressing today's wrongs.

The song that follows Wangeci's narration is not just a mere external embellishment and a modernism, it is both an extension of her praise, lifted to a different level of sensitivity, and a chorus that forms an integral part of the Gikuyu narrative tradition of giving the narrator moral support and an endorsement of her statement by showing communal empathy with her in song form. This creates the sense of unity which is emphasized in the lines of the chorus (discussed later in this chapter) that say:

Great love I found there
Among women and children
A bean fell to the ground
And it was shared among them. (p.27)

Responding to Wangeci's song in the style of the oral narrative in which song blends effortlessly with dialogue, with hardly a break, Kiguunda steps in as a narrator/chorus to tell the running story and stir up the emotions of the audience on-stage and off-stage:

It was then
That the state of Emergency was declared over Kenya.
Our patriots,
Men and women of
Limuru and the whole country,
Were arrested!
The Emergency law became very oppressive.
Our homes were burn down.
We were jailed,
We were taken to detention camps,
Some of us were crippled through beatings.
Others were castrated.
Our women were raped with bottles.
Our wives and daughters raped before our eyes! (p. 27)

This list of atrocities, though not comprehensive, nevertheless touches everyone in a Gikuyu audience in one way or other. The euphoria over the independence that followed: "We beat the whites/ And freedom came.../ We raised high our national flag" (p. 27) and its ultimate letdown that has the capacity to render a man like Kiguunda helpless with frustration, is not something new but an experience they are all familiar with. So when he speaks he talks for them all, telling the story of their collective disillusionment, symbolised by the title-deed to the "one and a half acres of land in dry plains" (p. 28) which he looks at as he ponders over the ten years since independence, years which have seen him reduced to a mere labourer.

Such is the fate of Ngugi's folk hero who finds himself propelled by circumstances and his own political naivete towards a head-on confrontation with traitors and villains on the opposition side. We are conscious throughout that he is just an ordinary peasant (like the majority of the people in the audience) and not a super-hero like the legendary Dedan Kimathi

or even the idolised "Patriot Son of Njeeri" whose story is a clear example of the narrative-within-the-narrative.

The Patriot's story (pp. 58-59) is a set-piece that has no direct bearing on the drama on-stage, but it is an ideal vehicle for Gicaamba as a character to demonstrate his skill in moving the audience to higher aspirations and sacrifice through example. Such a narrative also offers the actor a great opportunity to enact a whole drama in which there are at least three voices: Gicaamba's own narrating voice, Patriot Son of Njeeri's dissident voice, and the priest's wheedling voice. Its text echoes *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*, and its heroic loftiness helps lift the heroes of *Ngaahika Ndeenda* - who are not principally men of action and great deeds but tellers of these deeds - to higher levels themselves.

3.2.2.2 THE VILLAINS AS CARICATURES

For the requirements of drama, the villains in *Ngaahika Ndeenda* are not of secondary importance to the heroes. On the Kamiriithu stage they were rendered even more interesting by the fact that they were acting out the roles of the ogres whose evil-doing calls for an element of exaggeration and the suspense of realism, thus inviting ridicule and laughter rather than animosity from the audience. The actors taking these roles face the daunting task of making what are only caricatures appear like real people, each played with a straight face, calling for greater restraint in resisting the temptation to laugh with the audience.

The villains of the piece are seen from the point of view of a popular audience for which they have to be drawn on easily identifiable stereotypes. The wealth that the villains flaunt before their opponents has to be seen as an affront on the vast majority of the audience who are poor themselves. The villains' general conduct is depicted as a subversion of the accepted conventions of etiquette among the Gikuyu people. Their lack of hospitality, their inhumanity, their hypocrisy and their greed for material wealth are all

satirised in the characters of Ahab Kioi wa Kanoru and his wife Jezebel (whose names are loaded with allusions);[15] the Kiois' permanent house guests, Samuel and Helen Ndugire (representing the *nouveau riche*), and the grotesque Ikuu wa Nditika who affirms the characterisation of the whole group as closely parallelled on the diabolic ogres in *Devil on the Cross*.

The actors playing these roles are also required to bring to their performance the kind of acting skill that a good narrator would put into his or her depiction of the kind of absurdity that Helen and Jezebel indulge in when they say their long-winded and self-conscious grace before meals (pp. 44-45) and after meals (pp. 82-83), respectively. The caricaturing of these characters can give great satisfaction to both the actors on stage and the audience. As Cook and Okenimkpe point out:

> The acting out of the daily wrongs in this social structure must stir ready response in an experienced village audience. Disjointed resentment and complaints are marshalled into coherent protest.[16]

Ndugire's hardly disguised self-appraisal is caricatured when he stands up (as if at a convention) and introduces himself with a testimony which is a clear precursor of the testimonies at the Devil's Feast in *Devil on the Cross* in its pompousness, hypocrisy, sadism and total disregard for the common people:

> My name is Samuel Ndugire
> I am a man who has received the tender mercy of the Lord,
> Since the year 1963.
> Before then I used to be a very bad homeguard.
> I used to kill people,
> And to do many other terrible deeds
> As was the habit among the homeguards of those days.
> In our village they had baptized me Kimeenderi
> Because of the way I used to crush people's heads.
> But the Lord called unto me in 1963,
> It was the midnight of December twelve,
> And he told me:
> Ndugire...the only good freedom is that of the soul.
> Follow me now,
> And I shall make you a fisher of men... (pp. 45-46)

This is not only the voice of a man who knows he will not be called to account for his deeds, but also the voice of one who has the assurance of having been

amply rewarded for them. It is the dramatists' indictment of the class that had benefited from the colonial legacy. Being an unsolicited and shameless confession, thus witnessed by the multitudes in the audience, it stands completely indefensible. With this self-righteous and remorseless prelude, Ndugire then goes on to further incriminate himself by openly parading his acquisitiveness and assuming a dismissive attitude that takes umbrage in the transparently vacuous pretence at self-effacement. His credibility as a character is relentlessly demolished through painstakingly sustained understatements which wash out the mask of respectability until the ogre beneath is exposed. Ndugire's monologue (p. 46) is the voice of the "smug individualist" whom Cook and Okenimkpe also describe as a "modern egotist" who fervently believes (like a caricature from George Orwell's *Animal Farm*) that some people are more equal than others because God did not make all people equal "like teeth". In the play, his understatements sharply contrast with Kioi's overstatements.

The knack for double-talk is nowhere better illustrated than in the apparently unplanned but carefully executed plan that Kioi lays down so as to obtain Kiguunda's plot of land. Having hooked the peasant couple into the idea of wedding in church in the hope of forming closer ties with his own family, Kioi bides his time until Kiguunda himself willingly puts his neck into the noose. Toying with his intended victim and speaking with the self-assured exaggerations of the man who has made it in life, he says:

> Kiguunda, you are a very wealthy man,
> Only that you don't care to know:
> You have a lot of land, one and a half acres.
> You have a full time job.
> How many thousands who in Kenya today
> Cannot boast about a space large enough for a grave even? (p. 86)

With that he then lures Kiguunda into taking a bank loan with the precious title-deed as security, knowing very well that once the deal was concluded (ironically with his assistance) he would then get the bank to foreclose it when the peasant had no means of making the immediate repayment demanded. These are the tactics of the two-faced monsters (i.e. ogres) who act as the intermediaries of neo-colonialism in the exploitation of the masses which is

most conspicuously represented by the symbolic loss of land, equated with the loss of motherland at large. Cook and Okenimkpe describe this on-going dispossession of the masses as follows:

> Expropriation of land by white settlers has been reduced to grabbing the few impoverished acres left to the [masses] through chicanery and confidence tricks, by a ruthless elite subserving the demands of international corporations. A snobbish class system underpins the exploitation of the [people]. The complacent, hymn-singing rich extol the virtues of such minions as have been schooled into willing acceptance of their derisory wages.[17]

Kioi drops the ogre's mask to reveal his true identity when the Kiguundas approach him with the news of Gathoni's pregnancy by his son and a demand that the two young people marry before Kiguunda and Wangeci's own church wedding, which Kioi and his wife had motivated. Kioi contemptuously laughs them off, precipitating a confrontation that irrevocably marks the end of their relationship and their withdrawal back to their different worlds: Kioi to the realms of fantasy and Kiguunda back to the realities of struggle.

3.2.3 *Ngaahika Ndeenda*: A Celebration of Culture

There are two senses in which *Ngaahika Ndeenda* can be viewed as a celebration of culture: in its comprehensive integration of Gikuyu songs and rituals into the dramatic form and in its promotion of the Gikuyu ethos reflected in the proverbs and sayings that the play popularises. These elements, together with the narrative, made an enormous impact on the audience in Kamiriithu - particularly the Gikuyu speakers (who were the majority) for whom this was a homecoming too, for these songs and dances and sayings had been prohibited for a long time and the Gikuyu culture as a whole had been driven underground because of its close associations with the Mau Mau revolt.

3.2.3.1 SONG, DANCE AND RITUAL IN PERFORMANCE

Song and dance form an integral part of *Ngaahika Ndeenda* as a "total" performance in the tradition of the Gikuyu oral narrative. The repertoire of traditional songs which the playwrights incorporate into the drama is not randomly picked but is carefully selected from the popular songs that have been time-tested and proved appropriate to the various occasions that are being emulated here. This repertoire is so extensive that it even includes religious songs which are not strictly traditional but reflect the inroads that Christianity has made into Gikuyu culture. The temptation is to try and classify the songs in the play into categories like: songs that set the mood of the play (thematic); songs that celebrate the Gikuyu way of life (cultural); songs that transmit historical events like the liberation war (political); and songs that refer to spiritual beliefs (religious). But this is only the dramatists' usages of songs that traditionally have no classification other than what is outlined in Part One above. The Gikuyu community is flexible in the actual usage of songs across different ceremonies as indeed illustrated in *Petals of Blood* when a *Gitiiro* (wedding song) is performed on an evening when the harvest and the circumcision ceremonies are both being celebrated. For the production of *Ngaahika Ndeenda* at Kamiriithu, the selection of the dance-song material was not entirely left to the writers, as Ngugi wa Thiong'o himself testifies when he acknowledges the invaluable contribution of the peasants and workers in shaping the drama into an authentic representation of Gikuyu culture and history. (p. 146 above)

The dramatists themselves view their work as an African opera in the tradition of the oral performance. The transcript of the play is only an imitation of its potential transformation into a performance in which the "songs" (which are presented here only as loose translations into English) would become "dances" in a live enactment of Gikuyu culture at its most vibrant.

It is evident on examining the text that the authors must have researched extensively in order to put together such a variety of songs, covering many of the categories outlined above in Part One. Song, dance and ritual together

take up a large part of the text, but not as much as in the actual performance when the audience's response turns to participation and has the effect of considerably extending the time taken by song and dance. Cook and Okenimkpe acknowledge this fact when they say:

> More than a quarter of the printed text involves singing and ceremonial forms, which would occupy an even greater proportion of stage time.[18]

Indeed on stage these elements - particularly dance-songs - would act like an open invitation for audience participation, thus extending performance in terms of time as well as creating greater identity with the audience by bridging the gap between performers and audience. Although the songs do not quite span the full spectrum of the classification of the *nyimbo* genre as detailed by Kabira and Karega[18] for understandable dramatic reasons, the play contains well over thirty songs - including the repetitions used to enhance dramatic effect.

The dance-song sequences are not random but are skilfully integrated into the structure of the play. It is through this multi-medium that the authors succeed in involving the audience in a response that obscures the difference between the actors on the stage and the audience at large, creating one entity which Cook and Okenimkpe refer to as "the actuality of a traditional communalism."[20] Even for a Gikuyu audience that understands the dialogue, song and dance constitute a bonding agent calculated to incite an immediate response:

> The primary strengths of the play remain the vigour of its song and dance patterns, and its forceful, detailed assertion of social injustice as part of an unambiguous, class-based protest.[21]

> The essential pulse of the drama, heightening and complementing the cry for social justice, is felt in the carefully designed sequences of song, dance and incantation.[22]

In western theatre the dance-song medium is principally used to set the moods of the musical or opera, though it might also act as the vehicle of allusions that would add to an understanding and/or enjoyment of the performance. This medium is also the one that most distinguishes *Ngaahika Ndeenda* from any

conventional musical and makes it virtually impossible to perform outside the context of Gikuyu culture for a non-Gikuyu or non-Kenyan audience. This is because the song goes beyond its lyrics - which anyone can learn - and its melody - which is absent in this transcription and can not be adequately substituted. The production of the play outside Kenya would necessarily call for the reduction of the importance of the songs to an expression of moods and only a little meaning as they would bear no resemblance to the original. For that reason, this study avoids the temptation to make an analysis of the many songs that were so vital for the success of the Kamiriithu production. However, a mention of a selection of the songs is essential in showing what contribution they make to the form and content of the play.

Most significant, perhaps, is the song that gives the play its title and the one which is also used to emphasize Kiguunda's selfhood:

Ngaahikania Ndeenda	I shall marry when I want
Mubia ni atuire	While all padres are still alive
Na ngaahika ndeenda	And I shall get married when I want
Wamwari ni atuire!	While all nuns are alive! (pp. 4/108)

Similar to that in sentiment and equally pivotal is asserting Kiguunda's self-respect is the praise-song with which he defiantly awaits the imminent visit by the Kiois. Reacting to his wife Wangeci's frantic preparations and incessant nagging, Kiguunda is forced to stand up and assert his authority in his own home, however poor it is materially. This is expressed in a song in which he asks himself a rhetorical question which is also a challenge to his wife for appearing not to accord him due respect by fretting about other people and disturbing his peace of mind:

Guuku ni kwa u?	Whose homestead is this?
Guuku ni kwa u?	Whose homestead is this?
Guuku ni kwa u?	Whose homestead is this?
Ndiitemanie	So that I can roll in the dust
Ta njau ya mbogo	Like the calf of a buffalo
Hui wainaga.	I am free to do so. (p. 14)

Then, spurred by Wangeci's refusal to respond, he answers himself boastfully, thus reassuring himself of his own status in face of the suspense he otherwise tries to suppress:

Guuku ni gwakwa	This is mine own homestead
Guuku ni gwakwa	This is mine own homestead
Guuku ni gwakwa	This is mine own homestead
Ndeenda gwitemanie	
ndiitemanie	If I want to roll in the dust
Hui wainaga.	I am free to do so. (p. 14)

The allusion in this song is to Kiguunda's individuality and right to self-determination as the master of his own home and his own life which no one - not even the powerful Kioi - can deny him. The reference to rolling in the dust does not suggest penitence or humility but the freedom to wallow in his liberty - even if that means debasing himself and letting go of his animal emotions if he wants to. It is the same sentiment as in the title song and in the final analysis it is the ultimate assertion of one's selfhood irrespective of material wealth or position in society. Such an assertion is quite distinct from the individualism which the Gikuyu community frowns on: what Cook and Okenimkpe call "the smug individualism of those who have succeeded in skimming the fat off the present-day system" and which they contrast with "The vigorous idealism of Mau Mau camaraderie ... brought live to the stage."[23]

One of the most emotive topics in Kenya today is the disillusionment over independence, which is seen as having been granted to the conspirators who aided the colonial powers, i.e. as a further effort to thwart the aspirations of the liberators who had exerted pressure on the British to relinquish power. Many of the Gikuyu songs revolve around this subject, usually calling for action to punish treachery and reward heroism. It is this wealth of songs that the playwrights harness to the narrative plot, combining the requirements for entertainment with the more serious purpose of rousing political consciousness - something that Gikuyu narrators have always felt to be their responsibility to the community that looked upon them as "instruments of social mobilisation" in times of crisis.[24]

The *Gitiiro* is a dance-song form reserved for the older age-group and performed exclusively by women. In the play the first *Gitiiro* is not quite a genuine one, for it is not allowed to develop to its fullest potential. This is only one verse, started by Njooki in response to Gicaamba's moving account

of the exploitation of the poor by the rich. What it amounts to is a series of proverbs (discussed further on) which end up in a lament over the disappointing outcome of the freedom war. It is treated as a deliberate interruption that, however, fails in its objective of distracting Gicaamba from his hot-headed oratory against foreign domination and exploitation which reasserts itself in spite of her warnings to the men to stop talking politics. [The Kenyan audience would be fully aware of the implications of such a warning, for Ngugi wa Thiong'o himself was detained without trial soon after this play was banned.]

The real *Gitiiro* - which Ngugi wa Thiong'o enthuses about in the statement quoted in Section 3.1 (p. 172) - is performed later on in the play as part of the majestic traditional wedding ceremony *(Ngurario)* in which Gicaamba and Njooki re-enact their nuptial as a reminder to the wavering Kiguunda and Wangeci that their own traditional marriage was as blessed as any church wedding and more meaningful.

As Cook and Okenimkpe point out, in this scene: "The wholehearted togetherness of the time-honoured village marriage ceremony is captured before the audience."[25] Even though this too is only make-believe, it is vastly different from the pretence of Kiguunda and Wangeci's Christian wedding (in borrowed garments and in the isolation of their home) later in the play which lacks the very real communal celebration of the *Ngurario* in this episode.

Most Gikuyu songs, no matter what the subject, usually end up making a political statement. The *Gitiiro* discussed above, for example, ends with a reference to the controversial subject of stolen land whose recovery symbolises the true liberation of the nation as a whole:

Aagaciku:	AAGACIKU: Now you have seen
Ni mwaigua ni twendia Njooki riu	We have given away the hand of Njooki
Kwa mbari i ngumo ya mbui	To the Mbui clan, famous in war&peace
Tucooke na thuutha tukarime	Let's now go back and cultivate our fields
Turore kana ni tuukuona	While seeking ways of getting back
Ng'undu ciitu ciathiire na ngeretha	Lands stolen from us by the whites.
Oothe: *(Kuruma)*	ALL: (Applause/ Agreement)

Aambui:	AAMBUI:
Tunyiitane mooko meeri	Yes, we join our two hands
Turore kana twatooria	To see if we can defeat the enemy
Thu ciitu cia bururi	Of this, our land
Bururu uyu mwega wa Kirinyaga	Our beautiful land of Mount Kenya. (p.66)

While this may sound like tradition being used to sustain history, it is in fact a case of history being used by tradition to mobilise the masses into realising its strength and gearing up for a showdown with those who had taken over the lands that had been stolen by whites. The audience is not being asked to look to the past and its failures but to the future and its hopes of victory. This is re-affirmed by the fact that the women thereafter close the *Gitiiro* sequence with a different dance-song expressing joy and triumph, not just for the Aambui clan in winning a wife, but for the masses as a whole.

In a carefully balanced sequence, the women's song is followed by a children's dance-song which is immediately followed by the men's dance-song - completing the social cycle, endorsing the women's call for political action, and expressing a readiness to return to the mountains where the liberation war had been fought. The men's song is loaded with allusions, not least of which is the reminder that the hero, in whose homestead the re-dedication to the struggle is being made, is no other than Kiguunda whose earlier efforts to assert his selfhood, followed by the relapse initiated by the Kioi visit to his home, are now echoed in the renewed effort to stop him (and others like him in the audience) from falling by the wayside:

> In whose homestead do you raise the dust of vigour?
> In whose homestead do you raise the dust of happiness?
> I holding a gun in the mountains.
> For I see the soot here hangs long and loose from the roof
> I holding a gun in the mountains.
> Whose homestead is this?
> Whose homestead is this?
> I holding a gun in the mountains.
> So I can roll down like the young rhino
> I holding a gun in the mountains.
> Mother ululate for me
> Mother ululate for me[28]
> I holding a gun in the mountains.
> For a white woman once raised hue and cry against me
> I holding a gun in the mountains. (p. 67)

The refrain: "I holding a gun in the mountain" *(Ndi na biinduki mirima-ini)* is clearly a rallying call to "real" men for revolution. The homestead where "the soot hangs long and loose from the roof" is a neglected homestead where the man no longer stands up erect (he is merely long and loose) and where even the traditional weapon like the spear (another phallic inference) has been left to overgrow with soot in the roof where it is normally kept when not needed for battle (also a sexual allusion).

Men, however, rarely come under direct attack in Gikuyu culture as women often do. The rivalry between men and women dates back to the days when the Gikuyu were ruled by women until they were overthrown by men. As Kabira and Karega point out, women are: "At times seen as very important members of the community and with a crucial role to play." They point out that - depending on circumstances - there are times when "a woman is seen as a mother, family provider, a teacher of her children and an adviser." This, they say, is more commonly reflected in narratives than in song:

> It is however important to remember that song as a medium of communication that deals with changing circumstances and responds to immediate challenges and changes, is not only flexible but also more clearly reflects the contradictions in the society.[27]

But song is not a fixed form as people might think, for all it takes is a change of word or inflection to alter the meaning and convey a subtly different meaning, often on the spur of the moment. The *Gicaandi* players - who are usually men only - are particularly vocal in their demeaning of women though singers in general show the same tendency. The examples quoted by Kabira and Karega are very similar to the song that Gicaamba sings when Wangeci - in her disappointment with Kiguunda for slipping into drunkenness - vents her frustrations on Gathoni who had been driven away from home to become a barmaid. Condemning society for its failure to guide the younger generation and for having always oppressed women, Gicaamba sings a song that demonstrates just the kind of attitude he is critical of:

Aka na ng'ombe itiri ndugu Women and property are not friends
Aka eeri ni nyuungu igiri cia uogi Two women are two pots of poison
Aka na iguru matimenyangirwo Women and the heavens are unpredictable
Aka matiri cia ndiiro no cia yiniko Women cannot keep secrets
Cia aka ciitikaggio ciaraara. A woman's word is believed only after the event. (p. 105)

This is a good example of how proverbs and songs merge into a blend of what is traditionally taken to be wisdom. In this context, however, that age-old wisdom is brought to question and its prejudices laid bare and thus rendered baseless. This way they can be discarded and a new beginning made in the relationship between men and women who should be natural allies and never enemies as the very survival of society and mankind in general depends on it. Thus the song that might have stirred up controversy in a different context is skilfully used to lay the foundation for Kiguunda's return to the community after his slip and to prepare for the reconciliation between him and his wife following their almost ritualistic fight which is used as a safety valve to release their penned up emotions. Its friendly tone restores the easy comradely feeling between husband and wife and between the two couples, the Kiguundas and the Gicaambas. This ultimate reconciliation is more than just personal: it is the precursor of the desired communal healing of wounds in preparation for the renewed struggle to establish a more just society:

Uka muraata Come my friend
Uka muraata Come my friend
Twaranirie, riu Let's reason together
Turi na kieha Our hearts are heavy
Ni undu wa ciana Over the future of our children
Uthire nduma Let's find ways of driving darkness
Bururi witu. From the land. (pp. 106/114)

This is also a song which looks to the future, not to the past: it is concerned with children and future generations, not just parents and traditions of the past. It is a song calling for change and revolution, beginning at the personal before it can be realised at the communal level.

In Gikuyu orature the song is usually the next most important medium to the narrative itself in transmitting messages or information in a form that is most readily memorable. But the medium is also highly flexible and therefore

more manoeuvrable, which could make it unreliable as a vehicle for transmitting history - a point whose importance Kabira and Karega come close to over-stating when they say:

> Song unlike narrative is more responsive to actual happenings in society and therefore a more reliable record of historical events. Often narratives with the exception of some myths, are fictional and cannot be taken as historical records. In the Agikuyu community many historical records are seen in songs.[28]

The Gikuyu people are responsible for the majority of the freedom songs that are still popularly sung in Kenya today. These songs give spirit to the kind of processions which are dramatised in *The trial of Dedan Kimathi* and in *Ngaahika Ndeenda*. They serve to emphasize the sense of community that characterises the Gikuyu society. In a Kenyan theatre production such songs (pp. 25-28) are guaranteed to get the audience on its feet, singing along with the performers on stage in the tradition of Gikuyu orature.

Gicaamba and Kiguunda's song of unity, which they sing as they dance round the stage to the women's disapproval, is the culmination of their virulent attacks on foreign exploitation of and underdevelopment of Africa. The opportunity of openly singing these "forbidden songs" in public without fear of reprisal was one that the Kamiriithu audience could not pass. It is like a letting off of pent-up emotions even though the characters and the audience know that the resolution of the problem is futile, for real freedom is yet to come:

I ageni mari Kenya i	Foreigners in Kenya
Marutirwo mirigo	Pack your bags and go
Eene mucii meegukinya.	The owners of the homestead have come.
Ndirithagia baba i	I'll defend my fatherland
Na ruthaanju rwa iregi	With the sword of revolution
I tugithii kugiirima.	As we go to the war of liberation.

(pp. 41-42)

It should be noted that in the Kenyan context the reference to "foreigners" does not apply to all non-Kenyans, black or white, but rather to the land-holding remnants of the colonial legacy and, to a lesser extent, the multi-national corporations which had taken over large estates and industries and are said to be maintaining a stranglehold on the Kenyan economy. Such songs - and especially in the context of a dramatic performance - are meant to express

solidarity among the people rather than a general resentment for all foreigners, many of whom were in the Kamiriithu audience. This is where the use of Gikuyu rather than English has a dramatic and cushioning effect, as the foreigner in the audience is not expected to understand what is being said.

At a thematic level, the words of the song echo *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* and *Petals of Blood* while also anticipating *Devil on the Cross, Mother Sing for Me* and *Matigari*. In this context, ironically, it is not the heroic liberators like Matigari who arrive on cue when the two men sing: "The owners of the homestead have come." Instead it is Kioi and his group who arrive to start staking their claim for even the little that Kiguunda is worth. The Gikuyu audience would not miss this point, for it is like a reminder that it is not the foreigners who are the problem in independent Kenya but the familiar native beneficiaries of the colonial legacy (the former homeguards and the collaborators) who had made a show of taking over from the foreigners and then invited them back to continue to exploit the new nation in which these bourgeoisie are content to be "the watchdogs". Gicaamba is able to follow up the spirit of his song with a show of bravado but Kiguunda is clearly too over-awed and naive to recognise the enemy when he sees him.

The heroic story of Patriot Son of Njeeri gives rise to a brief dance-song extolling his patriotism which is turned into a historical fact by being directly contrasted with the treachery of two of the best known collaborators, vilified for undermining Kenya's liberation war by siding with the colonial government. This song (p. 59) is almost like an oath and that is how a Gikuyu audience would see it, being familiar with such oaths (pp. 68-70) which to them are the only means of expressing solidarity and ensuring lasting loyalty to the community. The Gikuyu people value loyalty to the community above any other virtues. This much is also expressed in the following song which the warriors sing after initiation:

Twaathiiaga tukeneete,	We were happy as we went to battle
Tugacooka tukeneete,	We were happy as we returned victorious
Rugeendo rwitu rwari rwega	Our spirits were high
Tugithii na tugicooka	As we went and returned.

Na twakinya ruui Ruiru	When we got to Ruiru River
Tugikora ruiyuriite	We found it in floods
Waruingi akiuga twake ndaraca	Waruingi ordered us to make a bridge
Gutiri wa iregi utuire.	Death in struggle is welcome.
Twathiaathia hanini	A little further on
Tugikora kamwendia andu	We came across a traitor,
Gakiuga ni geekuuga mbu	Who threatened to shout our presence
Waruingi akiuga karekwo koige	Waruingi said, let him shout
Koigithanio na njiruungi.	And a bullet will shout him down. (p. 70)

This is a good example of how a song can become a narrative within a narrative, thus narrowing the boundaries between genres. This song tells a complete story of an event that we can assume must be historical from the naming of the hero of the day whose deeds would be familiar to the Gikuyu audience. The only real name in the song (apart from an actual geographical location, the River Ruiru near Nairobi) is repeated in the last two stanzas to ensure that it can be easily recalled and transmitted as the song passes from singer to listener, and the listener himself or herself subsequently becomes another singer performing to a different audience.

The idea of the traitor shouting the warriors' presence to betray them originates from a proverb which says: "The antelope hates less he who sees it/ Than he who shouts its presence." The moral of the saying is that it is better to turn a blind eye on what is none of one's business than to draw the adverse attention of others to it. This proverb, which is recurrently used in both *Ngaahika Ndeenda* and *Caitaani Mutharaba-ini*, shows how Ngugi adapts the same material to different mediums and different works and how he integrates traditional images into the themes running through his works.

The freedom songs, however, are not the last of the political songs in the play, popular as they are with audiences. The drama reaches its climax with the "trumpet song" which provides the grand finale. This is no less than the final call - as on Doomsday - to the masses to wake up and take positive action to bring about the beginning of what Ngugi wa Thiong'o once described as "A New Earth."[28] This last song (as in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*) is

designed to bring the audience to its feet in response to the call that is in reality addressed to them:

Coro wa athiini ni muhuuhe	The trumpet of the masses has been blown
Tuhuunjirie araata aitu	Let's preach to all our friends
Coro wa athiini ni muhuuhe	The trumpet of the masses has been blown
Tugarurire nyimbo ciitu	We change to new songs
Ni amu ituika ri hakuhi.	For the revolution is near. (p. 115)

Changing to new songs implies breaking with the past, learning from mistakes, and adapting to different times. The key to success, as the song goes on to emphasize, lies in just one word - **organization**. That is the ultimate message of the play: the people must get down to organising themselves for resistance. And that is what the authorities in Kenya saw as the danger lurking behind the cultural event in Kamiriithu. It is with the simple words of this song - which were so easy to memorize and repeat - that the Ngugis seek to mobilize the masses to rededicate themselves to the cause of liberation. The song thus qualifies as a suitable ending to a play that aims to rouse workers and peasants to new consciousness: to make them aware that they can be masters of their own destiny and that they have the power to make A New Earth.

The category that might be termed "religious songs" in *Ngaahika Ndeenda* deserves some consideration even though these songs do not deal with traditional Gikuyu religion. The flexibility of the dance-song medium, its ability to deal with changing circumstances, and its capacity for accommodating contradictions in society are affirmed by Kabira and Karega in the passage quoted above. (p. 194) This accounts for the existence of songs about the Christian religion in Gikuyu culture in spite of nearly a century of animosity towards Christianity. In the play there are two kinds of songs dealing with the dichotomous response of the Gikuyu people to the advent and proliferation of the Christian religion in their community: those that appear to embrace the alien faith at face value and those that try to ridicule it out of existence.

The first kind are assigned to two different groups: the ironically named "sect of the poor" who appear to spend all their time literally drumming up donations to build churches or send to the mother church in America on the one

hand, and on the other the "born again" sect of the Kiois that invariably fails to practice what it preaches. The second kind comes from the traditionalists as a mocking gesture or a response to provocation. The fact that both kinds of song, in the final analysis, aim to undermine the plethora of evangelical Christian sects that one finds in Kenya, speaks for the attitude of the playwrights towards religion.

Typically, the sect of the poor which calls for the crushing of the Satan of poverty, the Satan of theft, the Satan of robbery, and the Satan of oppression, seeks to ensure its fund-raising success by singing a familiar song of doom that claims "the second coming is near" (p. 8). The longer the list of Satans who must be crushed is, the more it smacks of hypocrisy. All it takes to prove this right is Kiguunda's failure to make a donation (because he genuinely has no money), which at once changes the theme of the song to the crushing of the devil of stinginess, the devil of darkness... and so on, but for Kiguunda's chasing away the group. This song is interesting for anticipating *Devil on the Cross* in which the double standards and two-faced nature of this kind of religion is more fully explored. Its reference to the second coming also echoes *Petals of Blood*. A link is thus established between past, present and future within Ngugi's own writing.

When the same group returns to the stage towards the end of the play, singing the same old song, this time they succeed in "reaping" Wangeci's last shilling in the prevailing spirit of reconciliation. Here the dramatists are highlighting the commercialisation of religion which the "new sects" in particular are often accused of doing, for instead of giving help to the needy and destitute, they demand payment, and instead of showing sympathy to those who do not have anything to give, they become offended and even abusive. This is contrary to Christ's teaching which becomes of secondary importance to the fund collection, earning these sects the reputation of being churches for the rich who can afford to buy their way to heaven - as Ikuu wa Nditika in this play would put it. The second time round, therefore, because of Wangeci's shilling, she is treated to "the hymn of harvest" which, however, is not devoid of its barb:

We bring you this offering, oh Lord,
It is the fruit of our toil on the land.
Take it Lord and bless it
Take it Lord and bless it.
If you give in a tiny calabash,
In heaven you will be paid in a similar container.
If you give in a wide basin,
In heaven you will be paid in a similar container.
And if you don't give anything,
You too will never receive blessings... (p. 112)

Evidently, this prayer not only excludes the others (besides Wangeci) who gave no donation, but it also restricts the measure of her blessings to a quantifiable amount corresponding with her shilling. This is not what true Christianity is all about. There are other contradictions as well: like "the fruit of our toil on the land" which would appear to refer to the rewards of Wangeci's peasant labour but could as easily refer to the sect's endless trudging throughout the land in the quest of donations to add up to their treasures on earth and purchase a ticket to heaven. Any religion that shows these sort of ambiguities can hardly expect to be taken seriously and such a sect tends to be seen as eccentric and marginal by the general public.

The "neo-Christian" songs are sung by Kioi and his group either when they visit the Kiguundas in their hovel or when they are being mean to the lowly workers in their own sumptuous home. These songs are interesting because they contrast with the traditional norms in their denigration of the poor and elevation of wealth to a virtue - contrary to Christian doctrine. The Kiois who have become so wealthy that they have lost the capacity to sympathise with the poor, can look down on Kiguunda as a breed of lesser beings than themselves and happily sing:

When Jesus comes back
To take home his amazing ones,
The amazing ones being the people
Saved by the Lord
They will shine bright as the star
The great northern star
And the beauty of his amazing ones
Will shine like the stars
And you children, and you children... (p. 49)

The message that this vacuous religiousness has for the world is that the poor must stop coveting what the rich have been given by God as a reward for their diligence. The song thus underlines the sarcasm with which the dramatists deflate the claims of Christianity to moral superiority in the Kenyan context as a whole. The blatantly un-Christian insensitivity of the Kiois is further drummed in when they deny Kiguunda a drink of water at their home while they are gulping it down themselves as they pay lip service to their religion:

> Thirst and hunger for earthly things
> Is the sleep and death of life
> Cry unto God your Lord
> And he will save you
> Life, life,
> The everlasting life
> And you will never get thirsty. (p. 82)

This is what religion means to men who will advise another to lay his treasures in heaven while they are plotting to rob him of his only possession in the world - and call it good news in their next song! The rift between the poor and the rich cannot be demonstrated better than by the sight of Kiguunda and Wangeci singing, clapping and dancing out of tune to the inversion of these alien doctrines that say what even they - for all their naivety - can see is all a sham.

The same disharmony between Kiguunda and the culture he is trying to espouse is illustrated in the scene in which he celebrates his facile new acquisitions by trying to sing and dance to a song on the radio. It is an anonymous, alien tune that shows up Kiguunda's ineptitude. He is portrayed as a man who has lost himself and become a consumer of commercial culture instead of an artist in his own right, performing competently in the context of his own culture.

Kiguunda and Wangeci's apparent self-delusions are further demonstrated of the hollow hymns that are sung by an invisible church choir (itself an illusion) as they go through the motions of getting married in church and attending the reception thereafter. Apart from giving a marvellous opportunity for acting, the scene serves the purpose of finally showing the awakening of the couple to

the realities of their situation - for instead of being taken in by all the make-believe, they are shown in the clever asides to be privately conscious of the charade that is going on. They are morally equipped to deal with the actual showdown that is not long in coming. In the end they accept that Kioi's religion is only another way of justifying taking away from the poor to make the rich richer.

This is the point that Gicaamba and Njooki all along try to drive home to the Kiguundas by every means including several songs ridiculing the Christian religion as practised in Kenya for its hypocrisy. It is obvious to them that even where traditional tunes had been used "To fit in religious words," as Wangeci admits, "the song is the same song/ The word the same word/ The aim the same!/...The earthly water is bitter!" as Njooki adds. Gicaamba sings:

> And even today the earthly water is still bitter
> From homesteads to workplaces
> From the children to grown-ups
> The earthly water is bitter, what shall we drink? (p. 60)

Njooki responds with another song to complement Gicaamba in preparation for an attempt to dissuade Kiguunda and Wangeci from falling prey to Kioi's machinations. Song is used as a medium to break the mould and soften the hard truths that the less informed couple must learn. These songs ridiculing the alien faith and exposing its hypocrisies are complemented on the other side of the argument against succumbing to a church wedding by the grace and eloquence of the *Gitiiro* opera sequence discussed earlier.

3.2.3.2 GIKUYU PROVERBS AND SAYINGS AS A RESERVOIR OF TRADITIONAL WISDOM

Ngaahika Ndeenda is an artistic record of Gikuyu culture: its traditions and rituals; its songs and dances; and its sayings that represent the collective wisdom of the tribe, gleaned over the ages. As a record of traditional wisdom, the play acts as a vehicle for an extensive range and large number of

proverbs - enough to leave no doubt that it reflects a deliberate effort of collecting and preserving these for posterity. What Bjorkman says of the research that went into Ngugi's *Maitu Njugira* also applies to *Ngaahika Ndeenda:*

> Ngugi wa Thiong'o, in his attempt to safeguard the [Gikuyu] oral tradition, had collected songs, music, mimes, proverbs and stories...[30]

The Igbo people say that proverbs are the "seasoning with which a conversation is eaten." In this context proverbs are more than mere garnishing without which the conversation would be no different, except superficially: proverbs irreversibly change the taste and texture of human communication. Proverbs express the theme of the talk into a "nutshell": they present the essence of the matter - the rest is elaboration. Proverbs also usually present ideas graphically in terms of imagery or symbolism, which is why there is an affinity between this genre and poetry. For that reason, proverbs are more easily memorable and can be transmitted from person to person, generation to generation, without any loss of meaning. Although proverbs constitute only one of the skills a good narrator brings into his performance in Gikuyu orature, for the *Gicaandi* player (who specialises in coding and decoding messages) proverbs have been elevated into an art form of the highest order. In *Ngaahika Ndeenda* the playwrights (with the competent assistance of the peasants and workers of Kamiriithu) have skilfully integrated the proverbs into the drama so as to enhance an understanding and enjoyment of it.

In an egalitarian community like the Gikuyu where traditionally there were no laws governing individual conduct, proverbs also had the power of law in that one never deliberately acted contrary to a proverb without risking censure. In general Gikuyu proverbs emphasize the spirit of communalism as a virtue without which the community can not exist, would be greatly weakened in the face of external threats. The converse is similarly true: that many Gikuyu proverbs condemn individualism, carried to excess, as vice that undermines the unity and strength of the community.

One interesting example of when the assertion of one's individuality is not seen as a vice is at the beginning of the play when Kiguunda is desperately trying to assert his manhood and sense of being, of which the only proof amidst the utter poverty is the title deed, he turns to a proverb of shocking frankness to sum up his identity in the face of Wangeci's challenge and dismissive scepticism. Holding up the title deed to the one and a half acres of dry wasteland that he himself knows is almost worthless compared to what his family owned before the liberation war, he says:

> These are mine own,
> Not borrowed robes
> Said to tire the wearer.
>
> ...
>
> A man brags about his penis,
> However tiny. (p. 4)

Proverbs, being almost formulaic, harbour no taboos. The second of the above proverbs is therefore spoken without fear of causing the least embarrassment or offending anyone. That is the reason why the same proverb is repeated for a different purpose later on in the play when Gathoni, who has been out with John Muhuuni, enters to show off all the fineries he had bought for her. Unimpressed, Kiguunda tells his daughter is dressed like a whore, implying that she should not be proud of wearing borrowed garments, said to have the capacity of tiring the wearer according to the other proverb above. To bring the point home emphatically to his daughter, without any embarrassment, Kiguunda uses the same proverb as he had told his wife earlier: "A man brags about his penis, however small." (p. 51)

These proverbs, that assert one's respect for oneself, are related to others that call for respect for or tolerance of other people. That the virtue of tolerance goes beyond the home is emphasized from the very beginning of the play when Kiguunda (but not Wangeci) refrains from condemning the defiant drunkard and outcast, Kamande wa Munyui (who is Kiguunda's alter ego), saying: "Poverty has no heroes/ He who judges knows not how he will be judged!" (p.5)

But the most persistent example of tolerance is provided by the trying situation Kiguunda and Wangeci find themselves in when their daughter, Gathoni, carries on with her affair with Kioi's son, Muhuuni, in spite of her parents' objections. Kiguunda is quick to judge his daughter but, at least at this stage, the mother shows more tolerance. While Kiguunda reveals his irritation at the endless squabbling between mother and daughter over the affair, Wangeci softens their family hurt with a proverb that generalises what is happening to them, thus making it out to be a consequence of circumstances beyond their control: "When axes are kept in one basket/ They must necessarily knock against each other." (p. 17) Wangeci also uses proverbs to educated her daughter the traditional way. For example, in trying to caution Gathoni about her naivety regarding love, Wangeci asks: "Do you think to be smiled at is to be loved?" (p. 52) And when Gathoni disobeys her parents and goes on a trip with her boyfriend, Wangeci tries to pacify her irate husband, who threatens to disown his daughter, using proverbs to remind him of the wisdom of the tribe that advocates tolerance of children, however bad they may seem to be:

> A parent is never nauseated
> by the mucus from his child's nose.
>
> ...
>
> A she-goat suckles its young
> However deformed. (p. 52)

In a dramatic turn of events, Gicaamba later uses a variant of this same proverb to pacify Wangeci herself when she forgets her earlier restraint and calls her daughter a whore. This is another example of how proverbs serve to remind us of our own lapses in a manner that cannot be disputed since proverbs are impersonal truisms that have passed the test of time. Gicaamba speaks to Wangeci in proverbs so as to put Gathoni's situation in a context that goes beyond the failure of any one individual in society to embrace everyone in the audience:

> Let's not call our children prostitutes
> A hyena is very greedy
> But she does not eat her young.
> ...

When a bird in flight is very tired
It lands on the nearest tree. (p. 104)

The latter proverb also seeks to redress the balance by pointing out that Gathoni is not solely responsible for ending up where she is, for instead of being treated with sympathy and understanding, she had been driven away from home. Furthermore, this could not be blamed on Kiguunda alone, for Wangeci herself had done nothing to stop her husband from passing judgement though she exerts great influence on him whenever she wishes.

The domestic scene in the Kiguunda home gives rise to other proverbs, because proverbs are a way of responding to life's trials and tribulations. When Kiguunda comments on the ravages of age, childbirth and poverty on Wangeci's former beauty, she replies: "A flower is robbed of the colours by the fruit it bears!" (p. 29) And when Wangeci tries to pressurise her daughter into making a serious commitment instead of running around with John Muhuuni, she uses a proverb to point out the consequence of dilly-dallying:

There's no girl worth the name
Who is contented with being an old maid
In her mother's homestead. (p. 16)

Gathoni's stubborn reply is the memorable: "I shall marry when I want." This reveals that, though she is only a girl, she has her father's spirit - which augers well for her since it means that when she falls, like her father, she will be able to rise and carry on. A mother never gives up, and Wangeci goes on to repeat her statement more emphatically:

There's no maiden who makes a home in her father's backyard
And there's no maiden worth the name who wants to get grey hairs
at her parents' home. (p. 17)

Although poverty is not a virtue, it is not a vice either as the wealthy villains and hypocrites would have us believe. There are many proverbs in the play that extol the virtues of labour and express sympathy for poverty such as we can see in the Kiguunda household. For example, when Wangeci demands that Kiguunda produce the money to buy some basic essentials to prepare a meal for

the impending visit of the Kiois, he replies: "The given does not know when the granary is empty." (p. 18) Then, turning to a modernism, he asks: "Do you think that taking out is the same thing as banking?" Wangeci's reply is an equally telling proverb that brooks no argument: "He who puts on dancing finery knows how he is going to dance in the arena!" (p. 18)

Some of the personal proverbs that border on the communal are used to clarify the role the Gicaambas play in drawing the Kiguundas back from the clutches of the Kiois to the community to which they truly belong. The Kiguundas' readiness to be enticed by the Kiois leads to a straining of relations between them and their neighbours that comes close to breaking their friendship. Wangeci in particular resents the influence Gicaamba has on Kiguunda:

> Since when did a person
> Try to build his hut
> Exactly like that of his neighbour? (p. 72)

Arguing for the need for them to follow their own ways and do what is best for them and for their daughter, she refuses to be cautioned and chooses to jump to conclusions. Her pursuit of individual ends, however, is attained at the expense of her responsibility to the community - something the Gikuyu abhor. Corrupting traditional wisdom, she says:

> The burdens of the masses
> Are tied with a cord easy to cut
> Or carried in a basket full of holes. (p. 73)

In her anxiety to win Kiguunda to her way of thinking, she even uses emotional blackmail and calls him a coward for hesitating from dropping the traditional ways and boldly embracing Kioi's ways and religion for the rich rewards that beckoned:

> The coward went home safely to tell the tale
> And left the brave lying for ever safe on the battlefield. (p. 73)

This is how she succeeds in undoing all that Gicaamba in his wisdom had tried to make Kiguunda understand when he persistently warned him against making assumptions about Kioi's good intentions towards them:

Promises do not mean delivery
Clouds may be in the sky
But it does not mean it'll rain! (p. 56)
...
Did the leopard ever change its spots?
A kid steals like its mother
The chameleon family
Has never changed its backridge. (p. 59)
...
No one regrets the going as the returning
Take care you don't lose four
While running after eight. (p. 62)

Ironically, it is Wangeci - in reality the principal offender since it is she who nags Kiguunda into falling into temptation - who remembers the lesson of these proverbs when everything Gicaamba and Njooki had warned the Kiguundas about comes true. When the Gicaamba and Njooki come to commiserate with her, Wangeci openly admits her folly by echoing what Gicaamba had said earlier on:

Nobody repents the sins of another
Nobody regrets the going as the returning. (p. 107)

At the political level, one of the most significant proverbs in the play is the one used by Gicaamba to explain the continued exploitation of the Kenyan people after independence by the same colonial powers that had robbed them of their land. Twice he says:

If you want to rob a monkey of a baby it is holding
You must first throw it a handful of peanuts. (p. 33)

A handful of peanuts is thrown to the monkey
When the baby it is holding is about to be stolen! (p. 37)

The reference here is primarily to the peasants and workers whose labour - which produced the wealth of the nation - was literally stolen by being rewarded with only token wages. Ironically, the local partners in progress in this exploitation by foreigners are themselves rewarded with only token payments and superficial authority compared to the vast amounts of wealth that were remitted overseas and the almost limitless power and prestige that the foreigners still enjoyed in the nominally independent state. Ikuu wa Nditika recognises this fact when he puts the label of "watchdogs" on his kind. In spite of all the wealth the ruling class appears to enjoy, they are "collared"

into serving their former masters in new guise like everyone else and they are bribed with peanuts while the greater amount of the wealth of the nation is being repatriated overseas.

This poverty, coming with independence after the trauma of colonialism, is described by Kiguunda in a proverb that depicts its chilling reality. Commenting on his inescapable condition, he says: "I ran away from coldland only to find myself in frostland!" (p. 19) And commenting on the starvation wages the workers are paid in spite of the need to keep them alive and strong enough to do more work, the Kiguundas say:

> They don't know the saying
> That the hand of a worker should not be weakened.
> ...
> Are we the pot that cooks without eating? (p. 20)

In contrast to poverty, contrary to genuine Christian doctrine, material wealth is what is most admired by the affluent born-again converts surrounding Kioi. It is significant that the people of this class, having lost the idiom of the people, can hardly speak in proverbs. Apart from the *nouveau riche* like Ndugire, who can still remember the proverb about people not having been created equal "like teeth" to justify his acquisitiveness, the rich as a whole subscribe to the saying that "A rich man's fart does not stink" to cover up their grossness. This belief is ridiculed by Kiguunda when he forces Kioi to get down on all fours (like Nebbuchadnezer turned into a beast) and plead for his life, even conceding to Gathoni's marrying his son after all. Kiguunda turns on him with contempt and - in the idiom of the rich - replies:

> It is said the fart of a rich man never smells,
> But yours Kioi stinks all over the earth. (p. 102)

Poverty, as such, is not always viewed negatively. Traditionally, it is regarded as an incentive to work, as Wangeci metaphorically puts it:

> Poverty has no permanent roots!
> Poverty is a sword for sharpening the digging sticks. (p. 29)

Wangeci does not always compliment her husband, especially when he moans about his poverty and compares himself to the former collaborators like Kioi who

have ended up reaping all the fruits of independence. But even when Kiguunda alternatively resorts to self-praise, Wangeci has some bitter truths to bring home to him. For example, she does not think much of his and Gicaamba's politics and she takes them for dreamers who talk too much. She also sums up Kiguunda's foolish bravado in a proverb that says it all: "A fool's walking stick supports the clever." (p. 15) Gicaamba echoes the same proverb later in the play when he as much as admits that the black people are fools for working so hard to produce wealth which is all siphoned overseas with the connivance of the black people themselves. It is not only Wangeci who thinks the two men talk too much and do too little. Even the supportive Njooki thinks Gicaamba's mouth (which had put him in trouble before) would be his undoing. She says: "Let me caution you for even a wise man can be taught wisdom." (p. 32) When her direct advice is ignored, she tries an indirect approach through the *Gitiiro* which is itself cut short. However, it is to her that the key proverb about caution and loyalty is assigned. She sings:

> The antelope hates less he who sees it
> Than he who shouts its presence. (p. 39)

This proverb is also recurrently used in *Devil on the Cross*. Njooki is forced to repeat the caution a short while later (p. 40) when she realises that her advice has fallen on deaf ears. Wangeci then adds her own voice of caution: "Dwellers in the land of silence were saved by silence!" (p. 41) This cautiousness is also a reminder of the prohibitions of the colonial era that had forced Gikuyu politics to go underground and encode many of its messages which would be transmitted in proverbs that rendered them innocuous in ordinary conversation. The circumstances had not changed much with independence, as the Gikuyu people continued to be politically repressed. But with the liberty (short-lived as it turned out) that theatrical performance offered, Kiguunda could afford to speak on the side of Gicaamba, citing the age-old wisdom of a free and open society that traditionally respected open debate:

> Discussions breed ideas
> And ideas cannot be hauled about like missiles.
> Discussions breed love, Gikuyu[31] has stated. (p. 41)

The political situation in the play resolves itself into an expression of unity which is backed by a song which is loaded with proverbs:

> Two hands can carry a beehive
> One man's ability is not enough
> One finger cannot kill a louse
> Many hands make work light... (pp. 114-115)

This idea is carried over to the recurrent image of unity and loyalty that also forms another link with the subsequent novel, *Devil on the Cross*:

> If a bean falls to the ground
> It'll be split equally among us.
> (pp. 27, 69, 71, 113,115)

Although this is not strictly a proverb, it is relevant in this context because the very fact that it is repeated five times in the play gives it the weight of a common saying. That should also confirm that the dramatists intend it to be noted as a key factor in engendering the unity without which the community would be rendered susceptible to manipulation and destruction. This strength in unity also provides linkage with Ngugi's preceding play, *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*, as well as with the next play, *Maitu Njugira*, in which the same theme is explored from a different perspective.

ENDNOTES:

1. Vansina, Jan, 1985, *Oral Tradition as History*, James Currey, London/ Heinemann, Nairobi, pp. 26, 43 and 110-111. [See Part One above].

2. Kabira, W.M. and Karega wa Mutahi, 1988, *Gikuyu Oral Literature*, Heinemann, Nairobi, pp. 7, 9, 43 and 45. [See Part One above].

3. Kenyatta, Jomo, 1938, *Facing Mount Kenya: The Traditional Life of the Gikuyu*, Secker & Warburg, London, 1938 / Heinemann, London and Nairobi, 1978, p. 172. [See Part One above].

4. Kabira, W.M., 1983, *The Oral Artist*, Heinemann, Nairobi, p. 2. (Quoted in Part One above).

5. Cook, D. and Okenimkpe, M., 1983, *Ngugi wa Thiong'o: An Exploration of His Writings*, Heinemann, London, p. 173.

6. Bjorkman, I., 1989, *Mother, Sing for Me: People's Theatre in Kenya*, Zed Books, London & New Jersey, p. 2, (my emphasis).

7. Cook and Okenimkpe, *op. cit.*, p. 174.

8. Vansina, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

9. Kabira and Karega, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

10. Kabira, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

11. Vansina, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

12. Kabira and Karega, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 45.

14. Kabira, W.M., *op. cit.*, p. 4.

15. Kioi's first name, Ahab, derives from the tyrannous Old Testament king who was turned into an animal and made to go to grass for his excesses while his wife, Jezebel, bears the additional connotation of the New Testament treacherous prostitute of the same name. Kioi's other name, Kanoru, is further elaborated in Ngugi's next play, *Maitu Njugira (Mother, Sing for Me)* as a name associated with colonial betrayal and exploitation.

16. Cook and Okenimkpe, *op. cit.*, p. 173.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 169.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 168.

19. Kabira and Karega, *op. cit.*, p. 7ff.

20. Cook and Okenimkpe, *op. cit.*, p. 168.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 171.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 173.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 168.

24. Kabira and Karega, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

25. Cook and Okenimkpe, *op. cit.*, p. 168.

26. The line "Mother ululate for me" in the Gikuyu transcript at the end of the text reads: *Maitu njugira (ngemi)*, suggesting the title of Ngugi's next play which may have been already on his mind as he was writing *Ngaahika Ndeenda*. The *ngemi* are the ululations or trilling the Gikuyu women raise for a boy (five) of a girl (three) at birth or later in life on important occasions.

27. Kabira and Karega, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 25.

29. This was the working title for the novel that was eventually published as *A Grain of Wheat*.

30. Bjorkman, *op. cit.*, p. vii.

31. Gikuyu in this context is used to refer collectively to the community as a whole as constituting an irrefutable authority.

3.3 THE HOMECOMING NOVEL *CAITAANI MUTHARABA-INI* (DEVIL ON THE CROSS)

3.3.1 Introduction

Caitaani Mutharaba-ini (**Devil on the Cross**) has a simpler plot structure than Ngugi's preceding novel, *Petals of Blood*. The reasons for this are the same as those for the simplification of the plot of the preceding play, *Ngaahika Ndeenda*, which sets the pace for *Caitaani Mutharaba-ini*: principally, ease of communication with a largely illiterate audience unfamiliar with the conventions of the western novel but well versed in the oral narrative traditions of the Gikuyu.

Caitaani Mutharaba-ini was Ngugi's first novel (his primary medium) written in Gikuyu, following the overwhelming success of *Ngaahika Ndeenda*, the play that preceded the novel. The play had proved that he could get to the level of the ordinary workers and peasants of Kenya and communicate with them in a language that they understood and in a manner that they appreciated. Just as he had been obliged to simplify the mechanism of drama to serve as a non-obtrusive vehicle for his ideas, he now had to do the same with the even less familiar medium of the novel. His task was to write a novel that would not only be read silently but one that could be read aloud to a listening audience that was used to listening to traditional tales, told with song, mimicry, riddle, parable and other rhetorical devices of orature.

Seen in universal terms, the plot is conceived as a kind of opera, with basic movements and sub-themes in which the characters work like an orchestra, inter-acting with one another in conversation, broken now and then until the strain is picked again to be built into the next wave. The individual stories

are weaved in like arias in an oratorio. The short **Prelude** introduces the action which is played out in three main movements: **The Symbolic Journey,** which is an allegorical return to the "frontline" in the eternal battle between good and evil in the quest of truth; **The Feast of Fantasy,** which is a symbolic inverted celebration of mass in the temple of the god of graft; and **The Second Chance,** which briefly offers a tantalizing promise of a new beginning in exchange for a deferment of retribution. The **Grand Finale** sees the Devil (after recurrently evading crucifixion) coming face to face with his nemesis.

However, this is only a view from the background, as it were, for (as detailed in Section 3.1 above) the author himself created *Caitaani Mutharaba-ini* not as a universal concept, but as a truly African novel based on the African oral traditions - particularly the Gikuyu ogre narrative form. The following analysis therefore concentrates on the various aspects of the novel as an ogre narrative in form and content.

3.3.2 Style: The Novel as an Ogre Narrative

Devil on the Cross is much more complicated than any traditional ogre narrative, such as the examples given in Appendices 1B and 1C. It is not sufficient even to say that Ngugi's experiment is an extended ogre narrative, for it exceeds the requirements of that genre in form as well as in content. Or rather it lifts that genre to the level of a modern allegory and sustained satire. This section, therefore, while placing the novel in the context of an ogre narrative, goes further to analyze all the various stylistic innovations that the author introduces into the genre to turn it into a more effective vehicle for transmitting his ideas to the targeted audience. As a work that has subsequently been "universalised" in translation, we are also interested in establishing in what ways Ngugi's experiment is significant to the development of the novel, particularly the African novel, as a genre.

This section deals with the role of the narrating persona vis-a-vis the voice of the author as a signifier in the context of a novel meant to be viewed as the transcription of an oral narrative; the symbolic journey as a structural technique which Ngugi uses a vehicle to simplify the flow of the narrative; the role of the Devil, personified as a two-faced character combining the Faustian/Christian concept of evil influence and the traditional idea of man-eating ogre; and the central satiric event visualized as a convention of ogres competing for international awards in "Modern Theft and Robbery".

3.3.2.1 THE NARRATING PERSONA AND THE WRITER AS NARRATOR

In a work that aspires to be seen as a transcription of an essentially oral narrative, the role of the narrating persona is vital. The narrator provides the prima facie evidence of the authenticity of the voice behind which the "absent" story-teller speaks. Realising the limitations of using a narrating persona throughout, Ngugi opts for the universally accepted omniscient and omni-present author's voice as the main story-teller of the story whose complexity demands the flexibility of such a narrator. However, the customary narrating persona is not entirely left out but is deliberately elevated to a "ceremonial" role through carefully selected episodes that help to reassure the audience of the authenticity of the aural performance. These skilfully "staged" appearances of the symbolic narrator, though few and far between, have the dramatic effect of making the readings live before the audience as in a dramatic performance. The narrating persona acts as a direct link with the audience whereas the other participants only interact with one another within the parameters of the narrative. He thus, in effect, plays a dramatic role that constitutes a narrative within the overall narrative.

The ritualistic nature of the narrating persona's role is most evident in the opening episode of the novel which goes beyond the normal formulaic statement to become a whole ceremony of initiation, atonement and cleansing. His status and credibility are determined by association - he is both the Gicaandi Player and the Prophet of Justice: the inspired artist and the objective witness with the authority to set right what has gone wrong. It is from this lofty

position that he opens the narrative with the dilemma that he himself, in his wisdom, must resolve: either to betray the community by revealing "The secrets of the homestead [which] are not for the ears of strangers" (p. 7) or to betray Wariinga by remaining silent and letting her be judged without the benefit of "the whole truth" being known. Although he is privileged to know all that is hidden, "concealed by darkness", and even though he is assailed by voices calling on him to reveal it all, to "Cast a light upon all that happened", he can not presume to so without risking the wrath of God, the ancestors or the wider community whose secrets he is guardian of. And so, speaking in proverbs, he asks himself: "Who am I - the mouth that ate itself? Is it not said that the antelope conceives more hatred for him who betrays its presence with a shout?" (p. 8) These proverbs at once establish a link with the play, *Ngaahika Ndeenda*, which helps to forge an identity with the audience from the beginning of the narrative and to make it ready to listen to a tale that must be of great significance to move the narrator to such depths of remorse.

The narrator, having quickly and skilfully established his bona fide identity as an oral artist and a Prophet of Justice, then goes on to tell of the penance he had done to resolve the dilemma he was in: seven days of fasting without eating or drinking, followed by the awaited signal described in images that deliberately carry biblical overtones for maximum effect:

> After seven days had passed, the Earth trembled, and lightning scored the sky with its brightness, and I was lifted up, and I was borne up to the rooftop of the house, and I was shown many things, and I heard a voice, like a great clap of thunder, admonishing me: Who has told you that prophecy is yours alone, to keep to yourself? Why are you furnishing yourself with empty excuses? If you do that, you will never be free of tears and pleading cries.
>
> The moment the voice fell silent, I was seized, raised up and then cast down into the ashes of the fireplace. And I took the ashes, and I smeared my face and legs with them, and I cried out:
>
> I accept!
> I accept!
> Silence the cries of the heart
> Wipe away the tears of the heart... (p. 8)

It is with this evidently divine authority that the narrator then gets ready to tell the story without any fear of either presuming too much or exceeding

the limits of secrecy. Then he climbs down from the pedestal and becomes like one of the people in the audience, speaking as an eye witness, not just a visionary who had seen it all in a dream:

> The story is an account of what I, Prophet of Justice, saw with these eyes and heard with these ears when I was borne to the rooftop of the house... (p. 8)

Yet this has to be a vision, for indeed it is a work of the imagination, though the audience is kept in suspense as to what kind of tale it is they are about to be told. The only indication that it might be an ogre narrative is dropped in earlier, though in so inauspicious a manner that the biblical inferences preceding it and the narrator's own interruption of it to introduce himself give it umbrage rather than exposure:

> The Devil, who would lead us into the blindness of the heart and into the deafness of the mind, should be crucified, and care should be taken that his acolytes do not lift him down from the Cross to pursue building Hell for the people on Earth.... (p. 7)

By the end of his ritual, the narrator has mentioned Wariinga by name, and Wariinga's mother and the people who either pleaded for the story "to be suppressed so that we should not shed tears a second time," or that it should be told as a lesson for future generations to learn from. From this the audience can deduce that Wariinga's story is a tragic one, and maybe even that is has something to do with the devil. Thus the narrator rouses interest without betraying the secret he so skilfully leads the audience towards expecting. Instead, his voice fades out with the declaration of a truism: "The voice of the people is the voice of God" (p. 8) and with the song of reconciliation from *Ngaahika Ndeenda* which effectively calls for the rehabilitation of Jacinta Wariinga who - for those who had seen the play - appears to be a reincarnation of Gathoni. The narrator in this opening of *Devil on the Cross* thus emerges as the conscience of the community and the voice of renewal and continuity whose identity must be established before the narrative can begin:

But why am I lingering on the bank of the river?

To bathe is to strip off clothes,
To swim is to plunge into the river.
It is good so....
Come, my friend,
Come and let us reason together
Come and let us reason together now
Come and let us reason together about
Jacinta Wariinga before you pass judgement on our children.... (pp. 8-9)

On that persuasive tone, with that song of reason over emotion, the narrating persona fades out, imperceptibly giving way to the voice of the omniscient author who takes over the complex narrative, drawing on his proven skills for handling multiple plots and free movement in time and space, which he spells out in *Decolonising the Mind*.

Yet it is not quite accurate to say that the narrator disappears from the narrative after the ritualistic opening chapter of the novel. In the second chapter, which sets the scene for the beginning of the symbolic journey and introduces Wariinga to the audience, the narrator's voice can still be discerned behind the more predominant voice of the all-knowing author. This is particularly evident in the interpretative voice of wisdom which frequently intervenes with proverbs that echo the opening ritual as if to reassure the audience that the narrator has only stepped back to let the story itself take precedence:

Misfortune is swifter than the swiftest spirit, and one trouble spawns another. (p. 10)

That which is born black will never be white. (p. 11)

Aping others cost the frog its buttocks. (p. 12)

These wise sayings are mixed with others that, together with the songs, also strongly echo *Ngaahika Ndeenda* (and *Petals of Blood* before it), thus helping to remind the audience that the narrator in the extended narrative, *Caitaani Mutharaba-ini*, is after all the same creative source from which the preceding play originated:

> ... no one repents on account of another's sins. There is no one who regrets the going as much as the returning. To be smiled at is not to be loved. (p. 18)
>
> A restless child leaves home in search of meat just as a goat is about to be slaughtered.... He who saves a little food will never suffer from hunger.... Too much eating ruins the stomach.... A restricted diet is monotonous.... A borrowed necklace may lead to the loss of one's own. (p. 20)
>
> The hunter who stalks his prey too stealthily may frighten it off in the end. Begging calls for constantly changing tactics. Bathing involves removing all one's clothes. (p. 21)

But the voice of the timeless narrating persona and that of the author do not always merge, as the latter sometimes stands out on its own as the voice of the world-weary commentator from our times talking from a lectern:

> But it is not Nairobi alone that is afflicted in this way. The same is true of all the cities in every country that has recently slipped the noose of colonialism. These countries are finding it difficult to stave off poverty for the simple reason that they have taken it upon themselves to learn how to run their economies from American experts. So they have been taught the principle and system of self-interest and have been told to forget the ancient songs that glorify the notion of collective good. They have been taught new songs, new hymns that celebrate the acquisition of money. (p. 15)

This sounds like an extract taken straight from a lecture by Ngugi to an audience overseas but it is also addressed to the audience back home that needs to know why things have not worked out the way they were supposed to after independence. This pointed approach can be expected in a work which aims not only to inform the intended "listeners" but also to educate them on current affairs and then mobilize them for action, thus re-igniting the resolve to struggle for a more just society.

After that elaborate beginning, once the principal performers get on the scene to tell the story with their own words and deeds, both the narrating persona and the omniscient author withdraw backstage though the latter shows up now and then in asides that elaborate some point which might otherwise be missed by the audience. The narrating persona, however, is phased out as a direct commentator until after the end of the first symbolic journey when he is

brought back to formally usher in the start of the second movement and credibly fill in the leap in time (two years), account for the sudden change in style (past to present continuous), change the direction of the journey (from Nairobi to Ilmorog to Nairobi to Nakuru) and to re-activate the direct link with the audience through familiar proverbs as well as a conversational invitation to this extension of a tale that has already exceeded the limits of a normal *ng'ano cia marimu* and yet is still far from finished. This time the ritual is played down to a minimal "It was revealed to me/ It was revealed to me" (p. 215) while the informal invitation "Come, my friend, come with me ..." is emphasized several times in the short breather which the audience is thus allowed before the narrative adopts a tone of immediacy and builds up to a surprise ending.

The narrator's voice in the last part of the novel partly accounts for its rise to a climax, particularly from the fateful weekend when Wariinga and her lover head for Nakuru, the scene of her despoiling. From his introduction of the change of scene and change of tempo, it is evident that he is already reckoning the events according to that Saturday when Wariinga and Gatuiria set off for Nakuru via Ilmorog - he starts with a simple statement of fact which is highly revealing: "Another Saturday." (p. 21) Suddenly, the narrator, who had managed to stand discreetly behind the author as the latter builds up the tempo by concentrating on Wariinga's amazing transformation (much more profound than Wanja's in *Petals of Blood* when she falls in love with Karega), finds he cannot resist the temptation to more or less talk to the audience over the author's shoulder, especially as the fateful journey progresses towards the confrontation that only he knows but will not reveal though he drops hint after hint. One can almost feel his mounting excitement as he prattles about little unimportant details which he feels he must share with the audience:

> It is true that their journey to Nakuru was pleasant.
>
> And their journey was still pleasant as they passed Lanet, and as they branched off towards Ngorika in their Red Toyota.
>
> And their journey was pleasant even when they drove into the home of Mr and Mrs Hispaniora Greenway Ghitahy, *Ngorika Heavenly Orchards*...
>
> You who were there, what more can I say? (p. 246)

By then the audience almost knows what the real identity of Gatuiria is: the mere mention of Ngorika should bring to mind the Rich Old Man of Ngorika who had ravaged Wariinga as a young girl and forever changed the course of her life. Yet the narrator can not quite bring himself to telling the audience what had happened when the author is on the point of narrating the story of how it had happened. This apparent conflict between the narrating persona and the author as narrator only serves to heighten the tension and build up the drama to its inevitable crisis which, when it is all over, still leaves a mystery about Wariinga's fate that neither of them explains. Thus in the end the artist creates a situation in which, when his story is told and finished, he still has a story to tell whose real ending only he knows. That is the art of outstanding story-telling and *Devil on the Cross* can be said to be technically close to attaining that objective.

3.3.2.2 THE SYMBOLIC JOURNEY AS A STRUCTURAL NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE

Although one does not need to look as far back as Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* or Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* for influences on Ngugi's style, it pays to bear these in mind as one thinks of the symbolic journey as a narrative device which has always fascinated writers. The narrative structure of *Devil on the Cross* is based on two symbolic journeys: the journey to the Devil's Feast in Ilmorog and the journey to the ultimate confrontation in Nakuru. At a symbolic level the first journey depicts the heroine, Wariinga, who is in need of moral healing, undertaking the journey to the scene of the feast of the ogres on a mission to test her moral courage in preparation for a later and even more formidable mission. The second journey depicts the militant maiden, now healed and primed for battle, heading for the den of the patron of the ogres for the final showdown. The two journeys are also meant to be seen as representative of other secondary journeys within the basic idea of life itself being a journey through time and space. In this sense although each of us is an individual who must ultimately travel alone to meet his/her destiny, there is a point up to which we are part of a community whose moral toning up

is a matter of communal concern. Wariinga therefore is not alone on the first journey but rather one of the many witnesses who are given the chance to testify to the reality of the wide road to perdition but ultimately she travels alone on the second journey when she is escorted by the Devil's son to the scene of the final temptation and the resultant showdown.

The first journey takes an unexpected turn from what the protagonist expects when she originally sets out for home: the return of the outcast back to nature (her mother) and to nonentity, rather like the principal characters in *Petals of Blood* who all flee to Ilmorog as a last resort when the world rejects them. For Wariinga, who had already surrendered the will to live before and was only saved by a miracle, another miraculous encounter is required to give her another chance of life. This time her rescuer sets her on the course to self-redemption, ironically, by handing her an invitation to the damning Devil's Feast in Ilmorog.

The journey itself starts like any other in Nairobi's chaotic public transport system which is dominated by the *matatu* taxis and their irrepressible drivers. Far from going into complicated symbolism on the implications of the journey, Ngugi chooses to take his audience over familiar territory, using well known names and landmarks to place the story within the realistic boundaries of the average commuter's everyday experience. And the characters who spring to life in this set up are also familiar figures - especially Mwaura, the taxi driver with the limitless slogans and bawdy songs which he uses as bait to attract clients to his dilapidated contraption than can barely move at a crawl. But appearances deceive and it is only on close scrutiny and on looking back with hindsight that one fully appreciates the fact that the passengers who are drawn by fate to Mwaura's taxi, like Mwaura himself, are far from ordinary although they are representative of the Kenyan populace:

- Wariinga is more than just an ordinary secretary, as emphasized in the opening episodes of the narrative: she is fated to play a key role in some momentous event that the narrator and some of the audience (but not the present listeners of the tale) have already witnessed - the narrative being only a re-enactment of events that have taken place on another time scale.

- The man in the overalls is evidently a worker, later identified as Muturi, whose mission is to recruit new cadres to the workers' and peasants' struggle against the wealthy ruling class. He is remarkably like Gicaamba in *Ngaahika Ndeenda*, which many among the listeners would have seen on stage.

- The university researcher, later identified as Gatuiria, is an academic whose doubtful credentials are implied by the fact that after all his degrees, he is still trying to find himself, to find his roots and to define his objectives in life. Typical of the two-faced (ogre-like) members of his profession - the intelligentsia - he sits on the fence, siding with either the peasants and workers when it suits him or with the ruling class when that seems more opportune. Unknown to the listeners at this stage, Gatuiria is also the son of the principal ogre, an identity he initially refuses to acknowledge and later deliberately hides. This makes him a wolf in sheep's clothing, an aphorism that would be understood by an audience that believes that "the kid of a goat is a goat" and one, moreover, which a familiar with tales of ogres masquerading in borrowed clothing, face and limb.

- The peasant woman, identified as Wangari, is a typical Gikuyu woman: proud of her heritage and unashamed of her enforced destitution. Her rustic simplicity belies the resolute conviction underneath for which it is only the outer covering to beguile the enemy. In this she reminds one of the Woman in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*.

- The last of the five passengers, later identified as Mwireri wa Mukiraai, like Gatuiria, is another intellectual lost in the limbo of indecision between the working class, which he distrusts and exploits, and the ruling class, which distrusts and exploits him before ultimately rejecting and eliminating him altogether.

- And, ironically, taking charge of all these emissaries, conveying them to their mission of witnessing the celebration of evil, is no other than the Devil's Disciple: an avowed opportunist who, by his own confession, would kill his own mother for a shilling.

The conversation in Mwaura's *matatu* - by tradition a sort of open "people's parliament" where anyone could say anything without fear of recrimination - drifts from politics (instigated by the peasant woman's guileless admission

that she does not even have fare for the journey, leading to the discussion of the plight of the poor people who had fought for freedom) to the more abstract topic of the conflict of good and evil, God and the Devil, on earth in general and in Kenya in particular. This in turn leads on to the discussion of the Devil's Feast in Ilmorog, which the misguided Mwireri wa Mukiraai convinces them is only a student smear of a genuine convention of the satirically named *International Organisation of Thieves and Robbers* whose evil intent entirely escapes him - fatally as it later turns out. In between, the lost man talks of culture and tells ogre tales he has collected, seemingly unaware of its import to the mission they are on.

The first journey thus precipitates into an almost unconscious process of beginning to choose sides in the conflict of classes in which Muturi (the only one who knows the score) and the impulsive Wangari stand on the side of the people while Mwireri wa Mukiraai blindly walks on the side of the bourgeoisie. Wariinga is too emotionally upset to know for certain where she stands, suddenly beginning to see the correlation between the nightmare in her mind and the one that is unfolding before her. Significantly, Gatuiria the still groping, two-faced researcher does not seem to know in which direction he is headed, while Mwaura the wily opportunist sits on the fence with a knowing smile, being privy to the true nature of the occasion to which he thinks all the others have been inadvertently invited.

The second journey has less of the "folkish" symbolism about it. Its pace is much more determined and its destination is more directly focused, though only "seen as though through a looking glass, dimly", as it were, for suspense is the key word. This time instead of the tempo being dictated by the driver and his devil's contraption, it is Wariinga, the passenger, who sets the pace while Gatuiria, the driver, who knows what lies ahead, is helpless to stop her from plunging headlong into the inevitable confrontation in which he is only an agent in a grand design that lies beyond his control.

This time Wariinga is far from being the picture of an innocent lamb being led for slaughter: she is the image of Mumbi's daughter, fine-honed and primed for

battle. This is the ultimate journey and Wariinga makes it with a secret awareness of the fact that it is also a journey of no return, win or lose. In the end, after she has executed her duty and rocked the opposition into stupefied·shock and flight, Wariinga keeps walking on towards a destiny that the story-teller leaves to our imagination. The second journey never ends: it only takes the narrative to the verge of its own limitations as a work of art. The improbable denouement that Lisa Curtis justifiably dismisses as "contrived... silted... failure"[1] is indeed a synthetic solution to the problems that Ngugi cannot exorcise away with smart wishful thinking, for it calls for the best that he can offer and there is little evidence of this in the last part of the novel from the time when Wariinga is transformed into the image of an avenging goddess.

3.3.2.3 THE FAUSTUS FACTOR AND THE OGRE SYNDROME

Central to the thematic conception of *Devil on the Cross* is the Faustian idea of Man tempted by the Devil to sell his soul for material wealth and thus damning himself to Hell. Ngugi's choice of this age-old theme is a direct proof of the influence of his classical reading on his style, as he himself admits in *Decolonising the Mind*:

> For a long time I had been intrigued by the Faust theme in [European] literature. The theme reappears in several works of European literature: Marlowe's *Faustus*, Goethe's *Faust*, Thomas Mann's *Dr Faustus* and Bulgakov's *Master and Margarita*.[2]

Ngugi establishes the link between the classical concept and the African oral traditions in his quest for a vehicle to convey his views on the absurdity of the socio-political realities in Kenya to a working class audience unfamiliar with the conventions of the novel but well grounded in their own oral traditions. But this is also a testimony of his faith in the African people (typified by the peasantry) who in western thinking have usually been said to be incapable of abstraction. While admitting the western influence on the Faustian concept, Ngugi goes on to say:

> But I always suspected that the story of the good man who surrenders his soul to evil for immediate earthly wealth, intellect and power, was universal and was rooted in the lores of the peasantry. Elements of it are to be found in many national traditions.[3]

In the abstract sense this eternal conflict between Good and Evil is all within the individual's soul, but in dramatic depiction it is both externalised and personalised to make a visual impact. The combination of the Faustian concept with the traditional idea of the Ogre is an interesting example of how Ngugi combines notions derived from his classical reading with those coming from his research of his own roots on his homecoming.

There is a subtle difference between the western concept of Hell as the reward for individual sin in the abstract and the African idea of just punishment for breach of societal norms. Ngugi strives to find an equilibrium in the Gikuyu traditions in whose context his novel is set. In that context, the Faust factor is positively identified in the analogous ogre narrative presented as a Gikuyu parable.

The parable of Nding'uri (pp. 63-66), ironically, is told by Gatuiria (he son of The Rich Old Man from Ngorika in Nakuru) but is attributed to the old man from Bahati in Nakuru. The parable is told in a style that is loaded with imagery from the native idiom which not only places it firmly in the context of Gikuyu oral traditions but also distinctly marks the voice of a different story-teller (the old man from Bahati) and a different narrator (Gatuiria) speaking for him in absentia. The Nding'uri parable is a close parallel of the Faust plot with the exception that it is depicted within a communal context in which Ndingu'uri's isolation, his lack of compassion for his fellow human beings and his individualist pursuit of wealth and power, respectively, are interpreted as wizardry, cannibalism and a crime against the collective ethics of the community. He is punished as much for the sin of commission as for the sin of omission, for he offends the community as well as the evil spirit "in the shape of an ogre" who, in exchange for his soul, like the Faustian Devil, empowers him and commands him as follows:

`"Listen: from today onwards you'll never be able to see the beauty of children, or women, or of any other human being. You'll be able to see only the beauty of property. Go now, go home. Devour the people's shadows. That's the task I have given you until the day I come to fetch you!"' (p. 64)

The evil spirit also warns Nding'uri never to tell anyone that he has no soul, but Nding'uri falls for the sin of pride and boasts that he fears nobody for that reason and that is when the spirit returns to claim Nding'uri's body. In the Gikuyu context, however, that ultimate punishment is not just sudden death - inflicted by a shadowy, supernatural cause - but a publicly performed purification of the collective contamination by fire:

`When they heard [Nding'uri's boast that he has no soul], the elders of the village were greatly alarmed, and they looked askance at one another: "So we have been harbouring a witch in our village? We have been sheltering a louse in our bodies? This one will drink up all the blood of all the people until there is no more blood left in the land." And then and there they seized him, and wrapped him up with dry banana leaves, and burned him and his house.' (p. 66)

The biblical overtones are deliberately built into the syntax to underline the parallels between the Christian doctrine and the Gikuyu social ethics violated. But instead of this being seen as individual punishment, in the latter context it is interpreted as a collective ritual performed in the interests of the community as a whole. The parable therefore ends on a communal note that emphasizes the virtue of unity or collective strength, rather than just the vice of individual sin. It is meant to be seen as steeped in the Gikuyu ethos which is presented as being in amity with the Christian ethos rather than at conflict with it:

`From that day the village was rid of evil, and the shadows of the people grew healthy again. Many hands can lift the heaviest of loads!.' (p. 66)

In the parable there is no direct reference to the Devil who is only alluded to as the evil spirit. The dominant figure of the Devil in the novel is therefore clearly Christian as is the symbol of the cross, a modernism which Ngugi finds necessary in clarifying his satiric depiction of the bourgeois

caricatures at the Devil's Feast as modern ogres whose exploitation of the working class people is equatable to Nding'uri's actions.

The ogre syndrome is most directly depicted in the fable of "the peasant farmer who used to carry an ogre on his back." (p. 62) The parasitic dependence of the leech-like ogre on the blood and sweat only goes on until the day the diviner advises the peasant to ignore the pain and prepare to pour boiling oil on the nails of the ogre to get rid of him. The plight of the poor peasant and its resolution are not a moral but an economic and political issue. It is only by association through the Nding'uri parable that the peasant's action to rid himself of the ogre attains a moral edge that serves to further justify the message of the novel: the call for revolt against an unjust system.

The ogre is also the antagonist in the fable about the beautiful girl whose vanity makes her reject all suitors in her country and whose folly makes her choose to follow a man from a foreign country who turns into an ogre which devours her. (p. 62) This condensed fable, which has many variations in Gikuyu oral literature (Appendices 1B and 1C for example) seeks to take the distrust of outsiders from the village level to the "country" level so as to draw the parallel between the myth of deception by the traditional ogre and the reality of foreign exploitation by the modern ogres at a national level, which is the main subject of the overall narrative. This fable also serves to forge a link between this traditional setting, in which the helpless victim is not in a position to check her killer or defiler and the modern setting, in which Wariinga falls victim to a similar deception and is put on a course to settle the score.

It is through Wariinga that the collusion between the Devil and the modern ogres is turned into a cause to fight against. For Wariinga, her violation is initially an internal (i.e. moral) and personal issue which the experience of her journey to Ilmorog turns into an external (i.e. socio-political) and impersonal commitment. It is internally, in her mind, that the moral issue is visualized through the recurrent nightmare of the Devil on the Cross which vividly establishes the identity of the Devil with the modern ogres and the

identity of the latter with the wealthy class. The nightmare also provides moral justification for the revolutionary course of action advocated:

> She saw first the darkness, carved open at one side to reveal a Cross, which hung in the air. Then she saw a crowd of people dressed in rags walking in the light, propelling the Devil towards the Cross. The Devil was clad in a silk suit, and he carried a walking stick shaped like a folded umbrella. On his head there were seven horns, seven trumpets for sounding infernal hymns of praise and glory. The Devil had two mouths, one on his forehead and the other at the back of his head. His belly sagged, as if he were about to give birth to all the evils of the world. His skin was red, like that of a pig. Near the Cross he began to tremble and turned his eyes towards the darkness,as if his eyes were being seared by then light. He moaned, beseeching the people not to crucify him, swearing that he and his followers would never again build Hell for the people on Earth.
>
> But the people cried in unison: 'Now we know the secrets of all the robes that disguise your cunning. You commit murder, then you don your robes of pity and you go to wipe the tears from the faces of orphans and widows. You steal food from people's stores at midnight, then at dawn you visit the victims wearing your robes of charity and you offer them a calabash filled with the grain you have stolen. You encourage lasciviousness solely to gratify your own appetites, then you put on robes of righteousness and urge men to repent, to follow you so that you may show them paths of purity. You seize men's wealth, then you dress in robes of friendship and instruct them to join in the pursuit of the villain who has robbed them.
>
> And there and then the people crucified the Devil on the Cross, and they went away singing songs of victory.
>
> After three days, there came others dressed in suits and ties, who, keeping close to the wall of darkness, lifted the Devil down from the Cross. And they knelt before him, and they prayed to him in loud voices, beseeching him to give them a portion of his robes of cunning. And their bellies began to swell, and they stood up, and they walked towards Wariinga, laughing at her, stroking their large bellies, which had now inherited all the evils of this world .... (p. 13-14)

The parody of Christ's crucifixion and the reversal in the roles of crucified, crucifier and associates are in line with the author's satirical depiction of a society turned upside down. The yoking together of normally diametrically opposed symbols - crucifixion, associated with Christ, and the Devil - is most effective in giving credence to this subverted view of society.

The internalisation of the moral debate inside Wariinga herself is also depicted in the variant to the recurrent nightmare which creeps on her on the golf course in Ilmorog when the appalling sight of what she has witnessed at the Devil's Feast drives her out into introspection. (pp. 184-194) There is an interesting Faustian factor in this dream episode, which is presented as a dramatic dialogue between the Devil and Wariinga, between the id and the ego. It is also somewhat reminiscent of the scene of the temptation of Christ when the Devil lured Him into isolation and baited Him with notions of earthly power. Having shown Wariinga the power of wealth paraded in the Competition in Modern Theft and Robbery, organised by his disciples, the Devil goes on to tempt her with the power of property and beauty in exchange for her loyalty. He goes about this in the most devious manner: he does not attack and ravish her, and having sneaked on her in voice only, he skirts round the subject, tactically going as far back as the garden of Eden, introducing himself with caution when she asks 'Who are you?':

Voice: I am a roaming spirit. I walk about the earth, planting the tree that grows the fruit of the knowledge that enables him who eats it to tell good from evil. (p. 184)

The Devil initially tries to undermine Wariinga's confidence in herself by making her question her real motives for being in Ilmorog and her purpose in life. Then he demonstrates his power of foreknowledge of people and events so as to assert his domination over her before switching to flattery:

Voice: ... The trouble with you, Wariinga, is that you have no faith in yourself. You have never known who you are! You have always wanted to remain a delicate flower to decorate the lives of the class of *Boss* Kihara. Wariinga, Jacinta Wariinga, look at yourself. Take a good look at yourself. You have a young body. The joys of life are all before you. If you hadn't taken to singeing your hair with hot combs and your skin with lightening creams like *Ambi*, the sheer splendour of your body would have been pulling a thousand and one hearts behind it. **The blackness of your skin is smoother and more tender than the most expensive perfume oils. Your dark eyes are brighter than the stars at night. Your cheeks are like two fruits riper than the blackberry. And your hair is so black and soft and smooth that all men must feel like sheltering from the sun in its shade.** (p. 192, my emphasis)

The emphasis in the above passage highlights words that are to ring a warning bell in Wariinga's mind later on when she hears them recited almost verbatim by Gatuiria (p. 224), for she had heard similar words spoken by *Boss* Kihara in a similar seduction (pp. 20-24) and she was to hear the exact wording repeated in a parallel final seduction (pp. 249-253) by Hispaniora Ghitahy, The Rich Old Man from Ngorika, who originally coined them - thus establishing the identity between all the three men and the Devil as their mentor.

The Devil's flattery, however, is only a prelude to springing the trap on the unwary Wariinga who initially appears to be as susceptible as the maid in the ogre tale who falls for the handsome stranger:

Voice: ... Now add to the power of youth and beauty the power of property, and you'll rid your heart of all the troubles that poverty is heir to. Men will kneel before your body, some of them content merely to touch the soil on which your feet have trodden, others driven to standing by the wayside, hoping to be touched by your shadow as you pass by.

Wariinga: So what must I do?

Voice: Come. Come. Follow me, and I'll take you up into the big Ilmorog mountains, and I'll show you all the glories of the world.... All those wonders will belong to you....

....

Yes, if you'll kneel down before me and sing my praises. (p. 192)

This completes the parody of Christ's temptations and is followed by a devastating demonstration of the Devil's power of foreknowledge as he predicts Mwireri wa Mukiraai's murder by Robin Mwaura at the instigation of the organisers of the Devil's Feast. But the final test is yet to come: the Devil offers Wariinga a job to do in Nakuru, Ngorika, which at this stage can only be interpreted as a temptation to murder the man who had despoiled her and get her revenge. But this does not make sense, for if she accepts the Devil's authority over her, then she is accepting the patronage of the Rich Old Man from Ngorika. She rejects both proposals: like Christ, she says: "No! No! Get thee behind me, Satan" to the Devil and, just as emphatically, she turns down Hispaniora Ghitahy's overtures when the real meaning of the Devil's assignment in Ngorika later turns out to be an offer of the power of property in exchange for the role of the kept woman.

Wariinga's initial rejection of the Devil's offer is a moral victory which fully vindicates the purpose of her symbolic journey to Ilmorog. From then on, she is able to choose sides and she chooses the side of the people. Her political initiation starts with the huge demonstration in which the only real part she plays is the symbolic acceptance of the little gun from Muturi which becomes her talisman and, ultimately, the instrument with which she is able to attain her personal revenge and administer justice on behalf of the people. Significantly, the Devil has no power over her in the intervening period of her transformation and preparation for the final crusade. It is only on the night of the eve of the final confrontation that her nightmare recurs, as she tells the bemused Gatuiria who tries to bush aside the obvious implications of the dream:

> `... last night's dream was a little different from the usual one. In last night's dream, the tie-wearing tribe didn't even wait for three days to elapse. And they didn't approach the Cross stealthily. Last night the men in ties came as soon as the Devil was on the Cross. They were led by armoured cars with big guns. They lifted him down and started singing his praises, guarded on every side by the armoured cars.' (p. 239)

The presence of armoured cars, and the brazen attitude of the Devil's acolytes imply official approval, which implicates the regime in power. The other detail that seems trivial but is in fact very important is that in Wariinga's last nightmare the people "scattered and went to the forests and mountains, singing [new] songs". For an audience that had seen *Ngaahika Ndeenda*, this is a clear signal of the start of the second liberation war. It is also Wariinga's final realisation that she is not alone in her crusade to the den of the patron of the modern ogres - for the people are behind her, willing her to march forward on the mission for which she had been chosen and for which she had prepared herself thoroughly: physically, morally and psychologically. The modern ogres have no defence against a heroine who is not only armed with one of their own weapons, but who also has moral justice, social commitment and the political will to back her.

3.3.2.4 THE DEVIL'S FEAST

The Devil's feast is the centrepiece of Ngugi's satire, the catalyst that makes the plot, the theme and the characterisation for the Gikuyu novel fall into place. This feast of fantasy is a parody of a religious convention, inverted to reflect the reversal of values in a capitalist society that has lost any respect for common human decency. The ceremony is ushered in with the last words of the Biblical parable of the master and the three servants to whom he entrusts his estate when he goes on a long journey, leaving each of them with a certain amount of talents which they each invest in different ways.

This parable leads to an extended adaptation into the Kenyan post-colonial situation and the setting of a multi-national economic system which Ngugi portrays as a perpetuation of the master-servant relationship under the guise of "partnership in progress", first mooted in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*. It is the exploitative character of this complicity which is the subject of satiric attack in the ensuing dramatic fantasy.

Though there is no mention of Jonathan Swift in Ngugi's discussion of the European sources that have influenced his style, the satirical concept of the Devil's Feast, and particularly the preposterous project proposals following the testimonies, is clearly reminiscent of Swift's satiric style in works like *A Modest Proposal*. In this fantasy, the ludicrously named Competition in Modern Theft and Robbery and its absurdly grandiose organizers are given open license to play out their preposterous fabrication to the full in what extends over the greater part of the novel. (pp. 82-200) This ferocious feast of shameless self-negation, presented in mock Christian revivalist evangelism, is depicted in seven fully developed **testimonies**, and the drama surrounding them, which runs parallel to the travellers' involvement as spectators and as seekers in the quest for moral redemption.

The fantastic Competition in Modern Theft and Robbery comprises of testimonials by each of the candidates, followed by a project proposal that

intended to be as preposterous as possible. It is open house to all the delegates and among the judges are the foreign observers from the multi-national corporations that control the local economic set-up. The seven episodes covered differ only in the detail of execution but the modern ogres who are the principal actors in the different scenarios are each and every one of them a gem of satiric execution.

These agents of evil are neither merely benign scarecrows and caricatures, meant to entertain the audience, nor even just mischievous goblins and gremlins, meant to shame us into acknowledging the culpability of our materialist world: the modern ogres are violently malignant spirits, bent on imposing a world economic order that has no respect for ethics such as morality, justice or truth. They are all described in grotesque detail that externalises their inner grossness and moral decrepitude. They each speak with an easy confidence and arrogance that shows complete disregard of the total reversal of the normally accepted values in society to which they don't subscribe. In appearance and manner the modern ogres are an augmentation of the combination of Ikuu wa Nditika and Ndugire in *Ngaahika Ndeenda*, the corresponding play. Of the seven principal delegates to the mock convention, a brief look at just one of them is sufficient to show the grand scale on which Ngugi portrays them:

> Nditika Nguunji was very fat. His head was huge, like a mountain. His belly hung over his belt, big and arrogant. His eyes were the size of two large red electric bulbs, and it looked as if they had been placed on his face by a Creator impatient to get on with another job. His hair was parted in the middle, so that the hair on either side of the parting looked like two ridges facing each other on either side of a tarmac road....His eyes rolled in time with his words. His hands rested on his stomach and he patted it gently, as if beseeching it not to stick out towards the people with such arrogance. (p. 176)

This is the picture of a "no nonsense" man who is perfectly at ease with himself, and that is how he presents his testimony. He is the one who is able to look reality in the face and, without flinching, confidently say:

> We all fought for freedom in different ways, on different sides. What's wrong with the way things are? Let's all forget the past. All that business of fighting for freedom was just a bad dream, a

> meaningless nightmare. Let's join hands to hands to do three things: to grab, to extort money and to confiscate. The Holy Trinity of Theft: Grabbing, Extortion, and Confiscation. If you find anything belonging to the masses, don't leave it behind, for if you don't look after yourself, who'll look after you? (p. 177)

Nditika (like his namesake in *Ngaahika Ndeenda*) is said to be a smuggler and a black-marketeer who has amassed a fortune through co-operating with foreigners with whom he has no quarrel whatsoever. He is a good orator who knows what to compliment and what to condemn in what the speakers before him have said, enhancing his own credibility in the process. When it comes to his project proposal, he is careful to ingratiate himself to the panel of judges by emphasizing its dependence on foreign co-operation for its success. Then, like the good story teller he is, he skilfully creates suspense as he skirts around his idea. When he eventually comes to it, its lack of originality no longer matters, for it has a story to carry it convincingly to the end. The idea of having a factory for the human anatomy so that rich people could buy immortality by duplicating any parts of their body at will is both grotesquely appealing for his audience and yet he himself also cunningly deflates it so that the final laughter is his. It takes confidence to do that and still audaciously claim the crown as he does - for being the least offensive and the most entertaining of the delegates to offer testimony.

This incredible edifice of fantasy is sustained at great length before it is finally brought tumbling down by the reaction of the workers, peasants and students who re-introduce a sense of reality when they invade the cave. The convention is almost humorously terminated as the demonstrators send the comic parasites running for their lives in a short-term victory that ends in the death of some members of the crowd in the police shoot out and the detention without trial of the ring leaders. But the episode also marks the heroine's awakening from her life-long slumber to see the reality of her suffering in terms of the class conflict in which the enemy are the ogres she has just witnessed engrossed in a ceremony of self-praise and Devil worship.

3.3.3 Characterization: Heroes, Patriots and Ogres

Characterization in *Caitaani Mutharaba-ini* is kept at a simple level as in the preceding play, *Ngaahika Ndeenda*. In the novel, as in the play, Ngugi is mindful of his primal audience: that is, the mostly illiterate Gikuyu, unfamiliar with the genre, the majority of whom would only have access to the novel through communal readings similar to staged performance but essentially different in that the reader/listener has the opportunity and the time for pause, questions and contemplation. So, instead of the straight division between the poor on one side and the rich on the other, which was necessary in the dramatic medium because of its short span and fixed pace of presentation, in the more relaxed novel form, the author has rightly decided to present the characters, who fall into exactly the same categories as in the play, in a slightly different form. This is determined by both the tone of the narrative, which is satiric and more subtle rather than direct and confrontational as in the play, and the form of presentation, which is largely based on that of the traditional oral narrative.

In folklore, not only are the good clearly good and the bad absolutely bad, but the world of normal houses in which the good live is only a journey away from the dark kingdom in which the ogres live in caves. The characters in the novel are, therefore, basically divided into real people going on an allegorical journey towards redemption on one hand, and the larger-than-life, human-like but anti-human ogres on the other. This is a situation that also normally creates heroes on the side of the people and arch-villains on the side of the man-eating ogres. The heroes (or heroines as in this case) also normally dominate the tale, thus reducing the other characters into aspects of the hero's own characterisation.

Caitaani Mutharaba-ini is a fable in which the only real character, therefore, is Wariinga, the heroine around whom the other "pilgrims" evolve and revolve in a "widening gyre"[4] that marks the awakening of renewed nationalism and foresees the revolution to usher in a new order. The "modern ogres" or

caricatured "thieves and robbers," who seek to determine her place in society and to devour her through sexual exploitation and corrupt her with material wealth, are best seen within their own world of fantasy, in which they have the benefit of animation to give them a semblance of reality, as in the previous section (3.2.2.4). These ogres, however, for all their grotesque exaggeration, diminish into one-dimensional cartoon characters outside the context of fantasy. The exception is the ill-fated Mwireri wa Mukiraai: the lost traveller who abandons his companions and enters the den of thieves without realising that he is in enemy territory; the erstwhile intellectual who, like the proverbial hyena, gets split into two for trying to walk two roads at once.

3.3.3.1 WARIINGA

Jacinta Wariinga is the central character in the novel. She is the fair maiden who is seduced and ravished by the ogre who comes wearing the mask of wealth and property. This violation is depicted as an act that is so mortifying that its details are only revealed later in the middle of the novel after the heroine has firmly got back on the road towards self-redemption and, even then, it is not told straight but indirectly by being seen through a veil of fantasy within fantasy (pp. 138-153) to hide the raw pain which it still causes.

The Wariinga we first hear of in the prelude to her story - for this is her story - has done something for which society is inclined to judge her without a knowledge of the mitigating circumstances - hence the elaborate call for the impartial, inspired, all-seeing, and all-knowing witness and judge not only to re-create but also to present it to the audience so that they can judge for themselves only after knowing the full story. What it is that she has done is not said, at least not at this stage, and it is left open to speculation, thus heightening suspense and sharpening our sensitivity to the character.

The dejected, distracted, suicidal girl we first encounter in the story is a victim worthy of sympathy for the way she has been treated by the wealthy men

who have sought to dominate her young life: principally the Rich Old Man from Ngorika and his alter ego, *Boss* Kihara. John Kimwana, the university student who jilts her out of baseless jealousy, is thrown in for good measure as a foil for the enigmatic Gatuiria, who himself in the end falls to her unrelenting pursuit of justice when the sins of the father are visited on the son. When Wariinga is kicked out of job and out of house, this is only an extension of the blight she had began to experience since she permitted herself to be corrupted by the Rich Old Man from Ngorika. This has had the effect of stalling her otherwise promising education (and intellectual growth) as well as placing her sense of moral rectitude under strain so that she feels the need to set the record straight by always trying to put her cards on the table in order to avoid the trauma of a later exposure - which proves to be a mistake (in the short run) in the case of her relationship with John Kimwana but correct in the case of Gatuiria, though only for a short reprieve.

Politically, Wariinga is a novice at the time when she sets out on the pilgrimage to Ilmorog. Her political education, which is only symbolically initiated by the chance encounter with the mysterious rescuer who first starts to rouse her intellect, is actively launched in Mwaura's taxi by Muturi, her initial unknown saviour. Muturi's role in initiating Wariinga to the struggle is supplemented by Wangari whose lesson is given by example: she is the traditional peasant woman who is proud to be what she is and has the courage to stand by that. Although Wariinga misses the chance to see for herself Wangari's transformation from peasant woman to political activist, Gatuiria tells her all about it in the most glowing terms.

This is the transformation[5] that Wariinga herself ultimately aspires to and attains by shedding all artificiality and returning to her natural self. In complete contrast to her earlier life, when she was associated with the parasites who sought to feed on her, she now joins the class of workers who pride in the labour of their hands - a lesson she learns from Muturi. Peck dismisses the author's handling of Wariinga's transformation (pp. 215-223) but recognizes her symbolic role in the struggle which marks Ngugi's change of focus from the failed hermit/saviour figures of the earlier novels to "the

daughters of the Iregi rebels" who are posed to be the leaders of the future revolution:

> Wariinga is celebrated as perfection personified in some embarrassingly agitprop writing about her role as Heroine of Toil... She is clearly of the people, exceptional not in an alienation from the people and in having a clearer vision than they have, but only in being the apotheosis of their own strengths.[6]

Lisa Curtis is equally dismissive of Wariinga's transformation which she labels "reductive" and her mission which she calls "trivial" and "terrorist".[7] A sympathetic reading of Ngugi's character is one that bears in mind the circumstances under which the novel was written - circumstances that rendered him susceptible to creating a sentimental heroine to depict his own quest for freedom. The Wariinga who heads for Nakuru to meet her destiny is a woman in her prime: physically, mentally, morally and psychologically. She is in effect a formidable opponent for an old man, long past his prime, who can count only on his cunning to bait her with the allure of wealth and property - worldly things which she had long rejected when the Devil tempted her. So complete is her self-assurance that she comes to her appointment with destiny dressed in a simple traditional cloth and beads that far outshine all the finery dictated by the new-found tastes of the Anglicised[8] fraternity that, ironically, lines up in formal dress to welcome her. But even a sympathetic acknowledgement of her integrity cannot hide the fact that in the end she is reduced to a symbol of militancy, an unrealistic heroine of the struggle whose outcome remains as elusive as ever.

3.3.3.2 GATUIRIA

In spite of Wariinga's heroic stature and central position, Gatuiria is perhaps the most fully developed character in the novel. He is a reminder of Ngugi's earlier enigmatic characters like Munira in *Petals of Blood*. Gatuiria represents the educated elite, the intellectuals whose side in the people's struggle for social justice is not very certain. As Muturi puts it: "Those educated people are often not sure whose side they are on. They sway from this

side to that like water on a leaf." (p. 211) But Gatuiria appears to be more redeemable than the compromised Mwireri wa Mukiraai who has commercialized his intellect to a point of no return, for at least Gatuiria is aware of the shortcomings on the part of the intellectuals. Even before Muturi makes the above comment, Gatuiria asks himself:

> We, the intellectuals among the workers, which side are we on? Are we on the side of the producers or the side of those who live on the products of others? Are we on the side of the workers and peasants or on the side of the exploiters? Or are we like the hyena who tried to walk along two different roads at the same time? (p.205)

Gatuiria himself, however, is presented throughout as a consistent character whose sympathies are firmly with tradition and the workers and peasants. He is said to have made his choice at an early age, in his wealthy father's tea plantations where he spent his happiest moments with the workers: "They were the ones who sang beautiful songs to me, who told me exciting stories, who often played their guitars or their bamboo flutes for me ..." (p. 133) He can therefore be seen as an intellectual who has turned his back on wealth and property and rejected the temptations of the devil. His commitment in life at the time when we meet him, is the quest for a theme for a musical composition that would integrate the musical instruments from the whole nation, blending it with a thousand voices. So, apart from being a man who had rejected the trappings of materialism and even his father's name, Gatuiria is also the artist who is perpetually seeking harmony and unity and truth - a potential ally in the struggle. It is not surprising that the Student Leader spots him and recruits him for the vital mission to Ilmorog.

Gatuiria's search is said to have already proved to be a frustrating one because of the fragmented nature of the Kenyan society and because of the discouraging domination of transitory values that undermine his quest for a sustainable vision. But his struggle with the language of the people on the journey to Ilmorog suggests that he still has a lot to learn at this stage and the way in which it all appears to fall into place, intuitively, suddenly giving him unrestrained expression, affirms that he is at long last on the right trail.[8] Prior to that, the closest he had come to finding a theme that

had enduring value was on his visit to the old man from Bahati (an ironic antithesis to his own father, who is constantly referred to by Wariinga as the Rich Old Man from Ngorika). The old man from Bahati had told him the parables (discussed in Section 3.2.2.2 above) which had fired his imagination but only briefly before the fire suddenly fizzled out because (unlike Ngugi) he did not believe in fables as a basis for commenting on society. What he needed was real life experience to teach him what his long stay in America had made him miss: an understanding of the struggle that his people were engaged in and what they were up against.

Gatuiria travels to Ilmorog as a "pilgrim" and an observer and gets the opportunity to witness the translation of the fable that had already fired his imagination into the real life demonstration of class conflict that he already knew from his childhood experience. The modern ogres suddenly come to life and the rise of the victims against their oppressors suddenly becomes meaningful to him. He gets his theme but in the event it turns out that neither he, nor Wariinga, is quite ready for direct involvement.

In going back to the university to give creative expression to his experience, he also gets inspiration from Wariinga to dedicate himself to it in a situation of mutual (as opposed to parasitic) respect and affection. Ironically, it is also Gatuiria's destiny to help Wariinga regain her intellectual re-orientation so as to build the self-confidence to embark on the heroic crusade for which Gatuiria himself in the end proves to be unprepared. But whereas Wariinga moves away from the personal to the impersonal, Gatuiria is so full of himself that he evaluates his own work as revolutionary. (p. 244) What goes wrong with Gatuiria is that, unlike Wariinga who is able to put almost all her cards on the table and is guilt-free, Gatuiria harbours guilt about the father he has otherwise disowned, not realizing that the secret would be explosive when it finally came out, as it inevitably does. In the end he is unable to give up his parents and he finds himself headed back to Ngorika instead of steering Wariinga away from Nakuru. Gatuiria is unable to stop the clock or reverse the course that fate has set for them all - even when he begins to sense that all is not going the way he expected. At the end of the story, when Wariinga proceeds with her resolve to

go on with the crusade for justice, Gatuiria appears to have made his choice to stick with the establishment and, maybe, hope to change it from within - hence his concern first and foremost with his father's body (management), then with his mother's well-being (loyalty), and lastly, too late, with Wariinga who is then heading out of sight (lost love).

Yet, for all the clarity of that character profile, there remains something disturbing about Ngugi's portrayal of Gatuiria which cannot be easily explained away. Gatuiria is not just a failed saviour figure like Mugo in *A Grain of Wheat* or Munira in *Petals of Blood* as Peck argues.[10] He is actually two different and contradictory characters: on the one hand, he is the artist figure and an intellectual (like the author himself) who is engaged in a perpetual quest for truth; on the other (unlike Ngugi who comes from the peasantry), he is the son of the patron of the modern ogres, a legacy he may try to disavow but can not leave behind. In the end we have got to accept that Gatuiria never was what he seemed to be - a benign fence-sitting intellectual - but in fact a two-faced ogre and an enemy of the people.

3.3.3.3 MUTURI

Muturi is a representative of the workers who has been everywhere and suffered every injustice that the establishment can mete out to the underdog. On the journey to Ilmorog, he starts off rather reticent but soon opens up when he finds his kindred spirit in the open and fearless Wangari. The two of them team up harmoniously in recalling the liberation war and the ideals that they both had fought for, which had been cheapened and commercialized in the new spirit of Haraambe.[11] Wangari's guilelessness is responsible for Muturi's dropping of his guard and speaking boldly when he might have been more discreet. For a man who is on a clandestine mission, he ends up exposing himself more than he should have if he had taken Mwaura's self-seeking materialism more seriously and not mistaken it for an ordinary taxi driver's love of gossip for its own sake. In the end Mwaura twists the very things that Muturi had said to testify against him. But this in itself is of little

consequence to Muturi who anticipates his arrest and knows that no evidence is needed to incarcerate him since the ultimate fate of people like him (and the author himself), whose only crime is that of trying to rectify social imbalances, is detention without trial until pardoned without apology.

Muturi is certainly not a bad judge of character. His distrust of Gatuiria's commitment is justified in the end when Gatuiria opts to assume his legacy rather than follow Wariinga in her crusade. In the case of Robin Mwaura, Muturi can be deemed to be deliberately provocative and daring as many political dissidents are when they come across a two-faced informer. He correctly judges Wangari to be kindred spirit right from the beginning but he also detects the stubborn streak in her that makes him realise that it would be futile to try and change her mind from the course of action she is set on taking. But he is mature enough to accept that it does not matter, especially since her path leads to the same destination as his own and her action ultimately serves the same ends, for they are natural allies, not foes. In regard to Wariinga, Muturi intuitively senses another kindred spirit - still a long way from being ready for the baptism of fire, but already "bespoken". Having been fated to snatch her from the jaws of death[12] on three occasions - the last time with the student leader as proxy - he is justifiably entitled to her life. So he symbolically entrusts her with the custody of her own dowry (the gun), knowing that she could be relied on to take good care of it or use it as it is meant to be - in the service of the people.

Muturi prides himself in being a worker, a producer, and there is nothing that demonstrates his overwhelming respect for man's labour better than the incident when he assigns to Wariinga the gun he had "recovered" from the hands of one of the modern ogres:

> See how beautifully it gleams! This is the product of a workers' hands! But, you know, it doesn't go to defend the worker. We, the workers have always made things that end up oppressing us! But now look at the product of a worker's hands. It was iron pipes like this one, in the hands of the workers, that saved Kenya from the old colonialism. Even today guns like this should really be in the hands of the workers so that they can defend the unity and wealth and freedom of their country. (p. 211)

Muturi's reverence for this symbol of "the combined labour of many hands" is anticipated earlier (pp. 52-53) in his casual discourse with Mwaura on the journey to Ilmorog when he argues that it is the workers' combined effort which is responsible for all that is called progress and development, citing communication systems that range from the visible examples like roads, railways, and the vehicles that travel on them, to the almost magical telephones, radios, television and cinema, and to the "fire trapped inside copper wires" which is extracted from the waters of the local rivers and used to bring light (the sun and the moon) when there is darkness. This brings the miracles of science and technology to a level which the ordinary working man and peasant can comprehend and share in as a fellow producer whose hands are capable of working wonders in subduing nature to serve man's needs. Muturi is not merely concerned with making casual talk to while away the slow journey: he is actively engaging in his mission of rousing the people to an awareness of their conditions of life. So he asks:

> If the fruits of that co-operation had not been grabbed by the clan of parasites, where do you think that we, the clan of producers, would be today? Would we still know the meaning of cold, hunger, thirst and nakedness? (pp. 52-53)

In the end, when Muturi goes into detention as one of the "Holy Trinity", he is the leader of the pack and an inspiration for the people to continue the struggle. Having anticipated such a fate, we know that for him detention is just another assignment in a place where he knows there is a job to be done.[13]

3.3.3.4 WANGARI

Wangari is presented as a peasant woman endowed with the natural honesty and courage of the simple folk which the more wary and worldly-wise mistake for naivete. On the journey to Ilmorog she is the one who first breaks the ice with her disarming guilelessness and makes everyone (including the sly Mwaura) in time drop their guard and unveil themselves to some degree or other. She establishes social contact between the travellers, ironically, as a result of her admission to having no fare which makes Mwaura immediately flare up while

the others rally to her aid. Harmony is restored in the representative "community", a lesson is learnt and the journey continues. Wangari ceases to be just "the woman with the garment and basket" and becomes a real human being who further opens human barriers with an account of her traumatic experience in Nairobi.

From this we learn of her courage, her sense of justice and her candid view of how social ills should be corrected. In the story of her sad plight looking for a job in the city where she had been arrested and charged as a vagrant, it is Wangari's intuitive sense of what needs to be done rather than her factual knowledge of the event that prompts her to challenge the establishment in court to go and arrest the thieves and robbers in the dens of Ilmorog instead of wasting the state's resources harassing an innocent woman. The judge chooses the easy option of taking her challenge at face value for a voluntary offer of co-operation but he also strips her of the little money she has in a contestable fine which demonstrates how the poor are often robbed of even the little that they have. This unsolicited account of fellowship in suffering, apart from offering an explanation for her being on a journey without any money, consolidates the empathy that develops between her and her fellow travellers - and especially Muturi who immediately begins to relate to her. Her honesty is responsible for Muturi's dropping his guard in accession to the popular belief she expresses that taxis are the only place where one could express one's views without fear of recrimination.

However, Wangari and Muturi retain some reservations about each other that are stronger on the part of Muturi than with Wangari who several times comes close to confiding in him and soliciting his support in getting the thieves and robbers arrested. That is precisely the point of departure between them for, whereas Wangari is uninitiated in politics and retains a certain amount of gullibility with regard to the police, Muturi is an old veteran and knows that the system can not be trusted to correct itself. So they each follow their own agenda after establishing that the time is rife for action. Wangari reports the Devil's feast to the police and on escorting Inspector Gikono's men to the cave, gets arrested instead and thrown in jail.

Wangari's arrest marks a turning point in her life, for it finally opens her eyes to the position of the police in the poor people's struggle for social justice. She goes to prison a heroine (in chains like Kimathi and the Woman in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*) to learn her lesson from experience, as Muturi expected. Her heroic exit also marks Gatuiria's final realization of the theme he had been searching for as well as anticipating Wariinga's triumphal exit at the end of the novel.

3.3.3.5 MWIRERI WA MUKIRAAI

The ill-fated Mwireri wa Mukiraai is the lost traveller who abandons his companions and strays into the den of thieves without realizing that he is in enemy territory. He is the intellectual who, like the proverbial hyena, gets split into two by trying to walk two roads at once. Yet Mwireri is accredited for the adaptation to the modern situation of the Biblical parable of the man who travels to a far country and leaves his three servants to manage his property. This parable is not only used as a theme for the competition of thieves and robbers but is also given an anti-imperialist twist at the end of it which the master of ceremonies would not have approved of. It is probably the fact that he gives his fellow travellers the genuine invitations to enable them to get inside the cave that makes them more inclined to be forgiving towards him in the end even when he appears to have abandoned them.

Mwireri ends up antagonizing both sides in the conflict by falling short of the objectives of either side and trying to hide his failings behind the mask of intellectualism. He offends the class of his fellow exploiters by openly refusing to advocate co-operation with the foreign exploiters as a pre-condition for admission into the club, thus jeopardizing everyone's selfish interests and inviting harsh recrimination as a gesture of disapproval of his ideas. The leader of the foreign delegation specifically demands this as a condition for their agreeing to stay on at the feast and the execution of Mwireri, which is organized there and then, is meant to appease him. Mwireri also betrays the side of the workers and peasants by endorsing exploitation.

He is so blind to the plight of the people that, when Wariinga makes her gesture of protest, he mistakes her for the enemy who had thwarted his plans instead of blaming himself and his fellow exploiters who have driven him out of the den and have plotted to have him murdered at a convenient distance away from Ilmorog. And moreover he is seen as a traitor even to the fence-sitting intellectuals whom he has abandoned to concentrate on the worship of the god of gold and silver. One would think that he hardly deserves any sympathy, yet after his murder, the only people who speak kindly of him are his fellow travellers on the journey to Ilmorog - and especially Wariinga - who is able to pardon his failings and in the end makes an effort to avenge his death.

3.3.3.6 MWAURA

Mwaura the taxi driver is a thug and an opportunist. As he openly admits himself on the journey to Ilmorog, he is a man whose word cannot be trusted. But although some of the things he claims may be mere fabrications meant to entertain his passengers, most of what he says about himself seems true enough to be taken at its face value. One thing that is unquestionable about him is his love of money, for which he could and does kill - hence his connection with the sinister Devil's Angels who are a group of hired assassins and muscle-men who are retained by the rich for the task of eliminating anyone who threatens their interests. Whereas his passengers are travelling to Ilmorog in a quest of more noble goals, Mwaura himself is only heading there for the money and fame that he might chance to make. But he is also the conveyer of the opponents of the establishment even though he very quickly exonerates himself by betraying Mwireri to protect himself. This duplicity, however, is in character as he is a man who would benefit from both sides if he could.

Like most taxi drivers, Mwaura loves to talk and especially about either himself or politics - or both. It goes with the trade to sound provocative, amoral and worldly-wise, and yet remain perfectly non-committal and inoffensive. Mwaura, the indefatigable pragmatist, makes it quite clear that his primary objective is always looking after himself:

> I say this world is round. If it leans that way, I lean that way with it. If it stumbles, I stumble with it. If it bends, I bend with it. If it stays upright, I stay upright with it. If it growls, I growl with it. If it is silent, I stay silent too. The first law of the hyena state: Don't be choosy; eat what is available. If I find myself among members of the Akurinu sect, I become one of them; when I'm with those who have been saved, I too am saved; when I'm with Muslims, I embrace Islam; when I'm among pagans, I too become a pagan. (p. 47)

Mwaura regards himself as a businessman who will take a passenger anywhere in heaven or hell and who would do anything in the world for money. The question of morality does not concern him, as he says:

> ... we businessman play off God and the Devil against each other. We don't like to anger either of them. We pray to both. (p. 48)

He also adds that a businessman has many masters and must obey them all. Mwaura also calls himself a modern Thomas: one who will only believe what he has seen and touched. He says to his passengers that if he were invited to the Devil's feast, he would go to see for himself and this is a lie since he has a knowledge of the feast before setting out from Nairobi. His reasons for lying to them are probably just to protect his business interests and to avoid being asked for any explanations.

It is not surprising that when Mwaura is engaged by the organizers of the Devil's feast to arrange an accident to eliminate Mwireri and in the process write off his decrepit old taxi in exchange for an undisclosed payment, he jumps at the golden opportunity without any hesitation. And later when Muturi, Wangari and the student leader appear in court for trial, Mwaura readily volunteers to act as the key prosecution witness who blatantly perjures himself by telling half-truths and fabrications to incriminate them. For reward, we are told that he buys new taxis a month later and starts a transport company with the accomplices who had hired him as directors. The last time we see Mwaura is in Ngorika where he has been hired to take some of the directors to the "tea party"[14] to welcome Hispaniora Greenway Ghitahy's prospective daughter-in-law. When all hell breaks loose and Wariinga strides out like an avenging goddess after shooting down the arch-devil and maiming two of his disciples, Mwaura as leader of the Devil's Angels, who might have

been expected to counter her offensive, takes off in a hurry like the deadly but cowardly hyena he is: a hireling with no commitment and no cause to take unnecessary risks.

3.3.3.7 STUDENT LEADER: THE FACILITATOR

The Student Leader who, significantly, remains un-named throughout the novel, is another figure who is largely conceived and developed around the character of Wariinga and her transition from being a victim of exploitation to becoming an agent of retribution, a militant crusader in the quest for a more just society. The Student Leader is un-named because he is first and foremost a democratically elected office-holder, a representative of other countless, faceless students like him who are depicted en-masse as beginning to take sides in the class confrontation between the haves and have-nots. His primary mission, as a leader, is to recruit potential leaders like himself into the movement.

In choosing Wariinga, he is using his intuition which proves right, for it is he who first identifies this half-crazed, lost, suicidal child-woman as a human being worthy of redemption and capable of making a contribution to bettering the lives of others in need. That is the Wariinga who first appears in the story: a dejected, distracted, aimless wanderer - literally walking the city streets unawares and unseeing - whom he rescues from the jaws of death. The stranger is drawn to her by her obvious fellow human suffering and expresses this empathy in minding her only possession (the handbag which she had dropped, indicating a surrender of all worldly concerns) the same way that he picks the life she appears to be prepared to throw away. Like the good samaritan he is, he takes her to safety and watches over her until she regains her composure - thus re-assuming possession of her life. After thus ensuring her physical well-being, he stays long enough to talk to her and also ensure her mental well-being. By then she is recovered enough to remember her worldly needs and repossess her handbag. In giving Wariinga an opportunity to get her problems out of her chest by sharing them with a sympathetic fellow human being (not the monsters from whom she is running away), he also makes

her feel emotionally recovered. And, finally, after hearing her story, he literally puts her on the road towards moral redemption by giving her the invitation card to the Devil's feast in Ilmorog. He thus turns Wariinga's desperate and blind groping for the meaning of life from ending in the defeatist running home to mother (hence the suicidal negation of the present self as a means of returning to the safety of the womb to be reborn) into a crusade to oust the devils who had not only violated her person and sought to dominate her life but had done the same to millions of others like her.

His role in this key encounter is psychologically reassuring in restoring Wariinga's sense of perspective about her life; morally corrective in absolving her from the confessional and setting her on the right path; and socially/politically purposeful in giving her a mission in life which goes beyond personal revenge to attain the status of a crusade. In all these, his role is similar to that of Gicaamba in relation to Kiguunda in *Ngaahika Ndeenda*, and when they reach the point of identification, the two men each refers to himself as Priest of Peace.[15]

The Student Leader disappears from the story after this incident but he remains an ever-present inspiration in Wariinga's mind, for his relationship with her is ideological rather than physical. For the latter, as it turns out, he appears to have intuitively selected Gatuiria (whom he also invites to Ilmorog) as the instrument of her healing. He only re-surfaces in the march of the workers, peasants and students to the cave to chase away the thieves and robbers. But even then he is only glimpsed at from a distance and he is only heard, impersonally, when he mounts the platform after Muturi to address the crowd. It is on this occasion when it emerges that the role of the Student Leader in the story is really that of a "facilitator". He is the one who puts the other "pilgrims" on the way towards finding a common ideal. Muturi also gives credit to the Student Leader for organizing the students, workers and peasants of Ilmorog for the protest march well in advance of Muturi's arrival. For his role in creating this awareness, he attains the status of a hero with the people: one of the "Holy Trinity" who are arrested

on the day of the protest and subjected to a mock trial before the charges are suddenly dropped in favour of the more convenient detention without trial.

3.3.3.8 THE RICH OLD MAN FROM NGORIKA (GHITAHY) AND *BOSS* KIHARA: THE DEVIL AND HIS PROXY

Although these two men come into Wariinga's life at different times, they represent an identical impediment on her way to attaining self-realization. The similarity between the Alpha and the Omega of her tribulations is vividly illustrated in the way in which the two old men echo each other almost verbatim in the two incidents at the beginning and the end of the novel - revealing in itself - in which they each seek to use their wealth and their power to dominate her. It is significant that we first get to hear the sugar-coated "words of honey and perfume" from the ageing but inexperienced *Boss* Kihara - who is easily nonplussed by Wariinga - before we hear the original master's voice pitted against the more experienced Wariinga, who is neither the impressionable schoolgirl he had captivated nor the susceptible secretary *Boss* Kihara, his alter ego, had tried in vain to seduce.

The account of *Boss* Kihara's abortive attempt to seduce Wariinga is told directly, because - being a moral victory on her part - it presents no pain. But the link with the earlier seduction by the Old Man from Ngorika and her current rejection by Kimwana, which is partly why she feels suicidal, is a distressing. To reassure herself of her basic integrity, she forces herself to distance it from her conscious mind, cushioning the pain of relating it to the mysterious stranger (which also makes it easier) by "fictionalizing" it. Her fable of Kareendi, Waigoko and Kamoongonye gives all the basic details of her luckless young life without directly acknowledging the pain of it.[18]

The link between the Rich Old Man from Ngorika and *Boss* Kihara is further highlighted by the involvement of the university student, John Kimwana, who adds to Wariinga's distress by jilting her on account of her past involvement with one and the false allegation of her being a mistress to the other.

Kimwana's insensitivity and selfishness, after all the sacrifices that she had made to further his education, make him unworthy of her - for he is just another parasite like the old men he is so jealous of. As parasites, they are all vermin that she is well rid of in the end. John Kimwana disappears from the story without ever showing his face again but *Boss* Kihara resurfaces later with foreign investors to purchase a plot of land on which Wariinga and her work-mates in the open-air garage had planned to build a modern communally owned garage. The crisis he thus precipitates is left unresolved but is not forgotten by the militant Wariinga who is no longer the docile secretary whom *Boss* Kihara could simply dismiss without a fuss. Indeed it appears to add to her resolve to finish the assignment in Ngorika before, presumably, returning to deal with the likes of *Boss* Kihara.

In thus postponing the inevitable confrontation with *Boss* Kihara, Wariinga shows that her priority is the much more pressing impulse to get to the root of her problems: Nakuru, where also lives the Rich Old Man from Ngorika who keeps recurring in her memories like an unsettled account that had to be dealt with eventually. It is only when she is finally headed for Ngorika that Wariinga is at long last able to discard all guilt and talk lightly about the past and the future which she appears to be trying to reconcile with the present: her Waigoko and the daughter he rejected, whose close resemblance to her Kamoongonye she either takes for granted as accidental, refuses to acknowledge to be proof of kinship in her conscious mind, or knows for a fact.

The Rich Old Man from Ngorika is also the embodiment of the curse on Wariinga's life which frequently rises from her subconscious in a recurrent nightmare which lends the novel its title. On the eve of her confrontation with the Rich Old Man in Ngorika, Wariinga is mentally prepared for the unexpected by the recurrent dream but it is only in the final conflict that she realises that the job in Ngorika which she had rejected in the golf course dream was not the elimination of the devil but a proposition to save him from his nemesis with her youth and beauty in return for the power of material wealth and the position of mistress and glorified prostitute. As prepared as Wariinga is for the accomplishment of her mission, she does not waver but

rejects this ultimate insult most emphatically by gunning down the devil incarnate in his attitude of false praise as he clings to her knees in an attitude of irrevocable debasement.

3.3.4 Themes: From the Universal to the Traditional

The themes in *Devil on the Cross* are also carefully chosen to suit the primary audience which the author had in mind. Instead of going for complex universal themes that would be of little interest to the largely illiterate, unschooled Gikuyu reader/listener, Ngugi opts for a variation of basically the same themes as in the preceding play, *Ngaahika Ndeenda*. Because of the novel form being closer to the oral folk tale with which his audience is familiar, the author chooses a concept that could easily be illustrated with fables and translated into themes in the same way as the traditional folk tale.

Ngugi develops the whole novel on the model of an extended oral tale, complete with heroes, heroines and man-eating ogres to convey the central theme of the people's struggle against oppression and exploitation by the wealthy bourgeois class and their foreign allies. The oppressors and exploiters are satirized by being blown out of proportion to demonstrate the monstrosity of their parasitic monopoly of the nation's wealth, which is primarily produced by the workers - an ongoing debate in Ngugi's writing since *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*. As "eaters" of what the workers and peasants produce, the bourgeoisie are like ogres who recklessly destroy what they are dependent on, sucking the life out of the workers and leaving them weaker, more impoverished and therefore less equipped for production while the wealthy grow wealthier and grosser. Religion in the mouths of such people is only a convenience which they use to justify their own ends and, by doing so, they are usurping God's power and acting as agents of the Devil - hence the key parodying of the religious convention.

In this section we shall look at the basic themes that Ngugi brings down from the universal level to the level that the ordinary people can relate to their own everyday experience, thus giving the lie to commonly held notions that the African in general is incapable of abstraction and that the illiteracy of the vast majority of "uneducated" people amounts to a lack of intelligence. These themes are discussed at different inter-related levels as follows:

Abstract level: **The Duality of Man;**

Communal level: **Class Conflict: Proletariat and Peasant versus Bourgeoisie;**

Personal level: **Betrayal and Retribution.**

3.3.4.1 THE DUALITY OF MAN

The Nature of Man in the abstract is the main theme of the debate between Muturi and Mwaura on the journey to Ilmorog. They argue about concepts like the relationship between God and Satan: Good and Evil, which they both agree do exist. The two men concede that, in the abstract, God and the Devil are only meaningful relative to each other, and that, since man is forced to live with both Good and Evil, there is no point at which it can be said that one or the other can be completely eliminated. Muturi, as a man with a single-minded mission in life, has opted to be on the side of God or Good. But Mwaura, the opportunist, believes in keeping his options open and striking an even balance, saying:

> I am equally at home on either side. Didn't you say just now that I was someone who cooks two pots simultaneously? You were quite right. Only, I don't like burning the food in either pot. Let's go back to the question of God and Satan. I have never set eyes on either of them. But let's agree they both exist. Each has his own powers. And it is true that both have always sought votes on this Earth, the votes that are cast in the hearts of men. Can't you see, then, that each is capable of improving or ruining your fortunes on this Earth? Just as you find candidates vying with each other as they tout for votes during the elections, so we businessmen play off god and the Devil against each another.[sic] We don't like to anger either of them. We pray to both. (p. 48)

The discussion of this duality of man in the modern setting of major advances in medical science is taken a step further to examine the abstract idea of the heart as the seat of emotion and the battlefield of Good and Evil. Mwaura re-opens the debate by drawing on a newspaper article he had read about heart transplants[17] to reflect on whether the recipient of a donor heart would still be the same person he/she was before the transplant or whether he/she would be transformed by the new heart into the other person - the donor. And in the event of a scramble for a good heart, he asks who would be entitled to the donor heart when Resurrection Day comes: the original donor or the recipient in whom it had also lived? Mwaura then extends the argument to a hypothetical situation where a wealthy person with a wicked heart would, before he died, have the good heart of a poor person transplanted into him so that he would go to Heaven while the poor person goes to Hell, either because he has no heart (and therefore no soul) or because he is stranded with the wicked heart of the wealthy man, because he cannot afford any other. Mwaura uses this argument to counter the idea of an intrinsic value in the heart whose claim to being the seat of man's soul and emotions he is still inclined to dismiss as an illusion: "A breeze, a breath of wind ... a passing cloud that is transformed by the dreams of a man crushed by poverty ..." (p. 51) Muturi is virtually trapped into re-defining the heart in biological terms which would tend to affirm Mwaura's earlier assertion that the heart after all is just an organ of the body.[18]

But Muturi then goes on to make a subtle, philosophical assertion, saying: "humanity is the heart of man because the heart of man is linked irrevocably with the growth of his nature as a man." Refusing to be drawn to another plane of thought, Mwaura counters that there is no such a thing as a good or bad heart:

> A heart is a heart. Talk of Heaven and Hell is nothing more than a collection of stories that are intended to frighten children.
>
> (p.53)

Muturi disagrees, arguing that both Heaven and Hell exist and that the difference between them is like the difference between good and evil: He says:

> Our lives are a battlefield on which is fought a continuous war between the forces that are pledged to confirm our humanity and those determined to dismantle it; those who strive to build a protective wall around it, and those who wish to pull it down; those who seek to mould [sic] it, and those committed to breaking it up; those whose aim is to open our eyes, to make us see the light and look to tomorrow, asking ourselves about the future of our children, and those who wish to lull us into closing our eyes, encouraging us to care only for our stomachs today, without thinking about the tomorrow of our country. (p. 53)

This is the context in which Muturi sees the world as divided into only two camps, for there is no possibility of spectators as Mwaura would have him believe. According to him, these camps are: the clan of producers, which is committed to creating Heaven on Earth, and the clan of parasites, which is committed to creating Hell on Earth. The clan of parasites builds the evil heart while the clan of producers builds the good heart. Muturi concludes: "It is our actions that show which side we're on," and adds that we are like a sharp sword which, though neutral in itself, has the capacity for both good and evil, depending on whose hands it is placed in:

> In the hands of the producer the sword of fire has the capacity to do good. And in the hands of the parasite the sword of fire has the capacity to do evil. Its actions illustrate both the evil and the good nature of the sword of fire. (p. 54)

Muturi then brings home the essential duality of man's nature by comparing the heart to "a mirror through which we can look at ourselves and our work on this Earth ... a mirror that will reflect both good and evil." To reject this duality, he concludes, is to reject reality, and he goes on to add:

> Driver! There are two ways: the one that leads people to death, and the one that leads people to life. Show me the way to death, and I will show you the way to life. Show me the way to life, and I will show you the way to death. For the two meet in the actions of every man ..." (p. 54)

That completely silences Mwaura who is inclined to agree, from his own personal experience, but can not openly say so without risking disclosures that would compromise him.

Gatuiria finds it difficult to be inspired to compose the kind of music he perceives in theory because, in practice, he lacks vision and tries to operate on a one-track mind that denies the duality in him. When he is given the opportunity to witness this dichotomy in the competition of thieves and robbers, he finds only discouragement, and hears only cacophony. It takes the more perceptive Wariinga, who is getting to grips with her own duality after trying to deny it through three attempts at suicide, to correct Gatuiria and make him begin to see the inspiration that lies beyond the superficial level of the modern ogres' postulations:

> There is no love that is not linked with hate. How can you tell what you love what you love unless you know what you hate?[19] ... Didn't we two emerge from that cave chanting poems to our country? Kenya has enough patriots and heroes to inspire a patriotic composition. Wasn't Kimathi born of a Kenyan woman?[20] The biggest knot in you is the absence of love, because you've never known what hatred is. For while, it is true, a child with parents to look after him will never eat shit, if he is brought up wrapped in over-protective love, he will never learn anything. He will never learn the difference between dirt and cleanliness, hate and love ... It is whiteness that tells us what blackness is. Those whom we have left in the cave are the very people who are now identifying for us the true heroes of our land. (p. 132-133)

These abstractions on the Nature of Man are also illustrated through the parables which the old man of Bahati (who says there is no difference between stories, old or modern) tells Gatuiria, who is himself seeking to reconcile a different kind of duality through finding *harmony in polyphony* in Kenyan tradition. These parables further prove that abstract concepts have always been within man's awareness, even in the timeless traditional setting.

The parable of Nding'uri, who sells his soul to the evil spirit in exchange for wealth and property and prospers until the day when he forgets and boasts that he has no soul, is used to teach many lessons: that wealth and property can be corrupting; that love and respect for other people and compassion for the less privileged are greater gifts than the power of wealth; and that the capacity for good or evil is within each individual's power to control. Nding'uri is a man who had proved his power for good but, when brought to the

test, falls overboard by selling out completely to the side of evil for short term gains.

The idea of the ogre itself is one that reflects a duality: he is a two-faced man-like monster, or monster-like man, who preys on his fellow man and denies his own humanity by letting evil prevail. The ogre is essential Man, not Beast, for he operates in the community on which he preys. It is by choice that such a man remains beyond redemption.

It is interesting to note that in the oral traditions the ogre is always a man and never a woman, for women are the producers, the weaker sex as they are called, while men are the self-negating aggressors, plunderers and philanderers. The delegates we see in the den of thieves have human form and show just how their talents might have been used to achieve good ends if - like Nding'uri in the parable - they had not sold their souls to the Devil. They do not even appear to realise this, still seeing themselves as engaged in the service of God. Mwireri wa Mukiraai goes to great pains to discount the suggestion that the Competition of Thieves and Robbers is the Devil's Feast and the Rich Old Man from Ngorika is said to be a devout Christian. By contrast, the masses are made to appear like pagans who are doomed to go to Hell for their rebellion against God's wishes, interpreted as the humility to accept their subjection without question or resentment.

This dichotomy is also reflected in the individuals like Wariinga who starts off in life as a little angel harbouring a little devil within her and in the end goes out of the story like an angel of retribution within whom there is also the devil of revenge. Even if Ghitahy's killing is seen as a justifiable execution, vindicating Wariinga's claim to the heroic stature she assumes, there is something of the devil and the angel in her act." But the best example of this duality which is found in all of us is Mwireri wa Mukiraai, who, figuratively speaking, plays with the hares and hunts with the hounds; and, to a lesser extent, Robin Mwaura, who will blow with the wind and flow with the current as it suits him, but will not make a stand for God or Devil when the going gets tough.

3.3.4.2 CLASS CONFLICT: PROLETARIAT and PEASANTS versus THE BOURGEOISIE

This class conflict has become a recurrent theme in Ngugi's works in which it is constantly renewed and recycled. Whereas in the preceding play the workers and peasants are only a token force representing others beyond the scope of the theatrical medium, in *Devil on the Cross* we finally get a panoramic view of a mass movement of enormous proportion which is able to demonstrate what the power of the people can do - even if it is only possible to sustain briefly since it is not organised on a national scale, as advocated by Gicaamba in *Ngaahika Ndeenda*. Central to this emergent mass movement, which is still in its infancy, is Muturi - a character who is modelled on the earlier Gicaamba.

Muturi gives expression to the author's own views on the class conflict at the heart of Kenyan politics. His address to the people after they have routed out the thieves and robbers is a resume of what he had more extensively elaborated earlier as the pilgrims were travelling to Ilmorog:

> Friends - or perhaps I should call you clansmen, for we who are gathered here now belong to one clan: the clan of workers - I think all of us saw the incredible spectacle of those who have bellies that never bear children come to scorn us. The bellies are not swollen by disease. They have been fatted by the fruit of our sweat and blood. Those bellies are barren, and their owners are barren. What about us workers? We build houses, others occupy them; and we, the builders, are left out in the rain. We make clothes; others take them, and dress well; and we the tailors go naked. We grow food; others eat it; and we, the farmers, sleep with our stomachs growling through the night. Look here. We build good schools; other people's children find places in them, and ours go looking for food in rubbish heaps and dustbins. Today we are taking a stand. Today, here, we refuse to go on being the pot that cooks the food and never tastes the food. (p. 208)

The theme of the Competition in Theft and Robbery is the satirical depiction of this class conflict reduced to its most absurd level of bestiality. Each testimony is not only a shameless confession of how the contestants have exploited workers and peasants but also the occasion for outlining a project proposal for the enhancement of this economic exploitation for the mutual

benefit of the local bourgeoisie and their foreign partners. This convention of parasites is set up to find not only the winner but seven other experts who would be given the key to unlimited exploitation through the foreign businesses and finance institutions in the country. The delegates all share a common propensity for evil and although they do not look at themselves as the Devil's Advocates, the Devil who appears to Wariinga in her dream/revelation at the golf course[21] is evidently the Patron (The Head of the Convocation and the Unseen Listener to every Testimony) who even knows beforehand who the winner would be, though he hesitates to admit that he has pre-determined the course of the contest. The evil genius who is favoured to win is known as Kimeendeeri wa Kanyuanjii, who submits a project proposal for a research farm where workers would be penned in like animals for an experiment with the idea of tapping their sweat, blood and brains to be pumped like petroleum oil for export to foreign countries from which he "will get a commission at a fixed rate" (p. 187) for every gallon sold.[22]

This gross denial of humanity to the working class is only illustrative of the class conflict which is clearly stated from the beginning on the journey to Ilmorog when Muturi in particular is used as a vehicle for the indictment of the bourgeoisie. Without that basic foundation that lays down the class conflict both in abstract as well as in concrete terms, the extended satire might have looked like an over-elaborate example instead of the comprehensive indictment it is - which leaves no room for the benefit of doubt and conclusively proves the case of the proletariat and peasants against the bourgeoisie.

The next logical stage in the conflict against the bourgeoisie is for the proletariat to step into what is referred to as the "third world" after that of the producer and the eater. The protest march in Ilmorog is only a forerunner of this "workers' feast[23] to be held some time in the future," as Muturi tells Wariinga when he gives her the gun that was to be the key to her starting the crusade for revolution. The Wariinga who unleashes the fire of retribution and turns her back on the bourgeoisie at the end of the narrative is meant to be seen not just as an imaginary heroine of fable or history but

as a soldier of the future revolution that would liberate Kenya (and Africa as a whole) from the yoke of neo-colonialism.

3.3.4.3 BETRAYAL AND RETRIBUTION

Wariinga's seduction and rejection by the Rich Old Man from Ngorika is a recurrent betrayal theme which runs through Ngugi's later works dealing with post-independence Kenya. In *Petals of Blood*, Wanja goes through an experience almost parallel to Wariinga's, which also ends in a parallel baptism by fire. The difference is that Wanja is only a passive agent in facilitating retribution for her betrayal. She ends up compromising herself to such an extent that she only attains her revenge by default and the story ends with her future role in balance because she had consorted with the enemies of the people. In the latter case Wariinga earns her reprieve by undertaking a moral pilgrimage that restores her self-esteem and puts her on the side of the people and on the road to becoming fulfilled as well as engaged on a significant mission in life. But one can be credibly seen as an extension of the other.

Ghitahy, the Rich Old Man of Ngorika, is designed as a colossal figure of evil which makes him the sinister Godfather behind the scenes in the competition for thieves and robbers in which he conceivably donates the trophy. Wariinga might have pardoned him had he recanted but instead - true to character - in the final encounter he again tries to seduce her, thus damning himself beyond redemption and getting taken out with a big bang worthy of his status. *Boss* Kihara, his alter ego, is a similarly larger-than-life character whose brief encounter with Wariinga shows what a dangerous man he could be to a less wary girl. His tactical moves and his glib tongue can hardly be faulted, for they parallel those of the grand master himself. Even when he fails, he doesn't go down whimpering but unleashes his authority to damn the poor wretch who finds herself with no place to lay her head, and no one to comfort her, for even John Kimwana feels the impact and chickens out of the relationship with her. One can imagine the strings a man like *Boss* Kihara can pull, extending to the

rich landlord who immediately evicts Wariinga, and later on to the City Council that re-allocates the plot which Wariinga and her work-mates want for the construction of a communal garage. *Boss* Kihara's empire is expanding at the expense of the poor and one would imagine that his day of reckoning is bound to come too, though this is beyond the scope of this particular narrative.

Robin Mwaura is another traitor in the story who almost pays the price for the murder of Mwireri wa Mukiraai; for giving false testimony in the aborted trial of Muturi, Wangari and the Student Leader; and for being the one whose name and whose terrorist organization is twice used to intimidate Wariinga - the first time by *Boss* Kihara and the last time by Hispaniora Greenway Ghitahy. But Wariinga, perhaps considering that Mwaura is only the hireling of his wealthy employers, and knowing his character - a hyena is not renowned for its courage - lets him get away, just as he seems to conclude that she is none of his business. He disappears from the scene before anyone can give him orders for a job for which he might not live to collect his dues. Thus, except for the case of *Boss* Kihara which Wariinga files away, the cycle of betrayal and retribution appears to play itself out with her victorious exit.

ENDNOTES:

1. Curtis, L., 1984, "The Divergence of Art and Ideology in the Later Novels of Ngugi wa Thiong'o: A Critique", *UFAHAMU, Vol. XIII No. 1-2*, p. 212.

2. Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind*, p. 80.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 81.

4. A reference to "The Second Coming" by W.B. Yeats, which features in the preceding novel, *Petals of Blood*, but not in *Caitaani Mutharaba-ini*, though Ngugi could not have been unaware of the powerful women in the Irish mythology and politics, which inspired Yeats, when creating his own from Gikuyu myth, history and politics.

5. Wariinga's transformation is like a combination of Wanja's physical flowering in *Petals of Blood* and Wangari's psychological awakening to her political potential earlier on. This is the reason why she is able to sustain it to the end, figuratively walking out of the scope of the novel in graceful triumph.

6. Peck, R., ibid., p. 39. Peck's capitalization in "Heroine of Toil" creates an emphasis which is not in Ngugi's text which strives to play down the overwhelming inspiration that Wariinga gave him as he wrote the original manuscript of *Caitaani Mutharaba-ini* on toilet rolls in Kamiti Maximum Security Prison, when the phrases that constantly raced through his mind were: "*Wariinga ngatha ya wira...* Wariinga heroine of toil... there she walks haughtily carrying her freedom in her hands" - the opening words in Ngugi's *Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary*, p.3. Wariinga's newfound freedom and her story, inspired and written under such severe circumstances, were Ngugi's response and reaction to his own imprisonment. The reason why he appears to skim over it is because he has already told the story but for the climax and the reason why he appears to superficially glorify Wariinga's transformation (which would have taken another novel to do real justice to) is because he is only setting the stage for that climax. Such a treatment is quite justified from the point of view of an oral narrative which is being presented to a listening audience which is being pepped up for the climax.

7. Curtis, L., *op. cit.*, p. 211.

8. A reference to the assumed names which The Old Man from Ngorika gives himself which are not only comical and

pretentious (Hispaniora Greenway) but also indicative of his alienation (Ghitahy for Gitahi).

9. This, incidentally, corresponds with Ngugi's own frantic quest for the form and content to suit the Gikuyu novel he longed to write as a follow up to *Petals of Blood*. At that time Ngugi was also engaged (like Gatuiria) in researching Gikuyu oral traditions for the writing of *Ngaahika Ndeenda*, which corresponds with Gatuiria's fictional oratorio.

10. Peck, R., *op. cit.*, pp. 38-39.

11. Swahili slogan for Self-help or Self-reliance, commonly used by politicians in fund-raising drives.

12. This is equivalent to saving the beautiful maiden from the jaws of the ogre in traditional folklore - which is indeed the case, for Wariinga's flight is prompted by the seduction and the subsequent rejection by the Rich Old Man of Ngorika.

13. This reminds one that Ngugi himself wrote this novel on rolls of toilet paper, which were smuggled out of prison for typing, when he was in Kamiti Maximum Security Prison on detention without trial from New Year's Eve, 1978, until the end of the year (after President Kenyatta's death) when he was released, along with other political detainees, on the annual December 12th Independence Day Presidential pardon.

14. A subtle reminder of the oath taking in *Petals of Blood* in which Gatundu, the late President Kenyatta's official residence outside Nairobi, is implicated - an allusion which identifies Kenyatta as the evil genius and shady patron of the modern ogres in *Devil on the Cross*. That would also explain Gatuiria's duplicity as heir - not to a political dispensation - but to enormous wealth, which the author views as corrupting enough to make any man sacrifice his country the same way Gatuiria sacrifices his love for Wariinga, who thus emerges as the symbol of the nation (Kenya) which many have violated, betrayed and grossly exploited but beloved of the multitudes.

15. There is a definite correlation between these two characters and the Messiah and this particular moment referred to is parallel to the incident when the Disciples ask Jesus what they should say He is if the people asked them. But it could even be projected further back to the Old Testament to refer to Moses's encounter with God when he asks Him for a similar question and God replies: "Tell them I AM. I am what I am." The former may be closer to what Ngugi had in mind, if only because the God in the O.T. is regarded as the Lord of Hosts whereas the Messiah refers to himself as Prince of Peace.

16. The fable of Kareendi, Waigoko and Kamoongonye is an apt one for interpreting the ending of the story in which the heroine discovers that her "perfect" lover is actually the son of the old ogre who had ravaged her before and had again tried to seduce her when she silenced it with three shots from the weapon she had secretly hidden in her simple but elegant garment.

17. Dr Chris Barnard's history-making heart transplants had received wide coverage in the local press, later boosted by his official visit to Kenya (rare for a South African) which made the subject a hot topic for discussion at every level of society - including taxis where current affairs like these would be guaranteed to feature prominently.

18. In a useful footnote, the author explains that in Gikuyu the word "heart" means many things: soul, spirit, conscience, mind, inner man, essence, and so on - all abstract concepts which the African has sometimes been erroneously thought to be incapable of understanding.

19. This, ironically, is true of Wariinga and Gatuiria's love for each other which is linked to her hate for the Rich Old Man from Ngorika who also happens to be Gatuiria's father. Similarly, Gatuiria's professed hate for his father is linked to a suppressed love for him that doesn't show but which is evident in the way he takes the trouble to seek his approval and blessing for his chosen bride.

20. This is reference not only to Kimathi but also to Wangari, an ordinary Kenyan woman who is just about to work the miracle on Gatuiria and provide him with the inspiration he's looking for. In that way, Wariinga, here, is contributing to his awakening.

21. The Golf Club is the epitome of privilege in the Kenyan society where the most powerful men in the nation meet to while away their leisure hours while the wealthy men assemble there to make contacts and deals. The one in Ilmorog (in the middle of nowhere) is inspired by Sigona, an exclusive country club outside Nairobi.

22. Although the general satire is Swiftian, some of these details are almost Orwellian in their exposure of man's debasement of science for the subjugation of his fellow man - in this case purely for avarice.

23. An antithesis to the Devil's Feast - this would be a celebration of the final overthrow of the yoke of oppression by the workers and peasants.

PART FOUR:

R E A L I Z A T I O N

4.1 INTRODUCTION

4.1.1 The Third Stage: Realization

The third and final stage of development in the new phase of Ngugi's writings covered in this study follows the earlier trend by starting with a play which lays the ground for a subsequent novel. Even with the experience of detention without trial behind him, Ngugi was not prepared to change his stance and make a compromise with the authorities that had sought to proscribe his writing.

In the preceding play, *Ngaahika Ndeenda*, Ngugi had established a model that worked and, regardless of the consequences, it was difficult for him not to try it again. And the Kamiriithu centre was ready for another bold experiment which the audience expected. There was hardly any time or need for a formal script for the play whose plot was all that was needed for the other devices to fall into place as rehearsals started in earnest.

4.1.2 The Play: *Maitu Njugira (Mother, Sing for Me)*

The new play, entitled *Maitu Njugira*,[1] was even more ambitiously conceived than *Ngaahika Ndeenda*, with a view to reaching not just the Gikuyu primarily but a nationwide audience. This time Ngugi felt he did not need a co-author, the script itself being only a sketch that relied less on verbal dialogue than on action in the form of mime, supported by song and dance routines taken from a wide spectrum of cultures across the nation. Moreover, earlier experiments at the Kamiriithu centre had proved that his naturally talented cast was quite

capable of remoulding the script to suit the occasion - which is precisely what happened when rehearsals started and they even took over the role of co-directing the production with the "academic" professionals who found themselves cast in the role of apprentices under the real professionals. The Kamiriithu cast proved versatile enough to take on the new songs and dances from other cultures without a hitch.

Maitu Njugira was scheduled for production at the Kenya National Theatre if the authorities granted the necessary licence without which it could not be performed before an audience. In anticipation of these public performances, the troupe moved from Kamiriithu to the University of Nairobi where they were allowed to hold final "rehearsals" in the Education theatre which looked rather cramped in the eyes of the cast that was used to the vastness of their own amphitheatre. In the event, their reservations proved well founded. These rehearsals turned into performances which saw the public crushing in by the bus-load. The university grounds looked like a carnival and the corridors leading to the Education Theatre were jammed to capacity several hours before each "rehearsal" started, to say nothing of the theatre itself which was crammed to several times its normal capacity with the audience taking up every available space even on the stage itself. Word had got round that a unique happening in Kenya's theatre history was taking place and that those who missed it at this stage may never get another chance to witness it for themselves.

These rehearsals, which each lasted several hours longer than scheduled, saw the audiences spontaneously join the cast in liberation songs, which had been long suppressed by the authorities, and in traditional dance routines as space permitted. Language barriers were suddenly swept aside in the wave of the national sentiments engendered on the stage. The verbal dialogue in Gikuyu became peripheral to comprehension as the liberation songs and traditional dances forged new links between different cultures rather than separating them. For ten consecutive days, at the end of each show, this carnival spilled out of the theatre and the university grounds into the neighbouring city streets as the audiences sang and danced on their way out to their

several destinations. It was a wonder the authorities did not step in much earlier to ban the play, though they did act behind the scenes to try and deny it a venue.[2]

What made *Maitu Njugira* so successful was that the message it conveyed was stripped down to bare necessity. The performance broke down any distinctions between cast and audience, just as it integrated the audience into one family of people who were all suddenly involved alongside one another in forging a new nation, a New Earth. The non-Gikuyu and even the non-Africans in the audience could feel that here was something new, something profoundly moving in its spontaneity and its earnestness.[3] Not only had Ngugi arrived, but he had finally attained what he had long hoped for: an opportunity to be able to talk in his language and be understood everywhere; the chance to achieve universality without compromising his identity as a Gikuyu, as a Kenyan and as an African. This was a big enough prize to compensate him for the risk he took of being exiled from the country he had done so much to put on the road to self-redemption. Both Ngugi and Kimani Gecau, one of the directors of the play (who had also directed *Ngaahika Ndeenda*), have since been living in exile after narrowly escaping arrest and the likelihood of further detention without trial as attested by the hostile official comments that Ngugi continues to incite for his overt political stance.

The banning of the play in Kenya also put an end to the official invitation the group had received from Zimbabwe for the troupe to perform there, which could have paved the way towards a regular cultural exchange between the two countries and maybe even with other countries in the region. The Kamiriithu centre fared even worse than its founders: the amphitheatre was first closed down and then rased to the ground. As for the troupe itself, no amount of diplomacy could bring back to life an organization that had been declared non-existent and better forgotten than mourned. The press only made matters worse by giving publicity to the futile negotiations which were extensively reported both locally and in Zimbabwe.

To date *Maitu Njugira* has not been published and few people have had access to anything like a script of the play. Ngugi appears not to have even tried to get it published yet, though he is known to be in possession of an English translation of the play.[4] Maybe it is because he would have preferred to have it published in Gikuyu first or maybe it could be that *Maitu Njugira* had so much more in performance (including spontaneous audience reactions) which could not be captured in the script, even in retrospect. The most detailed published account of *Maitu Njugira* (which Ngugi himself recommends) is to be found in Ingrid Bjorkman's book of the same title,[5] written after extensive research in Kenya following the banning of the play, the disbanding of the Kamiriithu Community Centre and the complete burning to the ground of the amphitheatre. To appease the local people, the site had been converted into a two million shillings **village polytechnic** built with a personal contribution of three hundred thousand shillings from President Moi[6] donated in the fund-raising function which was staged to make capital of the occasion which was widely publicized in the media.

4.1.3 The Novel: *Matigari (Matigari ma Njiruungi)*

Maitu Njugira preceded the novel *Matigari*, which was also originally written in Gikuyu. *Matigari* was published in Kenya where an undisclosed number of copies spread like the proverbial bush fire in the harmattan and it was not very long before the authorities stepped in and rounded up all the copies they could find in the bookshops and the publisher's warehouse. It was actually the first of Ngugi's publications to be banned as distinct from the banning of the public performance of *Ngaahika Ndeenda* which is still effective to date.[7]

Matigari has since been published in English translation[8] for sale outside Kenya where the ban still applies. Significantly, the title remains as in the original Gikuyu edition, confirming Ngugi's resolve not to make any concessions to the English language beyond giving permission for someone else

to do the translation. In his latest novel to date, Ngugi finally abandons the idea of adapting oral forms to the tradition of the western novel and instead adapts the form of the traditional folk tale to fiction. This last of the fictional trilogy consolidates on the cumulative impact of the earlier novels, reducing the need for explication by taking the themes that had been explored before for granted and telling what still had to be said in simpler terms, using a narrative technique that any traditional story-teller might have used, and letting the message make itself evident almost without any elaboration. It's no wonder the Gikuyu edition spread so fast on publication for, unlike *Caitaani Mutharaba-ini* before it, *Matigari* could be read to any audience - young or old - and they would get the message which might have been missed in Ngugi's earlier works which might have been too complicated for the untutored listener/reader unfamiliar with the traditions of the novel.

Matigari represents Ngugi's mastery of the traditional story-teller's technique of creating a hero who completely dominates the narrative without even being the narrator.

ENDNOTES:

1. Although *Maitu Njugira* sounds good when translated into the poetic *Mother, Sing for Me*, the more accurate translation of the Gikuyu "Njugira" would be "Ululate for Me" as the plea here is not just for any song but for a special ululation that was used to greet either the birth of a child, the return of a hero or the arrival in the homestead of an important guest. Ngugi himself would probably stick to the Gikuyu original as he did with *Matigari* rather than accept an English title though he appears to have tolerated the clumsy English title for *Ngaahika Ndeenda*.

2. Wahome Mutahi, *The Daily Nation*, 27 February 1982, p.3.

3. Ingrid Bjorkman, *Mother, Sing for Me: People's Theatre in Kenya*, (Zed Books, London, 1989), pp. 10-23.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 62. Ngugi did not affirm this when I met him in Fort Hare in September 1990 and asked for a copy of the play for my research. Instead he referred me to Bjorkman's publication which he recommended as an adequate secondary source.

5. *Ibid.*, pp. 57 - 92.

6. *The Daily Nation*, 19 November 1984, back page.

7. In January 1991 one of the secondary schools in Kenya was refused permission to stage *Ngaahika Ndeenda* after it had first been allowed to do so. But copies of the play are on sale in the bookshop and the ban therefore only applies to public performances.

8. Ngugi, 1989, *Matigari*, translated into English from Gikuyu by Wangui wa Goro, Heinemann, London.

4.2 THE REALIZATION PLAY: *MAITU NJUGIRA* (*MOTHER, SING FOR ME*)

4.2.1 Introduction

Unlike *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* and *Ngaahika Ndeenda* that came before it, which are text-oriented, *Maitu Njugira* was primarily conceived as a musical play in which the dialogue is incidental. For this reason, the plot had to be strong so as to support a minimal narrative, blended with song, dance, mime and other theatrical devices to make the play work. The action is set on a settler farm in the 1920s and 1930s though the play is by no means confined to that period in its concerns. As Bjorkman puts it: "The play clearly mirrors the cyclic nature of historical events."[1] This is more especially so because these events have been anticipated in the playwright's earlier works. The play falls into three acts that each starts on a similar note underscored by the same song - *Kaleso*. The songs in the play form a recurrent motif that determines the mood of the play.

Dialogue - compared to the play's basic structure and to its overwhelming use of mime, song and dance - is of secondary importance in this play whose text, significantly, remains unpublished to date. Even in the Kenyan setting, where the dialogue in the original Gikuyu production was only functional, the actual language of the dialogue in the play was regarded as only marginally important to the performance. The variety of songs and dances presented suggest a multi-ethnic rather than a predominantly Gikuyu audience to be the focus of Ngugi's attention. This section therefore accepts the lack of written text and concentrates on the plot and structure of the play based on the secondary source which Ngugi himself recommended.[2] It also covers the dramatist's use

of theatrical devices to enhance performance in the manner of the oral tradition.

4.2.2 Plot and Structure

The plot and structure of *Maitu Njugira* constitute the framework on which the action is built. The story being told is based on the communal experience of colonial rule in Kenya which (for the target audience) hardly needs any words beyond mime to describe it. The mood of the play is expressed in the songs and dances that embrace a whole national spirit of resistance. The play is presented in only three simple movements (Acts) which almost imperceptibly carry the story from colonial times to modern times when the oppression of the past is shown to be still evident while the need for liberation remains unfulfilled.

4.2.2.1 ACT ONE

The play opens in darkness, suddenly broken by shrill screams, followed by a choir of tormented, mourning voices singing a Kikamba[3] song, *Kaleso,* as the curtain rises. The song is an invocation of the spirit of resistance, directed at the community as a whole. Its plaintive cry is a rallying point for the performers and audience alike:

> Kaleso my love
> Time and time gain I asked myself:
> This song we have been asked to sing,
> Will it take us out of this bondage, my love,
> Or is it the song of a day-dreamer?
>
> When I first heard the call to sing
> I hesitated and asked:
> How can we sing songs in bondage?
> But when things became clear
> I began to sing the following:

I will prepare the way to go home
No matter how far the home,
I will start the journey
I will start my homecoming
For I will not endure this suffering any more.

From the lyrics of the song we gather that this is not a love song. The lover here stands for the collective fighting spirit of an oppressed people while the loved one is not an individual but rather a symbol of the community and of the Kenyan nation as a whole. There is a decisive movement within the song from the apparently passive opening in the first stanza to the resistance to bondage in the second stanza and a plan of action in the last stanza which spells out the objective of the resistance: the symbolic homecoming which represents the ultimate overthrow of the yoke of colonialism.

In an episode reminiscent of the miming of the Black Man's History in the opening sequence in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*, as *Kaleso* is sung, the lights gradually rise on the miming of a scene of torture under a scorching sun, revealing the workers in different states of distress: one is being crucified, others (including a pregnant woman) are either chained or tied up. Most of the workers are described as wearing rags or patched clothes while a few stand out in startling contrast, notably: Nyathira, the heroine, whose hair is braided with pearls;[4] Kang'ethe, the hero, who is proudly adorned in a worker's dirty overalls;[5] Kariuki, the sacrificial lamb, who is significantly dressed in a red shirt[6] for the blood that is to be shed; and Mwendanda, the potential traitor, dressed in the discarded torn jacket[7] that has probably been handed down by his foreign master. The absentee settler farmer, George Scott, is represented in this opening scenario by Nyabaara, the foreman, who demonstrably assigns the whole of Kenya to his master in a conspiracy already elaborated in the earlier works in this study. The implication here is that the white man does not have to be physically present for the colonial repression that he stands for to be applied: his native henchmen are there to enforce his will even in his absence!

This episode is suddenly disrupted by a different, discordant kind of music which is described as: "any Western music - instrumental - with fascist or

militarist overtones," which clashes with the dignity and eloquence of *Kaleso.* The discordancy is then extended further into a lesson on colonial forced labour practices which is presented to the illiterate workers through a slide-projector.[8] These comprise official documents listed as law texts, newspaper articles, advertisements, photographs, information on strikes and wages - all designed to show the discrepancy between the letter and the practice of law: "between what the law states and the reality of brutality, repression, theft and robbery, racism." In this scene Nyabaara acts as the proxy for the white man, pointing to each document with his stick and translating into Swahili the text which the voice of authority (an echo of his master's voice) spells out in English. Nyabaara also singles out a few workers who repeat his words in unison in their own language "as an act of punishment and humiliation," for many of the documents chosen carry a racial slight and promote colonial virtues over African aspirations.

As the militarist music rises to a crescendo, an African enters pulling a rickshaw bearing Mr George Scott, the settler and farm owner, who is also nick-named Kanoru[9] by the Africans. George Scott is no ordinary farmer: as the representative of colonial authority, he is not only conveyed in a rickshaw but is also escorted by two policemen who stand to attention and salute as he approaches. Then as he descends from the rickshaw in style, also comically saluted by Nyabaara with his pointer, a fanfare is pompously sounded and an invisible union jack is ceremoniously raised to signify his presence at the official post. Like the archetypal settler and colonial officer, George Scott, alias Kanoru, wears a pith helmet and a khaki bush jacket while a watch and chain hangs over his stomach. He also carries a mandatory whip which he uses with the whistle to issue his commands, which Nyabaara in turn interprets with the aid of the intimidating pointer. Kanoru is thus depicted as being above direct verbal communication with either his foreman or his labourers who after all are only "primitive natives" who exist below the level of comprehension.

Kanoru sets the action in motion by cracking his whip, which Nyabaara interprets as the signal for the regimented workers to stand at ease. They

immediately begin to sing a Gikuyu lamentation song of defiance but Kanoru silences them with a whiplash and Nyabaara orders them to form a line. Kariuki, the worker in the red shirt, quakes in terror - in anticipation of the impending ordeal. The workers break into another lamentation which voluntarily fizzles out when an old man, a deaf-mute, enters and sits at a distance from them, laying down a few bundles of sticks. Closely watched by the workers, the old man attempts in vain to break one of the bundles of sticks over and over again. Then he abandons the effort and instead unties one of the bundles, taking out the sticks one by one and breaking them all with great ease. The workers respond to his wordless lesson by breaking into a well-known Gikuyu protest song, *Twiyuumiririe*, with the refrain: "Let's stand firm!" As they sing, the deaf-mute continues with his demonstration in mime form, alternating the vain attempt to break a whole bundle of sticks (tied with a red string to signify socialist political unity) with the easy breaking of the individual sticks when isolated and therefore denied the strength of unity.

Nyabaara and his master are irritated by the old man's pointed demonstration and the labourers' enthusiastic response to it. Kanoru gives the signal for Nyabaara and Mwendanda (the worker with the torn jacket that nonetheless elevates his status above that of the other workers) to get some posters from the rickshaw. Although Kanoru cracks his whip to silence the protest song, the deaf mute carries on with his mimed demonstration, unawares. Nyabaara displays one of the posters that reads: **KANORU FARM - NO TRESPASS.** On seeing the poster, the people break into another Gikuyu song about the meaning of this prohibition. With a whiplash, Kanoru signals Mwendada to display the other poster which reads: **KANORU FARM - *MBWA KALI!* FIERCE DOG: BEWARE!** With this, the whole auditorium is suddenly filled with the barking and howling of dogs which is the signal for the workers to break into terrified disarray as the imaginary dogs single out Kariuki who desperately tries to flee but fails. Kanoru finally calls off the hounds with a wave of his hand which silences them so that Kariuki is able to steal back to his former position, trembling with fear. With a whiplash, another poster is then displayed, reading: "He without a *Kipande* [10] round his neck trespasses. Trespassers will be

prosecuted." The labourers respond to this with another song, lamenting the humiliation of having to bear with the *kipande*, while the deaf-mute continues with his mime, undaunted.

It is only after this elaborate opening that the dramatist finally introduces the first verbal dialogue in the play. This dialogue is not an exchange between Kanoru (who can only condescend to speak with the whiplash) and Nyabaara, who anticipates Kanoru's wishes and commands and translates them into the Gikuyu language, but rather between the latter and the workers who:

> ... respond in all sorts of ways which expose the nature of what is really being said. They do this by sometimes completing or adding to Nyabaara's statement but [sic] words which almost negate or explain the real meaning, or by adopting a mocking tone, or by merely repeating his words in a manner that denies them their impact.

The dialogue in the scene only marginally adds to the audience's comprehension of the message of the play which is rendered absolutely clear by the action - expressed in mime - as well as the tone of song and the attitude of the dance which all combine to show the divisive tactics of the colonial powers and the people's defiance of their oppressors.

In the mass interrogation, it becomes evident that Kanoru is seeking to find out who is responsible for inciting the workers to burn up the hated *kipandes*. Nyabaara is frustrated by the workers' impertinent responses as, undaunted, they continue to intersperse their answers with popular Gikuyu and Giriama[11] songs of protest. Kang'ethe, the worker in dirty overalls, unobserved, hits Nyabaara with his spanner, causing him, comically, to cry out not against the workers but against the stumps in the farm - a deliberate excuse which is part of the futile efforts he and his master make to bribe the workers and divide them "in an attempt to try and make them betray their comrade." Kanoru threatens to punish them the same way he had punished the old man before them whom had been turned into a deaf and mute for insisting that Africans could make guns: he had ordered the man's tongue pulled out and his eardrums pierced for uttering this heresy. Kanoru then gives the workers minutes within which to comply, exaggeratedly checking the passage of time on his watch while

Nyabaara signals the remaining minutes as the muted sound of a solitary drum beats the countdown "in time to the workers' hearts." Kariuki's agitation is clearly marked in contrast to the old man's unperturbed miming that acts as a constant reminder of the need for unity. It is only when Nyabaara signals that there is only one minute left when Mwendanda (the worker in the discarded hand-down jacket that marks him like a stigma from the start) rises in response. Everyone - including the deaf-mute - stop to look at him in dismay as he points a finger at Kang'ethe, the mechanic, thus betraying him to be the workers' leader who had made them burn their *kipandes*.

Nyathira, the heroine whose hair is braided with pearls, throws herself on the ground and embraces Kang'ethe's knees in recognition of his leadership and in compassion for his inevitable fate. Indeed, while the workers cry out in discordant protest (betraying their lack of unity and their inability to act jointly against their oppression) Nyabaara alone shoves Nyathira aside, seizes Kang'ethe and forces him to dress in prison uniform before chaining him hand and foot.[12] Kang'ethe makes no effort to resist his arrest or defend himself and, apart from Nyathira's futile gesture, the labourers are themselves powerless to assist Kang'ethe. Nyathira begins to sing a Gikuyu children's song which laments: "Father, Father, open the door", begging to be let in, for she is tired and hungry and has nowhere to live, and she dare not go home to be whipped and shot. She wanders round the stage as she sings, pleading with each person in turn and being constantly turned away. There is no response to her enactment of the plight of the dispossessed, helpless and unaccommodated: no answer to her plaintive cry and no chorus to her impassioned plea from her fellow labourers. It is only Kariuki, the worker in the red shirt, who is finally inspired by Nyathira's song to find the courage to break out of this conditioned, slavish obedience. Overcoming his own great fear, Kariuki pleads for Kang'ethe in a weak voice, choked with anxiety, which hardly needs any words to be understood: "Don't kill him! He taught me how to repair machines."

Nyabaara then quickly transforms the scene into a courtroom with Kanoru (like his fellow-Scotsman, Henderson, in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*) as the

presiding judge. Kang'ethe is summarily tried, in mime, and soldiers match in to execute him by firing squad. However, like Kimathi in the earlier play, he does not die before exhorting the people to guard against disunity:

> Too much cowardice perpetuates poverty in the land
> God helps those who help themselves ...
> Better to die fighting for your country
> Than live a slave in your country.

These words are to echo over and over again in the subsequent novel, *Matigari*, as a kind of exhortation on the people not to let fear and cowardice make them endure their dispossession. Kang'ethe's last words and his final pose of defiance firmly set him up as a hero of the stature of the legendary Kimathi and the mythical Matigari to come.

Mwendanda (like his namesake in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*) is rewarded for betraying his leader. His climbing up the social ladder is symbolically marked by his master who "gives him elegant clothes and new equipment and when he is dressed ... sticks a pen in his breast pocket to the tune of `For he's a jolly good fellow." Mwendanda's alienation is further underlined by the fact that he is also given a new name, Nyatai,[13] derived from the fact that one of the items of status in this "new domestic bureaucracy" - to which he had long been recruited with an old jacket - is the neck-tie which he has to wear round his neck like an albatross.

After Kang'ethe's mimed execution, George Scott inspects a mock guard of honour (a reminder of his multiple identities, like Henderson's in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*). He is dutifully followed by the stick-wielding Nyabaara, while everyone stands to attention. The ceremonial scene ends with the tune "God save the King" and a great deal of fanfare before Kanoru climbs back into his rickshaw and is pulled out of the stage.

The next scene is signalled by the old man gathering his sticks and leaving the stage while a lamentation is being sung for Kang'ethe. Nyathira interrupts the lamentation and tells the workers not to weep for Kang'ethe but to heed his last words and rebel against their oppression. Asking who will

now save them from Kanoru, she again begins to sing her plaintive song: "Father, Father open the door."

That is the signal for Nyabaara and Mwendanda/Nyatai to return to the scene and drive the labourers back to work. Nyabaara knocks down the pregnant woman, who is too weak to work, and in the ensuing commotion, the police rush in, beat her up again and carry her away. When Nyathira subsequently informs the workers that the woman has miscarried, they break into a Luhya[14] lullaby to express their anger, sorrow and frustration. The song tells how the imperialists don't care about children because they eat their own.[15] In a scene visualized with the vivid detail of the novelist written into stage directions, which far exceed the needs of drama, Ngugi then goes on to describe the distracted woman's return as follows:

> Thunder, lightning, wind, rain. The sound of a child crying. Enter woman who had a miscarriage. She is looking for a child, for she imagines that she has properly delivered and that the child is only missing. She hears the cry of the missing child everywhere. At times she imagines she has found him. At such a moment the cry of the child ceases. The mother picks up the child. She sings one, two, or three songs. Then she realizes she is not holding the baby. She hears another cry. She rushes here and there. Finds the baby. Holds it. Sings.

These detailed stage-directions are also a substitute for the dearth of dialogue, meant to guide the actor as much as the director in creating a sustained mime that would be self-explanatory. Mwendanda brings the pathetic scene to an end by hustling the woman off the stage and pulling back a huge screen bearing an enlarged picture of Kanoru's face and the words: **Wherever You Are, Whatever You Do, I Can See You - *Mbwa Kali*.** The irony of this being that Kanoru himself is the *Mbwa Kali*, fierce dog which the terrified labourers are forced to live in perpetual dread of!

Nyabaara and Mwendanda then distribute new *kipandes* to the workers, register them afresh, and assign them new duties under the forced labour laws. These are dramatised in the long sequence that follows in which they dance and sing in different Kenyan languages, describing and miming different kinds of work. On the Kenyan stage, this would have the effect of consolidating the rapport

between the performers and the audience who would enthusiastically join in the singing and dancing. But this festive atmosphere is brought to an end in a brutal mime in which Nyabaara forces the terrified Kariuki (as the only mechanic left in the plantation) to put on the dead Kang'ethe's overalls - something that would be recognised by most people in the audience as taboo. This the labourers initially shun Kariuki as if he had committed an act of wilful sacrilege. To add to his terror, Kariuki finds a piece of paper marked with the initials KCA[16] in the pocket of the overalls and realises that Kang'ethe had belonged to the dreaded underground political organisation whose membership spelt doom. But, in spite of his initial terror, the revelations mark Kariuki's relentless initiation into the leadership role which fate (aided by Nyathira and the old man) appears to have decreed for him.

This is followed by the scene in which, following a song about slavery, Nyathira initiates an operatic dialogue with the people. In one of the verses of her songs she asks: "What shall we do?" as if in answer to her question, Kanoru rushes in and forces her at gun point to go with him. Her screams - as she's being raped by Kanoru - are heard off-stage but no one has the courage to go to her rescue. It's only Kariuki, in despair, who impotently repeats her question: "What shall we do?" For an answer, the old man resumes his stick-breaking mime and Kariuki is finally made to understand the need for unity. As this is not an end in itself, the old man then proceeds to show Kariuki how to make a gun. The old man aims his imaginary gun at the picture of Kanoru who in reality himself emerges from behind the screen. Kanoru shoots the old man dead and thus finishes the job he started a long time back when he only rendered him deaf and dumb for fostering rebellion and revolution. All these actions can be enacted with little or no dialogue - a factor that would tend to emphasize rather than debase the symbolic aspects of the conflict.

This marks the beginning of Kariuki's efforts to convince the workers to join him in rebellion, leading to the subsequent alternation in the plot between revolt and repression. Nyathira, having been raped by Kanoru, resorts to prostitution as evidenced by the trimmings of Western culture like fine dresses and trinkets that she begins to wear (like Gathoni in *Ngaahika*

Ndeenda) as she negates herself in an act of wilful self-debasement. To Kanoru's delight, the repressed people shun revolt and resort to the Christian religion instead in which they find refuge. In a scene of near fantasy, when Kanoru finds his workers on their knees, singing Christian hymns, instead of the usual shrill whistle summoning them back to work, church bells are heard and Kanoru is transformed into a prelate-cam-administrator caught in the satiric act of decorating two soldiers with "Christian Soldier" medals. Then, as "Amazing Grace"[17] is played on the organ, Kanoru finds himself being anointed into a bishop in a solemn ceremony before a sombre crowd while his two henchmen, Nyabaara and Mendanda/Nyatai, become priests and the labourers happily sing hymns of praise. The identification between the Christian church and the colonial administration is thus almost effortlessly achieved by the playwright without any need of dialogue.

But the peace which is thus achieved between the oppressor and the oppressed is only short-lived, for it soon erupts into conflict in a spectacular theological dispute over which of the several churches represents true religion. As several groups scream at each other on stage, the arguments degenerate from the theological into the tribal and ethnic. The resulting cacophony is also presented without any need for meaningful dialogue. Only Kariuki appears to realise how Kanoru has succeeded in dividing and weakening the people through religion and it finally dawns on him that he is actually the appointed saviour destined to lead his people towards political salvation. He emerges as the leader in an emotional scene in which the people rejoice, singing a Gikuyu religious song which he takes up, eventually substituting it for a patriotic freedom song. Nyathira is the first to join in, followed by a few other voices until finally they are all singing the patriotic song whose refrain is a direct challenge to Kanoru and his henchmen:

> And all because of all the fear
> Which was instilled in me
> It's only Kanoru, the imperialist
> accompanied by his native mercenaries.
> Look out; look out
> For he is after our country.

As they sing and dance "with a power of newly discovered unity," the people destroy Kanoru's picture and Act One ends with them fleeing in disarray as the sounds of sirens and gunfire off-stage signal the impending threat of retribution.

4.2.2.2 ACT TWO

Act Two, like Act One, starts with the people singing *Kaleso*. However, instead of the communal torture with which the first act starts, this one begins with only Kariuki isolated and bound to a pole which stands at the centre of the stage in a scene reminiscent of Christ on the Cross and which is also the antithesis of the Devil on the Cross in the preceding novel. The sorrowing mother (also reminiscent of the Virgin Mary) who keeps reappearing throughout the play in an endless quest for her lost baby, now returns and the people join in her lullaby: "to symbolize their collective search for their children", i.e. the liberators.[18]

Kanoru, again acting as judge, sentences Kariuki to death for instigating rebellion. Kariuki is ordered to hold a board above his head as he stands before the firing squad for execution. The soldiers shoot and Kariuki falls down - only to rise up again, for the soldiers had been ordered to shoot at the board above his head. This ritual is repeated three times before he is granted a pardon because in truth, Kanoru cannot afford to lose his only remaining mechanic[19] following the execution of Kang'ethe earlier on.

After this "miraculous" escape, Kariuki's final awakening to his role of leadership and his acceptance of that vocation is symbolized in the elaborate traditional ritual of the second birth (preceding circumcision) in which the grieving mother at last finds symbolic solace in giving him ritualistic birth - signalling the beginning of a new life devoted to the fight for freedom. The five ululations (*ngemi*) for a male child or the returning hero (the real meaning of the title of the play) which are said on Kariuki's second birth, are the ultimate acknowledgement of his heroic stature and Ngugi's tribute to

the man who inspired this character - J.M. Kariuki.[20] This second birth is like an awakening from ritual sleep: a spiritual awakening to new consciousness that calls for positive action to rid the country of its oppressors. In a duet which Kariuki sings with Nyathira, he reaffirms the need for the men and women of Kenya together to take up arms to fight for freedom.

In the preparations that they begin to make for this inevitable confrontation, Kariuki undertakes the role of teaching his compatriots the skill he has learnt from the old man who had taught him how to make guns. Nyathira, who has returned from the city[21] to help with the struggle, volunteers to lure the soldier on guard away from his post so that the workers can study his gun and copy it. They drown the sounds of their forging by singing the words of forbidden patriotic songs to the tune of harmless Christian hymns. Instead of the usual terrified workers, the plantation is now filled with guerrilla fighters with braided hair, openly carrying guns. The new militant Nyathira (like a later Wariinga) dumps her Western clothes for an army uniform and her example is followed by the other workers who also throw away their *kipandes* and the prohibition posters on top of them to be set ablaze. The liberation war has broken out and it is enacted in mime on the stage, culminating in the confrontation between Nyathira and Nyabaara and between Kariuki and Kanoru (note the deliberate alliteration in the pairing) in which the two oppressors are killed.

The people sing of victory and dance in triumph as it is announced that a peace conference has been called by the Governor. The freedom fighters, returning from the forest, elect Kariuki to be their representative at the conference but the authorities refuse to endorse his candidature because he does not speak English. Eventually, a compromise is reached in which the people send three delegates: the local priest, Mwendanda (who takes over the estate after the death of Kanoru and Nyabaara) and Kariuki - Churchman, Businessman and Patriot, respectively. Mwendanda, who had betrayed Kang'ethe, woos the people into trusting him with a speech that marks him as a master of

political oratory. Mwendanda's return from the conference is then depicted with a speech of even greater ambiguity and demagogy:

> Hear me to the end
> Kanoru's plantation is to be sold
> At least some of it!
> White highlands no more!
> And it will be sold to anybody
> Without any colour bar
> Or any other form of discrimination
> In a word, there is no colour bar
> In the selling and buying of this plantation
> If a black man has got money
> Or if a group of black people have money
> They can buy this farm
> From today money is the bar.

This facile show of patriotism and the false reassurances that go with it succeed in silencing whatever questions try to surface. Then all doubt is drowned by the joyous trilling of the hapless masses whose five *ngemis* for the new leaders highlights the irony of the duplicity that lurks just below the surface. The second act ends with someone remembering to ask about Kariuki and being ominously reassured by Mwendanda that Kariuki "has stayed with the governor who will make him an example for all Kenyans."

4.2.2.3 ACT THREE

The final act of the play begins like the previous two with the people singing *Kaleso*. The central figure this time is the grieving woman who had been searching for her child. In this act she is once again pregnant. The passage of time is indicated by the posters which show that the farm has changed hands, but not to the indigenous Africans: it is now owned by an Anglo-American multinational corporation that still threatens to prosecute any trespassers and compels all workers to carry identity papers (not any different from the hated *kipandes*) and to live in perpetual fear of the dogs, *Mbwa Kali*. The imaginary dogs are depicted terrorising the shackled workers (whose conditions have thus changed for the worse), concentrating their attacks on the pregnant woman who significantly runs towards the map of Kenya

for shelter, symbolising recourse to nationalism in the face of neo-colonialist onslaught. The map is pulled away to reveal not a patriot or liberator, but Mwendanda sitting in a rickshaw which is being pulled by an African labourer just as Kanoru had been in the first act. Like Kanoru, whom he emulates in every aspect, Mwendanda silences the dogs with a mere wave of his hand. But instead of the colonial "uniform" favoured by Kanoru, Mwendanda is wearing a modern dark suit, a frill shirt, with a rosebud in his buttonhole.[22] According to the stage directions: "He is in other words dressed like a modern African bourgeois with all its crude exaggeration of its borrowed culture." And like Kanoru, Mwendanda also carries a whip and whistle and has a watch-chain hanging across his stomach. To crown it all, he also wears a pith helmet with the Anglo-American emblem engraved on it, thus affirming that he is a director of the multinational company whose local watchdog he is - an idea carried over from the earlier works covered by this study.

Mwendanda is also accompanied by two armed policemen and a priest, thus re-affirming the continuing conspiracy between business, state and church in the subjugation of the masses in post-colonial Africa. The armed policemen are apparently there to protect Mwendanda from his labourers, who have to work under shackles from which they are only released when he blows the whistle. The priest is there to put balm on his conscience, using religion (as in *Ngaahika Ndeenda*) to try and put off the likelihood of revolt in the face of blatant exploitation. Still aping Kanoru, Mwendada inspects the workers, taking the opportunity to fondle the young women and blowing the whistle for the police to take Nyathira off-stage for a repeat of Kanoru's rape by himself. As Nyathira's screams are once again heard, the "bought" priest delivers his hypocritical eulogy over Mwendanda, calling him a man full of mercy, who loves God, the Church and children. When Mwendanda reappears, the priest speaks in favour of polygamy for those who have the wealth to afford it. The workers respond to all this hypocrisy by intoning a protest song in spite of the guns that are levelled at them and Mwendanda has to shout to make himself heard.

Kariuki is then brought to the stage and there is instant silence at the horrific mutilation (worse than the old man before) he has been subjected to: his arms have been cut off, his tongue pulled out and his eardrums pierced - the "Governor" has indeed made an example of him as promised at the end of the previous act.[23] Mwendanda says: "This is what happens to those who think they are wiser than the rulers." Speaking in the idiom they know well, he also adds the following warning to anyone who might take offence and think of trying to get revenge:

> Violence is not the way to solve problems!
> The coward went home alive
> And left the brave man in the battlefield
> Think on that!

With that proverb, he climbs back into the rickshaw and is pulled away from the stage, leaving the workers still simmering in silence. In an act which is a reminder of the old man, Kariuki suddenly lifts the stump of an arm and loose sticks fall to the ground in disarray. Then he lifts the stump of the other arm and lets the second bundle of sticks fall which remains neatly tied together. The message is self-evident and the people once again start singing the famous Gikuyu protest song, *Twiyuumiririe* ("Let's stand firm"), repeated several times in the play, which brings the original stage performance in the Gikuyu language to an end.

Ngugi's adaptation into English, and the re-writing of the play with the hind-sight of the Nairobi "rehearsals", differs only slightly from the original Gikuyu version but for the new ending which extends the scope of the play enormously. As Bjorkman puts it: "The extended finale conveys a sense of optimism about the outcome of the people's struggle which the original version did not."[24] In this revised ending, Nyathira emerges triumphant from her humiliation by Mwendanda who fails to break her spirit. She throws his money at him and flees back to her people who rejoice to have her back amongst them. The pregnant woman embraces her in total acceptance while another woman gathers Kariuki's sticks and hands them to another woman who contemptuously breaks them one after the other in a demonstration of the weakness of self-

interest. Finally, the woman picks up the bundle of sticks which cannot be broken and proudly holds it high. This is greeted by a song they all join in:

Unity! Unity!
Of us workers and peasants
And our fearless courage
Are what will liberate Kenya!
Are what will liberate Kenya!

As the woman again lifts the bundle and tries in vain to break it, she turns instead and aims it like a rifle. This leads on to the repeat of the duet Nyathira had sung earlier with Kariuki, which closes the play on a definite promise of a future engagement in line with a similar optimism expressed in the ending of all the previous works in the study:

If ever you hear *tu tu tu*
It is not rain or thunder
It is the blood of us workers
Crying for Kenya our motherland

And you the stumps
And thorns of the land
Fire awaits you tomorrow
When dawn breaks!

But this promised revolution remains unrealised, for the dawn never breaks. The author's vision is therefore rendered static rather than dynamic.

4.2.3 Characterization: Duplicates and Stereotypes

As in the preceding plays in the study, the characters in *Maitu Njugira* are not individuals conceived with psychological depth but, rather, portrayals of corporate social groups such as workers, peasants, patriots, women, collaborators, settlers, imperialists, etc, which have become familiar representations by now. As Bjorkman points out, they are stereotypes who represent the "enduring facts of life such as oppression and the liberation struggle."[25] The depersonalization of the characters is further enhanced by

the fact that most of them are either nameless or bear descriptive names that are only fully comprehended by those who understand the language from which they are derived or the social context in which such names were originally spawned. There is a close correlation to both *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* and *Ngaahika Ndeenda* in the treatment of characters who fall into two basic camps, representing the oppressed and the oppressors. Kang'ethe, Kariuki and Nyathira represent the oppressed while George Scott alias Kanoru, Nyabaara and Mwendanda alias Nyatai represent the oppressors.

The three representatives of oppression do not play just one role in the play but are used to play other roles to cover the full spectrum of colonial domination, extending from settler farming to colonial administration and the judiciary to Christianity and the Church. This is a familiar device which is also used in the earlier *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* where Shaw Henderson (like George Scott here) plays his own role as well as that of investigator, prosecutor, negotiator and judge.

In the Kenyan "rehearsals", the oppressed who were represented on the stage by a handful also had the full backing of an enthusiastic audience representing the masses and laying a valid claim to being a part of the action in which history was being re-created. In the play the leadership of the oppressed masses is taken up by Kang'ethe, Kariuki and Nyathira who also stand for the workers, the youth and the women of Kenya, respectively.

4.2.3.1 KANG'ETHE

From the beginning of the play, to the ordinary eye, Kang'ethe is only a mechanic in dirty overalls - undistinguished by either high rhetoric or deeds of heroism. It is only when his real identity is betrayed by Mwendanda that we learn that he is the man behind the burning of the hated *kipandes* as a gesture of protest against colonial rule and economic exploitation. It is not what he personally has to say that makes him a hero in the mould of Dedan Kimathi but what he stands for, though one imagines him to depict a rather

brooding and massive presence that the enemies of the people would find intimidating. The manner of his death by execution after only a perfunctory trial (like Kimathi's) serves to emphasize his symbolic role as a focal point for revolt and revolution. This does not die with him but rather gains greater momentum towards the ultimate showdown. That he is a skilled workman as well is only an additional bonus that goes to show that the people's leaders do not necessarily come from the ranks of "great" talkers with no practical job skills.

4.2.3.2 KARIUKI

In the play Kariuki is the natural successor to Kang'ethe. Compared to his mentor, who had also trained him as a mechanic, Kariuki is conceived as a slighter, frailer youth, easily intimidated. But he is also cut in the mould of Ngugi's real-life hero of the same name - J.M. Kariuki whose fate was not far distant from the character he inspires. Kariuki does not aspire to leadership which is only thrust on him by the force of circumstances. Ironically, it is Kanoru himself who forces Kariuki to don the late Kang'ethe's overalls and assume the role of farm mechanic. After the initial scare of wearing a dead man's costume and the even greater scare of finding the piece of paper in the pockets which links Kang'ethe to the dreaded clandestine political organisation, Kariuki's eyes are opened to his responsibility. His transformation is ritualised through the ceremony of the second birth after which he is ready to assume the leadership of the people. To prepare him for this, his other mentor, the old man whom Kanoru had earlier turned into a deaf mute, teaches him how to make a gun in readiness for the revolution. In the confrontation that inevitably comes, the oppressors and their native collaborators are finally defeated. But the victory is hijacked from underneath the people's very noses by the cunning of traitors and turncoats like Mwendanda who betrays Kariuki just as he had betrayed Kang'ethe. But, even though he returns mutilated from the conference with the governor, Kariuki is undeterred by being a handless deaf mute from repeating the old man's lesson in unity.

4.2.3.3 NYATHIRA

Nyathira's natural beauty makes her the target of exploitation as a woman. She is also the symbol of what is most desirable in Africa the scramble for which has led to centuries of foreign domination. The song she sings earlier in the play reveals the plight of the dispossessed and oppressed while the duet she later sings with Kariuki inspires the youth and older generation as well to take up the challenges of nationalism. Her importance as a figure of ultimate confrontation in the struggle to attain a more equitable society is underscored by the playwright in the revised ending of the play in which she scornfully throws back the money Mwendanda had given her - a rejection of political prostitution like his - and puts on a military uniform as a last act of defiance similar to and even going beyond Wariinga's at the end of the earlier *Devil on the Cross*.

4.2.3.4 GEORGE SCOTT alias KANORU

The name *Kanoru* has a ring of "Colonel" about it that suggests a possible corruption of George Scott's military rank, for many of the settlers in Kenya had a record of military service in the First World War. In the Gikuyu language *Kanoru* also originally meant "little and fat" and in the colonial period its meaning was extended to include "imperialist" - probably because the white administrators and the settlers alike were usually fat and pampered. Indeed in *Maitu Njugira* Kanoru, who is the representative of the white colonial community in Kenya, makes his first appearance in the play as a pampered settler who is either too arrogant or too lazy to walk around his plantation and has to be conveyed in a rickshaw pulled by one of the labourers. The normal mode of transportation in such plantations was on horseback but that would be less dramatic for the purposes of this play which aims at portraying the white man in colonial Africa as "the black man's burden."

Kanoru's attitude towards his workers is that of a superior being towards sub-humans whom he cannot condescend even to talk to in human language. Instead he uses a whip and a whistle which have to be interpreted by an intermediary into commands calling for action. His workers have absolutely no rights and are virtually reduced to slave labour. He rules them by decrees and proclamations which are supported by state legislation and the colonial media. These sub-human and humiliating conditions are exacerbated by the laws requiring natives to carry the *kipande* - an identity placard designed to restrict their movement by enforcing their stay on the individual farms so as to stabilize the free labour they provided. Having been a party to the expropriation of their land, which had reduced them to a state of serfdom, Kanoru now exercises absolute rule over them.

Kanoru's authority is limitless and he virtually holds the power of life and death over his workers. He subjects them to harsh punishment such as that which the play opens with and he can sentence any of them to death for disobedience or revolt. Kanoru derives his authority directly from the colonial government whose rule is synonymous with his. He is empowered to run his plantation like an administrative unit in which he enjoys the full backing and protection of the police and even the military. His word is law and (like Shaw Henderson in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*) he is transformed into a judge by the mere donning of the appropriate apparel. As far as he is concerned, justice is a one-sided concept equated to what best serves his interests and those of the colonial system.

When Kang'ethe leads a revolt against this oppression and gets the workers to burn their *kipandes* in protest, he is sentenced without trial and although he has not committed such a serious crime, he is executed by firing squad in a show of strength meant to act as a lesson to any other would-be rebels. This is not an isolated case of excessive penalty, for Kanoru also reveals that he had been responsible for the deaf-mute's condition. He had ordered the old man's tongue pulled out and his eardrums pierced for presuming to say that the natives could make guns.

That Kanoru's authority is unchallengeable is also demonstrated by the manner in which he takes Nyathira at gunpoint and rapes her without anyone even raising a voice in protest. The deaf-mute defies the punishment that had been inflicted on him as a warning and not only teaches Kariuki how to make a gun but himself turns it on his master. Kanoru suddenly materialises from behind the screen displaying his picture and shoots the old man dead, thus finishing what he had left unfinished before. The trespassing that might have elicited eviction earlier on is treated to a punishment to match the crime of sowing the seeds of revolt.

Kanoru is also used to demonstrate the alliance between the settlers, the colonial government and the Christian church in which the populace seeks refuge from oppression. The church cannot offer any real hope to the oppressed people who get down on their knees in submission only to find themselves confronted by the inescapable spectre of Kanoru who turns up in the guise of a bishop while his native henchmen appear as priests. Exercising the control of wealth, state and church, Kanoru is a formidable adversary whose defeat is only made possible by the determination of the people. But although he is killed as an individual, what he stands for remains in force long after his departure.

4.2.3.5 NYABAARA

Nyabaara is the leading collaborator whose role as Kanoru's foreman makes him an enemy of the people from the beginning. Although he acts as an interpreter for Kanoru, who finds it unfit to address his labourers directly, Nyabaara (whose name means foreman) is not an intermediary for he shows no sympathy whatsoever for his fellow black people with whom he has no social contact. Like a faithful dog, he is simply his master's voice and nothing else. He has no individuality, for he merely represents a type of which he is a caricature. His death in the conflict in which he has no cause to fight elicits no sympathy as it is entirely out of his own choice that he turns against his own people.

4.2.3.6 MWENDANDA

Mwendanda is Nyabaara's successor as foreman to Kanoru's estate which passes on to the Anglo-American multi-national corporation in the modern setting of the final act of the play. Unlike Nyabaara, who is never at any time on the people's side, Mwendanda (whose name means he who looks after his own stomach) starts off as one of the labourers. But he is corrupted by colonial acquisitions right from the beginning of the play when he is depicted wearing a discarded jacket that marks him out as a potential target of conversion.

True to his name, Mwendanda sees the ideal opportunity for self-advancement when Kanoru puts the labourers under pressure to reveal the ringleader who had made them burn their *kipandes* and he betrays Kang'ethe. For this he is immediately promoted and re-named Nyatai to show how he had been roped in by the colonial powers. Yet in spite of this betrayal Mwendanda still manages to con the workers into electing him to go with Kariuki and the local priest (another ally of the colonials) for a conference to discuss terms for independence.

This gives Mwendanda a second chance for self-advancement through betrayal, for he returns with the full powers that Kanoru before him enjoyed while Kariuki returns mutilated and rendered deaf and dumb. To cap his metamorphosis into just another Kanoru in different clothing, Mwendanda also indulges in raping Nyathira (symbol of Mother Africa) in total contempt of the workers he has inherited.

The hypocrisy of the church - which is made to look the other way by the power of money when wrong is being done - is exposed when the priest eulogises about Mwendanda instead of condemning his dastardly conduct. The workers' defiance in the end - which is spearheaded by Nyathira - is clearly an indication of the class conflict against his kind that is yet to come as anticipated in all the works in this study.

4.2.4 Themes: Renewal and Continuity

Like *Ngaahika Ndeenda* before it, *Maitu Njugira* strips down Ngugi's recurrent themes to the basic confrontation between colonialism/neo-colonialism and the liberation/nationalist struggle. This simplification is dictated by the normal limitations of theatre (in terms of time and space) as well as by the diversity of the target audience. But whereas the presentation of the familiar theme narrows it down to a class struggle in the earlier play, in *Maitu Njugira* the perspective is different. Here, instead of relying on debate, discussion and dissent as in the earlier, the dramatist juxtaposes past and present to illustrate the cyclic nature of the confrontation. The greater complexity of the vision in the latter is balanced out by its being presented in broad symbolic terms that rely more on the language of mime and movement than on that of dialogue. Where the earlier play required the audience to pay attention to the dialogue in order to fully comprehend what the play is all about, in the later play the audience is required to deduce its message from the actions on stage, many of which are not verbalised. The use of the different methods of presentation then becomes a case of renewal while the repetition of familiar themes underlines the continuity that denotes the nature of the conflict.

4.2.4.1 ECONOMIC EXPLOITATION AND POLITICAL OPPRESSION

The theme of oppression is given a fresh look in *Maitu Njugira* by being placed in a historical setting from which the current situation evolves. The conditions that constitute oppression are depicted as parallel and equatable to the exploitation of the populace by the colonial intruders represented in the play by George Scott in his many guises: farmer, administrator, churchman. That the white man's domination of the African population would not have been easy or possible without the collusion of some of the Africans themselves is illustrated by George Scott's great dependence on Nyabaara, the foreman, and

later Mwendanda, the self-seeker, to assert his absolute authority and ensure that he exacts complete obedience.

The initial conflict depicts the colonial master and his black henchmen on one side with the yet largely undefined populace on the other side. As the exploitation of the community's labour mounts in pressure and rouses a reaction, and as the leadership to give focus to this resistance emerges, what might have started as an economic conflict begins to acquire political stature which is expressed in open confrontation, matched in history by the Mau Mau liberation war. By the end of the play, the conflict has been advanced to modern times and translated into a political confrontation between the multi-national corporations representing a new world economic order and the forces of nationalism set against the beneficiaries of the colonial legacy who had accepted a facile independence in exchange for personal favours and who had compromised the ideals of the liberation war.

In the play this historical development of many generations is telescoped into the span of the characters' individual lives to illustrate the basically unchanging nature of the exploiters and oppressors through the ages, now represented by Mwendanda, and of the exploited and oppressed populace whose "face" never changes though individuals may come and go. That this conflict is cyclic is demonstrated by the repetition of the arrival of the forces of intrusion, which establishes the identity between George Scott as the symbol of colonial power and the later Mwendanda as the scion of that same legacy in the new order.

4.2.4.2 UNITY: "UNITED WE STAND, DIVIDED WE FALL"

The familiar conflict outlined above is also further simplified in the play to demonstrate the old maxim: United We Stand, Divided We Fall. What might have been a rather tired expression is not merely given verbal utterance in the play: it is depicted as an almost detached graphic illustration that takes place outside the control of and in spite of the main events of the play in that neither side of the conflict can stop the demonstration.

This task is first assigned to the deaf and mute old man whose age attests to his authority while his inability to hear or speak obviates the need for the vocalisation of what should be a well known fact. The old man's life has been a testament to his belief in unity and his suffering in the course of attaining this objective establishes an identity with the exploited and oppressed labourers who are also victims of the same forces. His fate is the same as Kang'ethe's and his suffering anticipates that of Kariuki, to whom both he and Kang'ethe are the political mentors.

At the end of the play, the badly mutilated Kariuki repeats the old man's maxim in a slightly different manner. Using bundles of sticks as the old man had done, he demonstrates that if the people stand alone they can be easily scattered and therefore individually destroyed more easily than if they stand together, tied by the bonds of common interest. It is the same lesson put differently, as the audience would perceive.

It is the common experience of suffering as well as the lessons - which are only reminders - that are translated into action in Ngugi's new ending to the play which anticipates the revolution to bring in a more just dispensation.

ENDNOTES:

1. Bjorkman, I., 1989, *Mother, Sing for Me - People's Theatre in Kenya*, Zed Books, London, p. 75.

2. In September 1991 this researcher interviewed the author in Fort Hare University where Ngugi delivered a lecture on "The Politics of Language in African Literature". Asked for a copy of the manuscript of *Mother, Sing for Me*, Ngugi was uncertain whether this would be available for critical appraisal but he strongly recommended Bjorkman's book as a comprehensive and reliable source.

3. The Akamba people of Kenya (who speak Kikamba) are closely related to the Agikuyu people.

4. A reminder of Wariinga in *Devil on the Cross* whose beautiful hair is also her crowning glory.

5. Comparable to Muturi in *Devil on the Cross* who starts the symbolic journey to Ilmorog wearing a worker's overalls.

6. Reminiscent of the Fruitseller/Woman in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* whose red shirt also denotes socialist/communist support.

7. To be contrasted with the western/colonial attire he later adopts to denote his meteoritic rise from labourer to master as a reward for betraying his own people.

8. This is perhaps a deliberate anachronism suggesting the juxtaposition of the past with the present. But it is also a theatrical device which visually simplifies the presentation of ideas as images to an illiterate audience without having to go into extensive explicatory dialogue.

9. Kanoru is earlier identified in *Ngaahika Ndeenda* as the benefactor from whom Kioi inherits his wealth through his father - the original Kanoru whose name had been given to the white man in recognition of their common purpose in defrauding the people.

10. Passbook which the native "squatter" had to carry not only to show his identity but to prove that he had his master's authority to move from one place to another.

11. The Giriama are another Kenyan tribe (nomadic and far removed from the Gikuyu) whose depiction in the play signals the dramatist's nationalist concern with the need to draw together all the various ethnic groups in a show of unity.

12. A symbolic act of enslavement which is reminiscent of Kimathi's plight in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*.

13. Nyatai literally means the wearer of a neck-tie, but in a sort of derogatory sense with connotations of slavishness and misplaced arrogance that go with it.

14. The Luhya or Baluhya are another Kenyan ethnic grouping, unrelated to the Gikuyu, which is itself composed of several distinct ethnic groups like the Bukusu, Maragoli, etc.

15. A clear reference to ogres, which relates Kanoru to Henderson as characters conceived in the image of the imaginary man-eating monsters of folklore.

16. The Gikuyu Central Association (KCA) was the underground political organization that gave rise to the clandestine Mau Mau rebellion against colonial rule in the Kenya protectorate in the early 1950s.

17. The irony in this is only evident when we look back to *Ngaahika Ndeenda* where the hypocrites gathered in Kioi's house refer to themselves self-consciously as "the amazing ones".

18. Note that this takes the play beyond the scope of the 1920s to 1930s in which it is set to the 1950s after the liberation war in which the demand for an end to colonial oppression reached its peak.

19. This incident is taken from the biography of J.M. Kariuki, *Mau Mau Detainee*, (Oxford University Press, London, 1963/Nairobi, 1975) pp. 76ff. in which the author goes through a similar mock execution. The character of Kariuki here is taken from J.M., for whom Ngugi has great admiration, as is that of the lawyer in *Petals of Blood*.

20. This is another fictional portrayal of J.M. Kariuki, a popular and philanthropic MP and Minister in the Kenyatta government who in real life was murdered just as in *Petals of Blood* after having had an earlier escape just as depicted in this play.

21. Rather like Wanja in *Petals of Blood*.

22. The rosebud reminds one of President Moi's dapper style compared to the informal wear of President Kenyatta before him!

23. The mutilation is also a reminder of the fate suffered by J.M. Kariuki in Kenyatta's time, as evidenced by his charred remains which even the hungry hyenas on Ngong Hills shunned.

24. Bjorkman, I., *op. cit.*, p. 74.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 76.

4.3 THE REALIZATION NOVEL: *MATIGARI MA NJIRUUNGI (MATIGARI)*

4.3.1 Introduction

In *Matigari* Ngugi finally comes up with a novel which has not only all the elements of the traditional Gikuyu folk tale but its simplicity of structure as well. Complementing *Caitaani Mutharaba-ini* (*Devil on the Cross*) which could be classified as a *Ngano cia marimu* (Ogre Narrative), *Matigari* can be classified as a *Ngano* - a straight or epic narrative. In *Matigari*, the familiar cyclic, repetitious, yet cumulative style of the oral tale is much more firmly in place than in the earlier novel which introduces the conventions of western novel into the field of traditional oral literature.

Read only in English translation, *Matigari's* simplicity of style - though appropriate for a tale that tries to emulate an oral narrative and which bears in mind the expectations of the target audience - is a matter of contention for the critics who view it as a shortfall on Ngugi's part. Gikandi (whose own background is also Gikuyu) poses the following questions that such critics have raised from reading this version of the novel:

> Isn't *Matigari* a rather simplistic ideological version of the intricate critique of neo-colonialism and underdevelopment articulated in the previous novel *[Devil on the Cross]*? Doesn't *Matigari's* adoption of a simple narrative structure and the simplified language of popular discourse negate the author's obvious talents in the management of temporality and narrative structure?[1]

Such questions may be of interest to the academic whose concern is with universally accepted ideas of the novel, but these reservations can hardly be

carried to the Gikuyu audience for whom the simplicity of language does not arise (if `the language of popular discourse' means everyday language) while the narrative structure, far from being simple, is much more complicated than the normal traditional oral tale.

Although Gikandi acknowledges that "*Matigari* would appear to be the ultimate fulfilment of Ngugi's narrative desire,"[2] he stops short of affirmation because he sees this novel as making a clean break from the past, for he says: "we need to seek *Matigari's* precursors not in Ngugi's previous writings in English, but in Gikuyu oral and prose traditions."[3] In fact there is a close correlation between *Matigari* and Ngugi's earlier writings, for it is the culmination of the author's quest for the ideal written medium through which to create a people's literature. This quest starts with *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* and *Petals of Blood*, builds through *Ngaahika Ndeenda* and *Caitaani Mutharaba-ini* and ultimately finds fullest expression in *Maitu Njugira* and *Matigari*. Of the latter pair, though *Maitu Njugira* as a play makes a more direct appeal, its value as `literature' will not be fully gauged until it either gets published in book form or recorded on film as the only medium that can hope to capture all the details of song, dance, mime and movement which can only be described in the written form. For the moment, it is the Gikuyu novel that most emphatically affirms Ngugi's success in breaking down the barriers between him and his chosen audience, thus enabling him to communicate with them at their own level in a medium familiar to them. Gikandi recognises this achievement when he says:

> Ngugi could even go further and argue that by writing in his mother tongue he has returned to his sources, that he has not only evoked a psychological reconciliation with the traditions denigrated by colonialism and its language, but also rediscovered the power of orality as an indispensable instrument of the African narrative. He would hence insist that we err when we judge his work in relation to the Europhone tradition which he has already renounced. He would insist that, in relation to *Matigari's* achievements, the central questions don't revolve around his mastery of European-derived conventions of fiction, but around the way in which his text builds on existing Gikuyu prose traditions. Ngugi might suggest that we consider the possibility that, by writing in Gikuyu, he has generated a different kind of African novel.[4]

The points that Gikandi guardedly puts across as a possible defence that Ngugi himself might be expected to advance for his work are valid attributes that should be emphatically expressed as the basis for a different kind of critical appraisal which this bold experiment in finding a new kind of African novel form calls for. That justifies the approach in this study which attempts to examine Ngugi's later writings from a Gikuyu reader/listener's point of view with a knowledge at the same time of the western literary conventions in mind - the author's own position with which Gikandi is in sympathy:

> Ngugi's priority is not the invention of Gikuyu narrative conventions but the appropriation of already-existing novelistic genres to communicate with a Gikuyu audience and evoke an African perspective.[5]

These "novelistic genres" need not be seen as necessarily western, for the forms that Ngugi selects to work on are taken from the Gikuyu oral narrative traditions.

This section begins with an examination of the narrative structure of *Matigari* as the foundation of Ngugi's adaptation of Gikuyu oral traditions to the novel form. It also covers the basic themes and characterization which are all integrated into the narrative structure to form one homogeneous entity that evolves around its singular, symbolic focus: Matigari ma Njiruungi. The section then goes on to explore how other elements of Gikuyu oral traditions are integrated into the narrative to make it didactic, informative, entertaining and inciting. These elements include Proverbs, Riddles, Dance/Song and Poetry.

4.3.2 The Oral Narrative As a Fusion of Form and Content

Unlike *Caitaani Mutharaba-ini* (*Devil on the Cross*) in which the elements of oral narrative are integrated into what is still essentially a western structure of novel, in *Matigari* Ngugi adheres to the traditional oral

narrative structure to attain what is in effect an extended epic folk tale. The basic structure is that of a quest tale which is extended beyond the normal dimension of personal/inter-communal morality into a political allegory of wider national/multi-ethnic significance.

The central quest for Truth and Justice is presented in the form of a symbolic journey towards redemption through the Second Coming of the messiah, which by implication is judgemental and can be expected to pose questions calling everyone to account for their deeds and/or misdeeds. The narrative juxtaposes reality with mystique to attain greater symbolic stature and depth of emotion to give the audience an experience from which they are meant to see their own weaknesses as well as the way ahead in the struggle towards establishing a more just society.

But even though *Matigari* is folklore, the allegorical quest that dominates it is far from simplistically presented, for it falls into the familiar three-movement structure that Ngugi has experimented with since *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*. In this particular case, the movements are crucial in directing the Gikuyu audience in particular into perceiving the extended tale as a series of rituals through which the hero's homecoming is built towards an explosive political statement.

The narrative falls into three parts that cover the quest for the symbolic family, land and house, respectively. It opens with the initial re-assembling and comforting of the scattered family (Part One: *Ngaruro wa Kiriro: Wiping Your Tears Away*); then it extends the quest throughout the land (Part Two: *Macaria ma na Kihooto: Seeker of Truth and Justice*); and then, finally, it leads on to the ultimate confrontation over the house and the bequeathing of the legacy of struggle (Part Three: *Guthera na Muriuki: The Pure and the Resurrected*).

4.3.2.1 PART ONE: DELINEATION OF SAVIOUR, FAMILY AND ENEMY

The first part of the novel covers the return of the warrior and defender of the people's rights. Matigari, the last survivor of the Mau Mau freedom fighters, is cast as a patriot and an ageless man endowed with the powers of rejuvenation and showing messianic qualities of humility and compassion. What makes Matigari different from the usual traditional folk hero is that he is a blend of that and the modern revolutionary leader with a mission to change the socio-political order of the day. He is marked as an extraordinary man - in fact a superhuman individual - by the fact that he possesses magical powers which either protect him from being hurt or enable him to heal unnaturally fast when hurt. His general appearance changes with the moods he is in: showing age when he is troubled by the suffering of others (e.g. p. 29) and showing youthfulness when he is touched by hope and courage (e.g. p. 31). Matigari has also got great powers of endurance, he is physically untiring and is able to go on indefinitely without food or drink. He is a fearless man, a man of integrity who will face up to any challenge or anyone in his relentless quest for truth and justice. He is initially not diverted or affected in any way by the people's recurrent failure to recognise him for what he is. His story, stripped down to its basics, becomes a recurrent quest motif that permeates the narrative, thus underscoring its oral traditional roots in which such repetition is part of the established pattern of the story-telling techniques. What emerges is the symbolic and communal experience of the impersonal man rather than the biography of a unique individual. This is recurrently said to be the story of:

> `... how he had cleared the bush; how he had cultivated and sowed; and how later he had built a house... how, when he had finished building the house, Settler Williams had grabbed it... how he had fought Settler Williams; and of how John Boy saved the settler's life... how he had run to the forests and up the mountains, with Settler Williams and John Boy in pursuit; and how thereafter they had hunted one another across all the mountains and valleys. (p. 38)

To the Gikuyu audience for whom the original novel was written, this is a familiar story that needs no elaboration and the simplicity and delicacy with which Ngugi handles it is meant to make it not a point of information but a

ritual of a shared experience, a reminder of the subtle change in the nature of the betrayal they had fought against, and a re-invocation of the enthusiasm for the unfinished business of liberation which Matigari is conjured up to rouse them into taking up again.

4.3.2.1.1 The Matigari Mystique

The most evident device of traditional oral narrative that Ngugi uses in *Matigari* is the mystique that he weaves around his epic hero. This aura of other-worldliness that characterizes Matigari's homecoming serves the dual purpose of both elevating his heroic stature above that of ordinary men and making his mission greater than any ordinary adventure. Not content with merely weaving a tall yarn and creating a superhuman hero from the realms of folklore for entertainment, Ngugi considerably complicates the story by introducing a level of realism in order to make the tale applicable to the realities of the Kenyan situation and drive his point home. Gikandi points out the tension that this duality introduces into the basic structure of the novel as follows:

> This tension arises from Ngugi's divided intentions: on one hand, he anchors his character in the "real" world of Kenyan politics because he wants to provide a commentary on the rise of the post-colonial state as an agent of repression; on the other hand, he hopes to transcend the materiality of state power and neocolonialism by positing his hero as an agent of transformation. And so readers are asked to regard Matigari as a historical figure who returns to fight for truth and justice, but they are also invited to accept his supernatural powers as normal and natural. Readers are expected to view Matigari as a man who can transform himself (like the medicineman Thiiru[6] in the Gikuyu oral narrative which inspired the novel) while at the same time identifying with him as an ordinary or historical subject.[7]

If this poses a problem, it is not so much with the ordinary Gikuyu audience for whom the story was originally written as with the more informed readers who would be dissecting aspects of style. To the ordinary Gikuyu reader who would be well acquainted with the politics of the situation, the real excitement lies in Ngugi's use of traditional devices to create a modern tale.

It works because of what Gikandi himself points out when he defines *Matigari* for what it is: "the parabolic narrative - which is supposed to allow Gikuyu readers to orient themselves in the familiar tradition of orality and the Bible - and the desire for realism."[8]

The quest which dominates *Matigari* is in the vein of the familiar oral folk tale which calls for an element of mysticism: the ritualistic, the allegorical, the supernatural or the symbolic. It begins with the symbolic ritual of burying the hatchet - the weapons of conflict - in a bid to give peace a chance. Matigari, the epic hero of the tale, voluntarily lays down his weapons and girds himself with the humble belt of peace, setting off alone from the forest of strife to return to the community whose cause he has long espoused. He returns to lay claim to the symbolic family, land and house which he left behind - things without which he has no identity in society, no self-definition. The atmosphere in which he returns is described from the beginning as oppressive, repressive and most trying: the heat and dust being only part of the trials and tribulations that "one had to endure on this earthly journey." (p. 5)

Matigari's decision to seek family first before staking claim to land and house comes to him in the form of a vision or revelation from which he emerges with the kind of questions that lay a pattern which recurs throughout the narrative:

> He dozed off. His thoughts took flight. How can I return home all alone? How can I cross the threshold of my house all alone? What makes a home? It is the men, women and children - the entire family. I must rise up now and go to all the public places, blowing the horn of patriotic service and the trumpet of patriotic victory, and call up my people - my parents, my wives, my children. We shall all gather, go home together, light the fire together and build our home together... (p. 6)

Evidently, this is not a quest for a realistic family (as the target audience would be well aware of) but rather a deliberate co-option of the whole community into a political act of re-possession of their rights which are only figuratively signified by the symbolic homecoming. This collective or communal family is then painstakingly brought together in the face of

obstacles first expressed by the cynically named Voice of Truth, speaking for a corrupt and repressive system represented in the first instance by the police. But behind the corrupt police is the shady government which is itself fronting for the callous and exploitative neo-colonial commercial, industrial or agricultural multi-national corporations, headed by the black puppets, that still run the show from behind the scenes.

Significantly, it is among the oppressed and exploited workers that Matigari finds his family: the abandoned street kids who are left to fend for themselves in refuse damps in competition with dogs and vultures; the factory employees who are penned in like inmates of a concentration camp; and the barmaids and prostitutes who are preyed on by policemen who act more like pimps than lawmen. Matigari's first encounter with his arch-enemies - the heirs to the colonial legacy that had robbed him of his own heritage - only comes after he has reassembled his family in readiness for battle.

4.3.2.1.2 Muriuki and the Children

It is significant that Matigari's first real contact with the community is with the children of whom Muriuki is singled out from the start. This whole encounter with the children has an element of initiation about it. In effect it is the beginning of an awakening towards their responsibilities in society for which they have got to be prepared since they are the future leaders. To salvage the new generation after the trauma of the false dawn of independence and to give them the chance of creating "a new heaven on a new earth" (p. 16) is perhaps the most important reason for Matigari's return from the dead.

This encounter is a kind of initiation ritual in which the children of the lost generation are rescued by Matigari. But as can be expected of a society that has been so deeply traumatised, he is initially rejected and violently repulsed by the children who fail to see his messianic vision and are unimpressed by his magic powers. In an episode that echoes the biblical rejection of Christ and anticipates the ultimate sacrifice that parallels Christ's crucifixion, it is Matigari who sheds his blood for the children in a

reversed initiation ritual in which the comforter is also the one who is comforted by Muriuki the initiate. But it is among the children that Matigari ultimately finds his readiest supporters. The first and foremost of these, Muriuki, is marked by fate to become the heir to the revolutionary zeal that had motivated Matigari himself all his life. Muriuki, who himself becomes an outcast like his mentor, is converted from the very beginning into an unswerving disciple. We should note that Muriuki is also a re-casting of Boy in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*, herein placed on the way towards attaining fuller realization as a representative character in the mould of a younger Karega in *Petals of Blood* or Kariuki[8] in *Maitu Njugira*.

4.3.2.1.3 Ngaruro wa Kiriro and the Workers

The second key contact that Matigari makes with the community (i.e. the men) is with the workers whose union leader, Ngaruro wa Kiriro (like Muriuki) is marked for a symbolic role in the communal homecoming ritual. Both Muriuki and Ngaruro are drawn to Matigari by an almost mystical power beyond comprehension. Scorned, stoned, ridiculed and dismissed for a madman, the Christ-like saviour is only accepted and assisted by the boy and the worker whose compassion complements Matigari's and establishes the workers' communal relationship to him as family. Ngaruro is the embodiment of the oppressed workers and peasants whose blind rejection of Matigari is parallel to that of the children. Like Muriuki, he is the one with the foresight to fall behind the Christ-like Matigari who is himself portrayed as being able to condone his rejection by the people "who know not what they are doing". Ngaruro too has his parallels in Ngugi's previous works covered in this study: primarily Kimathi himself in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*, a later Karega in *Petals of Blood*, Gicaamba in *Ngaahika Ndeenda*, Muturi in *Caitaani Mutharaba-ini* and Kang'ethe in *Maitu Njugira*. Ngaruro becomes another disciple whose mission is even more immediate than Muriuki's which (like Karega's in the earlier novel) lies in the as yet hidden future:

> 'Spread the message: Settler Williams is dead. John Boy is dead. We must go home, light the fire and rebuild our home together.'
> (p. 23)

It is thus that the adult disciple is consecrated in another initiation ritual that echoes that of Christ's appointment of his disciples at the beginning of His mission on earth. The Christ analogy is even more evident in the prison episode later on after the first confrontation with John Boy and Robert Williams when Matigari is arrested and thrown in jail among twelve petty criminals, a drunkard and minor offenders (one of whom is an informer) where he shares his food and drink in a manner reminiscent of Christ's Last Supper. This ritual testifies to the kinship between Matigari and the community of the outcasts and dispossessed and the eleven men with him are clearly marked for a mission though they still don't know exactly who he is in spite of the obvious allusions to Christ the Saviour and Comforter come to wipe away their tears.

The mystique surrounding Matigari - like his miraculous escape from jail - though later given a rational explanation, prevents precipitate identification that in the Kenyan situation would be expected to lead to immediate liquidation as demonstrated in *Petals of Blood*. Such suspense and mystification is an essential ingredient of the folk narrative which is never meant to be about the stark realism of day-to-day existence. By a twist of irony, it is the drunkard - playing John the Baptist - who baptises Matigari and sets him on a peaceful mission as "a seeker of truth and justice" - an ideal held out as a possible weapon for the salvation of a world which - like Hamlet's Denmark - has been reduced to a jail.

4.3.2.1.4 Guthera and the Women

The third significant group that Matigari comes in contact with in the community are the women, represented by Guthera - the girlish and delightfully cheeky fallen angel whose vulnerability is painfully exposed. Like the symbolic Woman in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*, Guthera is all women, for she is young enough to stand for one of Matigari's lost children and yet old enough to be one of the wives or mothers he has come back in search of. As a victim of exploitation by the system, Guthera is also symbolic of the African woman in general and therefore of Mother Africa. The abuse and humiliation she

suffers at a personal level are equated to the rape of Kenya and that of the continent as a whole in the great scramble for Africa. Guthera also re-echoes Ngugi's earlier characters starting from Girl in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* and going through Wanja in *Petals of Blood*, Gathoni in *Ngaahika Ndeenda*, Wariinga in *Caitaani Mutharaba-ini* and Nyathira in *Maitu Njugira*.

In coming to Guthera's rescue when the police molest her and in restoring her dignity, the messianic Matigari underscores her many-faced symbolic stature with minimal assertion in a manner that is reminiscent of Christ calling his disciples to follow him:

> 'Get up ... Come, stand up, mother ... ' he said simply. (p. 32)

This episode marks a turning point in Guthera's life and is another form of initiation: a purification in which the wiping away of her tears transforms her into a Mary Magdalene figure "whose story is one of extreme innocence and of religious passion perverted by corrupt and irresponsible men."[10] In the end Guthera stands above reproach and is a symbolic fulfilment of all Matigari's expectations. Like a mother, she is able to direct his quest in a particular meaningful direction; like a dutiful daughter, a spouse and a disciple, she is ready to lay down everything else and follow him to the bitter end.

4.3.2.1.5 John Boy, Robert Williams and the Colonial Legacy

Matigari's final encounter in this part of the novel is the inevitable confrontation with John Boy and Robert Williams - the heirs to the colonial legacy left by their parents: John Boy the collaborator and his master, Settler Williams. This is a ritualised meeting of the irreconcilable: the beneficiaries who had grabbed what they never worked for and the dispossessed man who had apparently lost even the revolt to dislodge his oppressors; the selfish individualists and the selfless, single-minded revolutionary on a peace mission in the interests of the community that does not even recognise him and keeps on asking for an explicit sign to enlighten it.

The easy confidence with which John Boy and Robert Williams stake their claim to what they believe to be their rightful inheritance is clearly demonstrated by their casual dismissal of Matigari's challenge when he confronts them. The confrontation is a dramatic episode in itself, loaded with innuendo and even in the original Gikuyu edition carried out in three languages: English, Gikuyu and Swahili. In an exchange that survives the English translation, the alienated John Boy is shown replaying his own father's earlier betrayal of the people to the settlers as he trifles with Matigari in Gikuyu (translated into standard English to show the reality of the distance between them) while re-affirming his camaraderie with Robert Williams in a running side comments which are presented in conversational style. The two friends enjoy a mutually beneficial post-colonial co-operation earlier vilified in each of Ngugi's later works as "partnership in progress". They know the system is on their side and that the threat Matigari poses is immaterial for help is only a phone call away. Their allies - the police - are soon on hand to whisk the nuisance off to jail.

4.3.2.2 PART TWO: THE SYMBOLIC QUEST FOR TRUTH AND JUSTICE

The second part of the novel deals with the central quest for Truth and Justice by peaceful means. Matigari sets out with a single-mindedness and fearlessness that brooks no discouragement from constant rejection and repeated failure to find the answer to the one central question he poses everywhere he goes: where in this world can one find truth and justice? Apart from his not being recognised by the very people he has set out to redeem, his mission is further complicated by the smear campaign against him which is carried by the Voice of Truth - the anomalous radio service that acts as the supreme agent of mass corruption and deceit. Matigari's mission is not a single day's work though the events in the novel appear to be structured within the framework of a progressing day. The actual passage of time is signalled by the innocuous diary-like entries recording routine weather conditions which are also lacklustre, sterile and oppressive like the political climate.

The "mythification" of Matigari goes hand in hand with a deliberate down-playing of his messianic stature through the realistic, explicatory de-mystifying follow-up. The children's unquestioning acceptance of the mythical (in being the first to change their attitudes towards Matigari) is contrasted with the adults' lack of faith as a generation that had lost the struggle and meekly given in to the betrayal of independence. The children (i.e. the future generation whose heritage has been compromised) naturally turn to Matigari who welcomes them in a manner reminiscent of Christ. (p. 73) On the contrary, the adults turn away from him when he appears on cue whenever they wish for him - for they are only wishing for make-believe whereas the reality he confronts them with makes them so uncomfortable that they reject him. The adults and the government (through the ubiquitous Voice of Truth) promote the myth because it is more comfortable to deal with and poses no real threat to the status quo. It is not only Matigari's personality that is mystified but even the recent events like his encounter with John Boy and Robert Williams and his escape from jail are embellished and transformed to the state of folk lore. Matigari's message can only penetrate their defence and reach them through the disciple, Ngaruro wa Kiriro, who immediately becomes a target for execution as a warning to others.

The Biblical parallels between Matigari's mission to that of Christ can also be seen in the temptation he gets to save himself and forget about the blind and cynical community that persists in failing to rise to his challenge. Corruption in high places has certainly penetrated deep into the fabric of a society where even the usually simple shepherds, living in arcadian purity, are depicted as being conditioned by the pervasive Voice of Truth and the gospel according to His Excellency Ole[11] Excellence. The lone voice of wisdom in all Matigari's search is that of the old woman who redirects his quest away from the wilderness back to the urban centres where he would find the men of books (like the author himself) whose vision of a more just society had led to their persecution. But on Matigari's return to the city, the student, the teacher and the priest who Matigari directs his questions at all turn away from him in fear - the great epidemic that had silenced all opposition. Doubt of himself, fear of the wrath of God and personal greed all influence the priest into ministering to the profoundly disturbing Matigari

who - in a ritual reminiscent of the confessional - tells his story and Guthera's with the result that he suddenly de-mystifies his own role in the eyes of the priest who, now relieved and reassured, turns him away to go and seek answers to his secular questions from the Minister of Truth and Justice.

Matigari's confrontation with the Minister of Truth and Justice takes place in an episode reminiscent of the feast of fantasy in *Caitaani Mutharaba-ini (Devil on the Cross)*. Sarcasm underlies the facile show of democracy that the grotesque Minister of Truth and Justice puts up, shamelessly parading his ill-gotten wealth, parroting his master (His Excellency Ole Excellence) in an arrogant postulation of loyalist patronage and ruthlessly suppressing civil liberties through intimidation carried out in the name of truth and justice. When Ngaruro wa Kiriro asks about the workers' just reward for their labour, he is immediately arrested for sedition and treason. When Matigari appears on cue to ask his persistent questions and repeat the moral tale of his unjust dispossession, which strikes terror in the hearts of his listeners, he is met with the threat of violence though he is only guarded with the belt of peace. The Minister blatantly declares that the country only needs the wealthy capitalists (like Boy and Williams who provide the politicians with limitless funds), soldiers (or security men like the policemen who do their behest) and leaders (like himself) but not the ordinary people or workers who only cause trouble. Matigari is subjected to instant justice on the Minister's orders as an illustration of the official brand of justice. The Minister castigates Matigari and what he stands for, which he dismisses as a bad dream, a nightmare that should be forgotten.

The Minister of Truth and Justice is not alone in the corruption of state: he is only one of a long line of sycophants who take their cue right from His Excellency Ole Excellence, the President. These Parrotologists, as the author satirically names them, include the Provincial Commissioner, in his outmoded attire dating to the colonial days, who (in a move akin to that of the Kenyan authorities which banished Ngugi, banned his plays and even ordered the arrest and detention of Matigari, not knowing he was a fictitious character in a novel) bans all "songs or stories or plays or proverbs or riddles mentioning

Matigari";[12] the Party Chairman - a caricature of the blind follower - who also displays his ignorance by promptly outlawing Karl Marx and Mao, whom he assumes to be expatriate meddlers, proposing that they should be denied work permits; and the Member of Parliament who makes a number of preposterous proposals banning "dreams and desires for two years" and calling on the President to pass a decree to stop poor people from having sex so that the responsibility of having children can become the privilege of the wealthy. Such are the people who - in the interests of Christian democracy - mete instant justice on Ngaruro wa Kiriro, who is bundled off to the lunatic asylum where he is later killed in an alleged attempt to escape, and Matigari, who is also declared insane for imitating Christ and sent to the same mental institution. It is in the lunatic asylum that the teacher-pupil/messiah-disciple relationship between Matigari and Ngaruro wa Kiriro is consolidated and rounded off on a didactic note in a brief summary which follows the tradition of the oral tale:

> In the mental hospital, Matigari ma Njiruungi and Ngaruro wa Kiriro talked nearly the whole night about the workers ... peasants ... freedom fighters ... revolutionaries ... about all the forces committed to building a new tomorrow for all our children ... Amen.
>
> They became like student and teacher. Each was both a student and a teacher to the other. (p. 126)

The confrontation in which Matigari almost disorients the Minister of Truth and Justice and his entourage of sycophants is significant in the way in which he makes a statement that underlines his representative role, putting his mission on a wider canvas that transcends the present. Laying claim to the symbolic land and house that define the selfhood of the dispossessed Gikuyu people, he turns on Williams - the agent of neo-colonial domination - saying:

> `And you, imperialist, and your servant Boy- with all your other lackeys, ministers and leaders of the police force, the army and the courts, the prisons and the administration - your days are numbered! *I shall come back tomorrow.* We are the patriots who survived: Matigari ma Njiruungi![13] *And many more of us are being born each day.* John Boy, you shall not sleep in my house again. It's either you or me and *the future belongs to me!*
>
> (p. 124, my italics)

This marks the end of the peace mission: it is a declaration of war. Matigari's threat to 'come back tomorrow' is not simply a reference to the final showdown in Part Three of the novel: it is also a reference to the subsequent social revolution that Matigari seeks to set in motion with the return of the spirit of revolt which he represents - the spirit that had previously given rise to the birth of the Mau Mau movement which he aims to resurrect. The mystification of the end of this episode is only a facade the author uses to mask the reality of the transition from the meek acceptance of the status quo to the active revolt which was very evident to the readers of the Gikuyu novel when it was published.

4.3.2.3 PART THREE: THE ULTIMATE CONFRONTATION

The last part of the novel takes the narrative to its resolution in violent confrontation - literally a fight to the death. The messianic Matigari, whose attempt to find peaceful means to restore truth and justice for all fails, is forced to accept that words alone, without the force of arms, are not enough to bring change in a society where there are so many vested interests. His change of tactics is symbolized by his exchanging the belt of peace he had girded himself with at the beginning of the story for the sharpened spear. But this is only a symbolic expression of his intent for, in fact, when Matigari mysteriously escapes from the mental hospital (under circumstances that recall Woman's plot to spring Kimathi out of jail in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*)[14] and heads for the confrontation with John Boy and Robert Williams in the symbolic house, he goes armed only with words and it is the opposition which is armed to the teeth with weapons of destruction. But in spite of all the odds stacked against him, Matigari is determined to bring his mission to a meaningful conclusion, no matter what the consequences. He realises he had made a mistake to return in peace to try and resolve a class struggle between "the messengers"[15] and the true workers which could never be resolved by peaceful means and that unity and peace are impossible ideals in such an uneven struggle.

This change of heart and the decision to abandon peaceful means of resolving the conflict poses problems for those who might be tempted to view the extensive use of Christian imagery as evidence of Ngugi's ultimate reconciliation with western religion. In fact Ngugi's flirtation with the Christian ideology in *Matigari* goes only as far as it serves to promote the messianic role of the promised saviours who have always been a feature of Gikuyu mythology pre-dating the advent of Christianity as depicted in Ngugi's *The River Between*. Brown, who points out the parallels between the mystique surrounding Matigari and that surrounding the historical Elijah Masinde of the *Dini ya Msambwa* cult, argues that:

> Ngugi might, in the 1980s, have reassessed the possible usefulness of Christianity to his revolutionary project, and, in particular ... the potential for political mobilization inherent in the millenarianism embraced from time to time by sections of the Kenyan peasantry both under colonialism and in the post-colonial period.[16]

But whether Matigari is modelled on Christ or on the legendary Elijah Masinde, what matters in terms of the audience in the fiction as well as the audience which the author had in mind is that they would be receptive to the idea of such a hero, for, as Brown also points out, "Matigari's mythical stature clearly depends on the people's propensity for myth-making."[17]

In *Matigari* Ngugi finally comes to grips with his mythical hero by placing him firmly within the context of a realistic situation and he finds out that the people are irredeemably blind to the actuality of salvation, traditional or Christian. The startling reality which emerges, as Gurnah points out, is that "Ngugi's use of the Christ metaphor reveals that the mythical redeemer is a fantasy."[18] This is as true of Waiyaki in Ngugi's first written novel, *The River Between*, as it is of Matigari in this one. The author's message to his audience is quite unequivocal: if the mythical redeemer is a fantasy, then the responsibility for liberation lies in the hands of the people themselves. But since the people are not ready to take the initiative, they have to be guided towards the ultimate realisation of their freedom. This guidance can only come from inspired leaders like Matigari who carry the banner of the likes of

Dedan Kimathi. Even when the people turn away from them, such leaders should never despair of helping the people to help themselves.

For all his forbearance, Matigari almost comes close to giving up. His only consolation is in the disciples he has recruited: Guthera, who forsakes everything to become his helpmate - at a realistic level securing his release each time he is jailed and at a symbolic level labelled the pure for the superhuman role she assumes in order to rise to the level of becoming his partner; Muriuki, the resurrected youth who takes over Matigari's mantle in perpetuation of the struggle that goes on beyond the life of any one individual; and the children whose brave act in giving him temporary refuge testifies to their readiness to carry on the struggle that their elders have given up.

In the lull before the stormy final encounter, the readers' are treated to light relief which takes the form of a joy ride in the Minister's Mercedes Benz, which Matigari commandeers for his escape. This is the story-teller's bonus to boost his audience's morale and give them psychological satisfaction. But fooling around in the ill-gotten playthings of the wealthy after catching them in their hypocrisy (the Minister's wife's adulterous rendezvous) does not compensate for the depravation that the poor must bear and this escapade is only a case of make-believe which only temporarily suspends the reality of the gross exploitation they can see wherever they pass.

After this digression - which does nothing to get Matigari any nearer to his weapons - the shattering truth must be faced and it is the messianic Matigari who ultimately has to bear the cross. However, the brief respite is also utilised to play up the myth once again and rouse the masses to head for the venue of the final showdown to witness the sign they had been asking for all along that would show that Matigari is indeed the saviour who had been promised ever since time immemorial.[19]

The final conflict dramatically starts with the car chase in which Matigari is apparently cornered into heading for the symbolic house unarmed to stake his last claim before a massive audience. Although Matigari appears to walk

blindly into a trap, making his opponents gloat over their assured victory, the mystique that had been woven around him climaxes in an explosive finale in which the symbolic house is destroyed in an inferno (a reminder of the likely fate of country itself when the day of reckoning comes) and Matigari yet again mysteriously escapes in a blaze of glory and adulation that even threatens to affect the very soldiers who had been brought in to destroy him. As Matigari himself puts it, this last battle is against fear which had been identified by the old woman in Part Two as the real enemy of change and revolution. It is also the ideal opportunity to give the sign that the people had been asking for to mark the beginning of the new liberation war.

The Matigari who is chased from the scene of conflagration into the wilderness is the old guerrilla fighter back in his element and apparently indestructible. The open ending of the narrative by no means affirms that he and Guthera are killed in the blaze of gunfire which is only silenced by the thunderstorm. If anything, the parallel with Christ's crucifixion is a re-affirmation of a mission accomplished.

In folk tale tradition, the complicity of the mother-wife, Guthera, is like an announcement of a new beginning beyond the symbolic role already played to its dramatic end - hence the inference drawn from the reference to resurrection in the section heading, though the most obvious assumption is that this refers to the continuity which is provided by Muriuki who crosses the symbolic river to take up Matigari's weapons and assume leadership of the revolt his mentor had instigated. However one looks at it, Matigari's departure is no ordinary death for he himself says that he would be beyond harm once he got to the river[20] as he apparently does. True to folk tale tradition, Matigari and Guthera are said to disappear without trace, for in the end the hero from the realm of myth takes his bride from the real world and disappears with her to the land of myth to live happily thereafter. The old master bows out of the scene, as expected, giving way to new blood and new leadership in Muriuki.

4.3.3 Devices of Orature

Traditional orature is not complete without proverbs, riddles, poetry and songs and Ngugi's *Matigari* has a fair share of all these devices. They are not mere embellishments added for entertainment value alone but are integrated into the fabric of the tale to add to its didactic value as well. A brief examination of each of the items in the following sub-sections should be sufficient to demonstrate the contribution these aspects of orature contribute to Ngugi's quest for a new literary style to meet his needs.

4.3.3.1 PROVERBS

Proverbs are perhaps the most distinctive markers of a people's culture and the Gikuyu language is blessed with an abundance of them. In *Matigari* as in the preceding works in this study, Ngugi uses a wealth of proverbs to bring his message home to his audience. It is in the subtle use of proverbs as much as in his narrative technique that Ngugi's talent would be judged by the Gikuyu audience in whose idiom he was writing, not with the tentative cautiousness of the prodigal in *Ngaahika Ndeenda/Caitaani Mutharaba-ini* but with the assured confidence of the professional story-teller whose homecoming had borne the expected results.

Instead of the massive list of proverbs one finds in *Caitaani Mutharaba-ini*, in *Matigari* one detects a deliberate attempt to keep down the numbers and repeat certain proverbs to reinforce the cyclic nature of the plot. The first proverb in the novel - which refers to time and transition as the normal order of things - is a case in point, for it is used to set the pace as follows in the first quarter of the novel:

- there was no night so long that it did not end with dawn. (p. 3)
- There is no night so long that it does not end with dawn. (p. 11)
- there is no night so long that will not end with dawn;
  and no day dawns like another. (p. 46)

These proverbs are used to illustrate the transitory nature of power: for just as colonial rule had come to an end and given way to the neo-colonial era of pseudo-independence, the latter too would sooner or later give way to a more just society like that which preceded the colonial era.

One interesting feature about this device that becomes evident on reading *Matigari* is the recurrence of certain proverbs that had featured in the earlier works. This has the effect of giving thematic continuity to Ngugi's writing and re-affirming his commitment to Gikuyu culture as a valid source of material for his creative effort. One of these proverbs that cuts deep into the Gikuyu psyche and bears the burden of Ngugi's message relates to fear as an inhibition that hinders the community's resolve for self-determination and negates the attainments of the Mau Mau liberation struggle:

- Too much fear breeds misery in the land. (pp. 76, 87, 90, 112, 171)

This often repeated proverb, which acts as a kind of refrain designed to rouse the people into action, echoes *Ngaahika Ndeenda*, *Caitaani Mutharaba-ini* and *Maitu Njugira* in all of which it is used for the same purpose. Complementing it in a subtle way are the proverbs and proverbial sayings that urge caution which they seek to dissociate from cowardice:

- A prudent person keeps their mouth shut. (p. 63)
- Taking precaution does not mean that one is a coward. (p. 112)
- Caution is not a sign of cowardice. (p. 142)

Again these proverbs echo Ngugi's earlier works in which they are used in a similar context that gives a continuum to Ngugi's writings. One of the often repeated proverbs in the same category lends to *Matigari* the fighting spirit that suits the mood of the novel, echoing the resolve in *Ngaahika Ndeenda* and *Caitaani Mutharaba-ini*:

- We refuse to be the cooking pot that cooks but never eats the food! (pp. 60, 97, 138, 161)

The resolve of this proverb reinforces other proverbs that are introduced - often in clusters - to extol the virtues of honest labour and emphasize the blatantly exploited workers' right to the fruits of their labour:

- A fortune for him who works hard finally comes; a person who endures finally overcomes. (p. 59)
- He who sows must be the one who reaps. (p. 60)

As Gikandi, who is fortunate to have read both the original novel in Gikuyu and the English translation, points out, translation into English sometimes becomes impossible and the translator gives a precis that conveys the meaning but fails to carry the weight of the original.[21] In the following example, reportage is resorted to in place of the actual sayings Matigari would have used in Gikuyu:

> He [Ngaruro wa Kiriro] also told them how Matigari had appeared to him, and how he had spoken in parables and proverbs, saying: The products of our labour should go back to us who produce the wealth of this country. (p. 74)

Other proverbs that reappear from the earlier works, echoing the collective wisdom of the Gikuyu are:

- the shit (or fart) of a wealthy man never smells. (p. 60)
- A hero cannot be judged by his size (or by the size of his calves). (p. 73)
- A weary bird will perch and rest on any tree. (p. 94)
- The fool's staff is used by the cunning. (p. 142)

Some of the most effective of the proverbs originate from the basic wisdom of the peasantry gleaned from ordinary everyday experience like the following recurrent examples, many of which relate to farming and extol the virtues of perseverance such as shown by Matigari himself in his futile quest for ideals that no longer exist. Many of these proverbs are presented in clusters that also include universally accepted dictums on virtues like wisdom, knowledge, truth and justice:

- True justice is mightier than the sword. (p. 62)
- questions are the gateway to wisdom and knowledge. (p. 62)
- A farmer whose seeds have not germinated does not give up planting. (p. 64)
- The true seeker of truth never loses hope. The true seeker of justice never tires. A farmer does not stop planting seeds just because the failure of one crop. Success is born of trying and trying again. Truth must seek justice. Justice must seek the truth. When justice triumphs, truth will reign on earth. (p. 84)
- A farmer does not stop sowing just because one crop has failed. The seeker of justice does not stop searching until he finds it. Truth never dies. Justice is mightier than strength. (p. 86)
- The failure of one crop does not deter one from sowing seeds again. (p. 150)
- Happy are they who suffer in search of truth, for their hearts and their minds are free, and they hold the key to the future.[22] (p. 87)
- One must never scorn a grain of sand or a drop of rain. (p. 89)
- Give a little sacrifice to appease a thieving spirit, and this will only whet its appetite and greed for more... (pp. 90-91)
- A thieving spirit cannot be appeased by sacrifice. (p. 121)
- Fortune favours the brave. (p. 163)

4.3.3.2 RIDDLES

Riddles are a common feature of Gikuyu orature and it would be inconceivable to imagine a tale without at least a few of them. In *Matigari* there are five obvious examples that serve the critical role of concretizing the central questions posed by the narrative.

The first riddle is posed by Matigari in jail where he is cast among thieves, murderers and drunkards. The discussion turns to the system that had created the conditions that had led to their unfair incarceration, and this gives Matigari an opportunity to continue the quest by asking the question that had

put him in trouble. What makes this a riddle is the fact that there is no straight answer to it:

> `Where have truth and justice gone in this country?' Matigari said...
> `I will unravel that riddle for you,' the man accused of theft told him... (p. 61)

But neither the thief, nor the drunkard, nor any of the others have an answer to Matigari's riddle though he neither asks nor takes any forfeit for it, preferring to continue his quest till he finds an answer.

The second example comes from the labourers in the fields and plantations where Matigari goes in search for truth and justice. Instead of answering his riddle, which they say is too difficult, and not recognising him for the mythical saviour they believe in, the men send Matigari back to himself with a riddle of their own:

> `Go back the way you've come and look for a man called Matigari ma Njiruungi. He is the one who now beats the rhythm to the tune, "truth and again truth". If you find him, ask him this: Since justice is mightier than force, where does its force come from?'
> (pp. 79-80)

It is a case of one question being asked to answer another, and Matigari turns to seek the answer elsewhere - apparently to the law courts where justice should be found but where he once again gets shunted elsewhere at every turn.

The old woman who Matigari comes across in the wilderness at first appears to have the answers to the questions he is asking but in the end she too turns him away to go and consult with the men of books - the intellectuals who are the modern sages but whose wisdom she shrouds in another riddle that Matigari must try to untie if he is to find an answer to his question:

> `... Tell me this: Isn't it possible for one to find at least one or two among them who have been freed of fear and can untie the knot and reveal what is hidden...? (p. 82)

In the end this too proves futile and Matigari's quest turns up no answers from the intellectuals.

The next riddle is posed by Matigari to the priest to whom he tells the painful story of Guthera's betrayal in the hope of finding an answer with which to comfort her:

> `... With what words would you wipe away her tears? The Father in Heaven, why did He create a world that was so upside-down? A world in which those who sow evil reap good, and those who sow good reap evil! What do the holy books you study have to say about all this? Tell me the answer to the riddle. Untie this note for me. (p. 96)

Again, Matigari finds no answers here where the priest himself bears false testimony, for there is neither truth nor justice in him - only greed and self-seeking indifference to the suffering of others. He begins to castigate Matigari for saying the world is upside-down (which he calls blasphemy) and Matigari replies to him with "yet another riddle concerning him-who-sows and him-who-reaps-where-he-never-sowed." (pp. 96-98) The false priest answers Matigari's questions by directing the spiritual aspect to salvation through Christ and the secular one to the Minister of Truth and Justice for an answer.

4.3.3.3 POETRY

A full evaluation of Ngugi's handling of Gikuyu verse forms is only possible through an examination of the original Gikuyu version of the novel. Much of this is revealed by his ear for the rhythms of the language and the richness of the imagery suggested by the cadences that one detects in the high points of the prose narrative in the English translation available for this study. In this sub-section, however, the only examples that will be examined are seven items which are actually presented in conventional verse form.

The first of these examples is presented as a preamble addressed direct to the reader/listener. (p. ix) This is intended to rouse the reader's interest and prepare the non-reading, listening audience for an extraordinary tale to which they should pay close attention. The poem itself, however, is only a simple verse form of the kind any traditional story-teller would use as a formulaic opener with no particular individual identity. It does not have to be a unique composition or to highlight any special aspect of the tale to follow.

The affirmation of the formula, signalling the end of the preamble and calling for readiness for the real beginning of the narrative, is at the very end of the poem:

> So say yes, and I'll tell you a story!
> Once upon a time, in a country with no name... (p. ix)

We note that this purports to be the real beginning of the tale when it is only a false start that enhances the story-teller's invitation to the audience to suspend their prosaic awareness of the real world time and space and let their imagination guide them through the make-believe world of the *ngano*.

Versification is used in the narrative to depict major statements in a heightened lyrical form that would render these rallying calls more easily memorable - especially to the kind of listening audience for whom the original Gikuyu novel was written. For this reason, the verses chosen are also highly pictorial and intensely emotive - characteristics they share with the songs discussed in the sub-section below. These recurrent refrains or choruses (whose overtones echo back to Ngugi's preceding works) do not purport to make a deeply profound statement about society but are a reflection of the everyday experience of the peasantry and the working class people whose plight is the author's central concern:

> The builder sleeps in the open,
> The worker is left empty-handed,
> The tailor goes naked,
> And the tiller goes to sleep on an empty stomach. (p. 98)

These aphorisms are formulated into a fuller expression leading to the question that Matigari ultimately puts to the Minister of Truth and Justice when everyone else fails to give him an answer to his question, which becomes of universal concern:

> The builder builds a house.
> The one who watched while it was being built moves into it.
> The builder sleeps in the open air,
> No roof over his head.
>
> The tailor makes clothes.
> The one who does not even know how to thread a needle wears the clothes.
> The tailor walks in rags.

The tiller tends crops in the fields.
The one who reaps-where-he-never-sowed yawns for having eaten too much.
The tiller yawns for not having eaten at all.

The worker produces goods.
Foreigners and parasites dispose of them.
The worker is left empty-handed.

Where are truth an justice on this earth? (p. 113)

We note how in each verse the second line about the exploitation goes on almost ad infinitum as if to reflect the great length to which the agents of exploitation will go to flitch the working class.

The same theme is recast in a slightly different mould later on when Matigari feels let down by the workers' passive acceptance of their lot and wonders when they would ever have the resolve to break into positive action to redress the injustice. In his helplessness over the apparent failure of his mission, the words are only a song that reverberates through his mind, unconsciously building up into his own resolve to take the last initiative to ensure that a day would dawn when his ideals would be attained:

The builder shall live in a decent house,
The tailor wear decent clothes,
The tiller eat a decent meal?
No, the producer refuses to produce for parasites to harvest.
We the toilers refuse to be the pot that cooks but never eats the food.
Every human being has a pair of hands. (pp. 160-161)

The last line is a simple declaration of the individual's right to self-determination and not having to depend on others. In this situation, the workers are doubly disadvantaged, for not only are they denied the opportunity to rely on the labour of their hands, but they are also forced to surrender the fruits of their labour to others for no fair returns.

As depicted in Ngugi's preceding works, this exploitation knows no limits even when it comes to the Church which is blatantly perverted to serve the ends of the rulers and the wealthy who use religion to try and pacify the dispossessed into accepting their lot on earth without questioning the justice of it. It

is for that very reason at the meeting with the Minister in *Matigari* that the preacher is ordered to read the Ten Commandments to the agitating workers. These verses are deliberately chosen to try and counter the influence of the Matigari myth that had spawned songs of unity and sowed images of revolt in the people's minds. The Ten Commandments are made to sound like a good antidote for reducing any political fevers and making the cowed workers return to the state of passive acceptance of the status quo.

The antidote ultimately fails when the epidemic that Matigari lets loose spreads like a wild fire, fanned by the new generation that he has succeeded in inspiring into taking up the banner of liberation. It all starts with the symbolic baptism of fire in the inferno that Matigari lets loose to burn down the old order that had refused to yield to the cry of truth and justice. His anguished cry is taken up like a litany which is chorused by the multitudes gathered to witness the miracle to make them finally believe in his mission:

> Everything that belongs to these slaves must burn!
> Yes, everything that belongs to these slaves must burn!
> Their coffee must burn!
> Yes, their coffee must burn!
> Their tea must burn!
> Yes, their tea must burn! (p. 167)

This becomes a song that inspires the crowd to join in and start the destruction of all the capitalists' "sacred cows" that had been enshrined at the expense of the down-trodden. The story-teller sums up the extent of the destruction in a refrain that endlessly echoes and re-echoes the battle cry of the people:

> They burned down the houses.
> They burned down the tea-bushes.
> They burned down the coffee-bushes.
> They burned down the vehicles. (p. 168)

Thus poetry merges with song to give inspiration to the beginning of the revolution to bring about a more just society in the manner already signalled in the parallel dramatic endings of *Ngaahika Ndeenda* and *Maitu Njugira* in which the songs may be different but the purpose is the same.

4.3.3.4 SONGS

Songs are extensively used in *Matigari* as a device to break the monotony of the verbal narrative, giving the audience breathing space to absorb the nuances of the tale. Like poetry, songs provide a non-reading audience with an easier form to commit to memory, with the additional advantage that songs are also an open invitation for audience participation, usually accompanied by dance - thus adding to the theatrical aspect of the full realization of orature. But unlike in the plays, where song is almost invariably linked with dance, in the fiction song stands in its own right as a form of expression. Songs provide an important vehicle for mobilising popular support and spreading the message of the narrative, as the author (who is also the hidden narrator) testifies:

> No government, not even the most repressive, has ever managed to silence the voices of the masses. The songs spread like wildfire in a dry season. They spread through the villages. The people sang them day and night. (p. 127)

The disadvantage of studying the songs in English translation is that we miss out on the natural rhythms and tune of the original unlike the Gikuyu audience which would be able to join in the singing during a performance/reading of the narrative. This disadvantage also has the additional effect of narrowing down the difference between poetry and song.

One of the earliest songs to feature in *Matigari* is the unity song that goes back to *Ngaahika Ndeenda* and *Caitaani Mutharaba-ini* as a rallying call for the community to stand together against the opportunism and individualism of the powers that oppress them:

> Great love I saw there,
> Among the women and the children,
> We shared even the single bean
> That fell upon the ground. (p. 6)
>
> Great love I saw there,
> Among the women and the children,
> When a bean fell,
> We would share it among ourselves. (p. 55)

This unity was a key factor for survival among the Gikuyu, especially during the emergency when father betrayed son and brother turned against brother.

Some of the songs in *Matigari* sound like mere children's ditties in their wistful simplicity but they also speak of sentiments that lie as deep as experience. The following examples of timeless folk songs speak of dawn and the promise of a new beginning:

> If only it were dawn
> If only it were dawn
> So that I can share the cold waters with the early bird.
> (pp. 4, 126, 171)

Another similar example is a prayer for rain and the blessing it implies, for which the singers in their state of material and spiritual drought promise a socially respected sacrifice:

> Rain, rain, come today
> So I may slaughter a calf for you
> And another with a hump. (p. 53)

> Rain; Rain,
> Let me slaughter you a calf,
> And another
> With jingle bells around the neck! (p. 174)

The potential of song as a mobilising factor is also illustrated in the resistance song composed by the imaginary "he-who-sows" which echoes the words of the poem examined in the sub-section above. It goes:

> I will not produce food
> For him-who-reaps-where-he-never-sowed to feed on it
> While I go to sleep on an empty belly.
> I will not build a house
> For him-who-reaps-where-he-never-sowed to sleep in it
> While I sleep in the open.
> I will not sew clothes
> For him-who-reaps-where-he-never-sowed to wear them
> While I strut about naked.
> I will not make goods
> For him-who-reaps-where-he-never-sowed to grow rich
> While I remain empty-handed.
> I have refused to be like the cooking pot
> Whose sole purpose is to cook and never to eat! (pp. 97-98)

Another similar example is the battle song which is spontaneously sang by the multitudes who respond to Matigari's brave gesture and start burning all the things that remind them of their exploiters, ranging from property to ideologies like Parrotology and political practices like detention without trial and the exiling of patriots. Like the poem discussed earlier which makes a similar battle cry, the song is made up of a solo and a chorus in response to it:

> Everything that belongs to these slaves must burn!
> Yes, everything that belongs to these slaves must burn!
> Their coffee must burn!
> Yes, their coffee must burn!
> Their tea must burn!
> Yes ... (pp. 167-168)

One of the more poignant songs in the narrative is the one that gives the novel its title and also spontaneously rises with the mystification of Matigari:

> Show me the way to a man
> Whose name is Matigari ma Njiruungi,
> Who stamps his feet to the rhythm of bells
> And the bullets jingle.
> And the bullets jingle. (pp. 71, 77, 125, 127)

Ironically, the people who sing this song and popularise it do not even recognise their hero when they come face to face with him. Like Christ, he is only revealed to a few while the vast majority only revere the idea of him as a saviour with the mythical powers to defy any of the forces which had cowed them into subjection.

Another of the rallying songs in *Matigari* is also featured in the preceding works in which it is directed against the same enemy:

> You foreign oppressors,
> Pack your bags and leave!
> For the owner of this house
> Is on his way! (p. 46)

It is only now through the words of this song that we come to realise how early Matigari's homecoming had been predicted or planned by the author for

whom the three pairs of play and novel each are all designed to lead to the realization of an overwhelming desire to speak for and about the Gikuyu people in their own language and idiom. Nowhere is this realization celebrated more strongly than in song:

> Even if you detain us,
> Victory belongs to the people.
> Victory belongs to the people! (p.121)

This song, that defies all odds stacked against the people, is also the last voice that closes the narrative like an echo that is designed to reverberate endlessly:

> Victory shall be ours!
> Victory shall be ours!
> Victory shall be ours!
> Victory shall be ours! (p. 175)

But this is as yet only a moral victory and, moreover, one in which the heroes ever since Mugo wa Kibiro the seer of old[23] and Waiyaki (in *The River Between*) have always been the first victims and which was to cost Ngugi himself his homecoming, doomed to end in exile.

ENDNOTES:

1. Gikandi, S., 1991, "The Epistemology of Translation: Ngugi, *Matigari*, and the Politics of Language," *Research in African Literatures, Vol. 22, No. 4,* Indiana University Press/Ohio State University, p. 162.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 163.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 163.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 164.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 164.

6. Referred to in the blurb as the man who journeyed everywhere in search of a figurative cure which Ngugi interprets into the quest for a political goal.

7. Gikandi, *op. cit.*, p. 165..

8. *Ibid.*, p. 165.

9. Note the similarity in name between Kariuki and Muriuki which both have the same derivative and only differ in the prefix which could be used within a family or clan to distinguish the senior in age from the junior.

10. Gurnah, A., 1991, "*Matigari*: A Tract of Resistance," *Research in African Literature, Vol. 22, No. 4,* Indiana University Press/Ohio State University, p. 170.

11. Apart from the pompous word play implied in this satirical title turned into a name, the `Ole´ (though it is Maasai) would be viewed by the target audience as an obvious substitute for the Kalenjin `arap´ which has been popularised in Kenya by the current President´s appellation: His Excellency, President Daniel arap Moi.

12. Thus ridiculing the senseless censorship which politicians in African countries often adopt to silence their opponents.

13. See Gikandi, S., *op. cit.*, pp. 161-162 for detailed account of the meaning of Matigari and the significance of the full title of the original Gikuyu publication - *Matigari ma Njiruungi.*

14. There is an obvious parallel between Woman, Boy and Girl in the earlier work and Guthera (who is both Woman and Girl) and Muriuki in later work.

15. "The messengers" is a derogatory term which covers the full range of "traitors" going back to the earliest converts to Christianity who also received western education and became servants of the colonial administration. Later the collaborators who sided with the colonial government in fighting against the Mau Mau rebels also came from the same class which was eventually rewarded with the reigns of political power and economic control at the time of independence.

16. Maughan Brown, D.A., 1991, "*Matigari* and the Rehabilitation of Religion," *Research in African Literatures, Vol. 22, No. 4,* Indiana University Press/The Ohio State University, p. 174.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 174.

18. Gurnah, A., *op. cit.*, p. 171.

19. See *The River Between* for Mugo wa Kibiro's prophecy which antedates any other in Ngugi's later writing.

20. Reminiscent of the Honia river in *The River Between* and therefore symbolic of the divide between hostile sides as well as reconciler and healer - positive elements which negate destruction.

21. Gikandi, S., *op. cit.*, p. 166, gives a detailed account of an incidence in which the translator replaces a complex Gikuyu saying with an easier English alternative that only makes a statement on content.

22. The author's own prophetic voice, also echoing the workers' beatitudes in *Caitaani Mutharaba-ini,* pp. 209-210.

23. Mugo wa Kibiro is the seer who first prophesies the advent of the men from across the seas who would come dressed like butterflies and carrying sticks that spit fire and who would take away the land of the Agikuyu because the people would be divided amongst themselves. Though derided and laughed into silence, Mugo wa Kibiro also foretells the rise of a saviour (pre-dating the messianic saviour) who would come to lead the people in their greatest hour of need. (Featured in Ngugi's *The River Between*).

PART FIVE:

C O N C L U S I O N S

5.1 FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

This study set out to analyze Ngugi wa Thiong'o's later novels to assess his adaptation of dramatic techniques and Gikuyu oral traditions to the requirements of fiction. In the research the novel was taken to be Ngugi's basic genre towards which his other writings progressed. The plays of the period of study - having almost all been written in collaboration with others - were given a secondary status to the novels, each of which they preceded. Gikuyu oral literature was studied as essential background to Ngugi's later writing with a view to identifying its characteristics and subsequently tracing these through the plays and the corresponding novels covered in the study. Ngugi's non-fictional writings of the period were also examined so as to confirm the theories about his intentions and methods to be investigated.

The study establishes that there are strong elements of Gikuyu oral literature in both Ngugi's later plays and novels. Ngugi, while drawing from the same oral sources to enhance his writings, adapts certain elements of orature to both his drama and fiction. It is these elements of orature that then form the linkage between the two genres, thus establishing a continuity from drama to fiction. The recurrent coupling of the drama and fiction indicates Ngugi's view of the plays (either written in co-operation with others or given minimal textual content) as only a step towards his primary medium, the novel, through which he could attain the fullest expression.

Ngugi's special interest in oral literature, apart from its being steeped in Gikuyu tradition, is in its being performance-oriented and therefore better suited than the written word to the needs of direct communication with a non-reading audience. The order in which his works were issued, with the plays preceding the novels in each stage, is itself indicative of his recognition of the primacy of performance in this respect. However, this does not appear to have reduced his dependence on conventional genre definitions to provide the

basic structures within which he has fashioned his experimental works. Therefore, the innovations Ngugi introduces in form and content do not significantly alter the salient characteristics of either genre though the said works come out richer by virtue of their departures from the beaten track.

5.2 CONCLUSIONS

This study reaffirms Ngugi's self-attested status as a revolutionary author whose message and method are closely linked to the people's struggle in the Kenyan situation. Ngugi commits himself to becoming a revolutionary writer by choice, knowing very well that in doing so, he risks either detention without trial and/or exile and the resultant separation from the very sources of his inspiration and the primary audience for whom he is writing. Speaking with hindsight (in an address to a Conference on African Literature held in Stockholm in 1986), Ngugi comments on the difficulties a writer in his position is confronted with as follows:

> It seems to me that the African writer of the eighties, the one who opts for becoming an integral part of the African revolution, has no choice but that of aligning himself with the people: their economic, political and cultural struggle for survival. In that situation, he will have to confront the languages spoken by the people in whose service he has put his pen. Such a writer will have to *rediscover* the *real* language of struggle in the actions and speeches of his people, learn from their great heritage of orature, and above all, learn from their great optimism and faith in the capacity of human beings to remake their world and renew themselves.[1]

One cannot help noting the writer's own great optimism, for by then he himself is living in exile, cut away from his primary audience and his chosen language of expression, with no certainty of reunion. Gikandi remarks on the irony of the historical circumstances that have distanced Ngugi from his audience at the very moment of his greatest achievement and attributes it to the vagaries of the very forces that he has set out to combat:

> It is indeed a reflection of the political crisis in Africa today, that the Kenyan state, by going out of its way to silence the country's most important writer, has become an agent in the impoverishment of its people's culture.[2]

And one might add: that of African literature and Literature in general which might have benefitted from the sustaining of the creative momentum that Ngugi had established with his literary experiments.

This research establishes that Ngugi has made a bold experiment in returning to his roots to lay the foundation for creating a popular literature which has the potential to overcome the problem of illiteracy prevalent in his society and indeed throughout the African continent and the Third World. Over a period of less than a decade - the kind of time that most writers of his calibre normally take over one novel - Ngugi has come up with no less than three plays and three novels, to say nothing of the non-fictional writings and public lectures that he has had to cope with.

And yet the ending of each of these works leaves the impression that the promised land - the New Earth - is far from becoming a reality and that the author has not made any advances towards making his vision get any nearer to becoming realisable. Could it be that the New Earth (predicted as early as *A Grain of Wheat* in 1967), is only a mirage - a tantalising illusion and an untenable ideal that the artist and his society alike forever yearn for but could never hope to realize? But even though Ngugi the politician's revolutionary wishful thinking appears to come in the way of Ngugi the artist's concern with objective reality, at least the latter resists the temptation to create a socialist utopia as an answer to the Gikuyu and Kenyan people's persistent quest for a more just society - a task in which Ngugi's commitment, as Nwankwo[3] notes, is singularly consistent throughout his career as a writer. In fact Ngugi himself - visionary though he is - looks not to a utopia but to a very tenable future that he believes the revolutionary African writer should aim for: one in which the people attain the democratic right of controlling their economy, politics and culture.

Ngugi's later writings differ vastly from each other in style and yet they retain a close affinity in terms of themes and characterization. Although it may seem too early to say just how great these creations are as works of art, it can not be denied that these plays and novels represent a major departure in Ngugi's writing and for African writing in general. Already they have had a tremendous impact on the Kenyan populace, particularly the Gikuyu working class and peasantry in whose language and idiom Ngugi chose to write. These are people who had never been exposed to any literature outside their own oral narratives and the Bible.

Opinions differ in the critical analysis of any work of art - and especially if it is a form as new and experimental as the plays and novels which Ngugi has written more recently. Gikandi, one of the most illuminating critics on Ngugi because they come from the same background, reveals the ambivalence with which many critics approach Ngugi's later writings, especially the plays:

> Both *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* and *Ngaahika Ndeenda* ... have nothing to recommend them as aesthetic products, for Ngugi has never been a master of the dramatic form; neither is there anything memorable about their ideology. Both plays ... treated themes already exhausted in Ngugi's earlier works with tiresome reductionism. **And yet *Ngaahika Ndeenda* was to add a totally new dimension to Ngugi's notions of literary engagement. For a play touching on Kenya's most recent past, a play about displacement, dispossession, and betrayal, to be written in a local language and acted by the very peasants who had lived these themes every day since the 1920s - this was a unique event in Kenyan cultural history.**[4] (my emphasis)

The two plays and the musical that followed have been almost entirely restricted to Kenyan audiences. With the exception of the more conventional *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*, which was presented at FESTAC '77 in Lagos, and more controversially at the Africa Centre in London later on, and whose text has been prescribed in schools and colleges, the other two have only been overwhelmingly successful as local productions in Kenya and *Maitu Njugira (Mother, Sing for Me)* has yet to be published. Their success in Kenya can be attributed to the fact that the performance of each of the dramas became an event in itself that attracted social commentary and an over-reaction from the authorities who drew even greater attention to the plays by banning them. To

the Kenyan audience, although the plays deal with familiar themes from their own past and present, it is not so much the subject matter as the manner of presentation that constitutes the novelty and the audience's enthusiastic appreciation of Ngugi's creation is a clear indication of their recognition of the plays' artistic merits.

Significantly, of the three novels it is the more conventional *Petals of Blood* which has also been of more lasting appeal to scholars whereas the other two, which were first written in Gikuyu, have been an unprecedented success with readers/listeners in Kenya. However one looks at it, Ngugi appears to have succeeded in writing for two dissimilar audiences: a conventional, elitist, reading audience and an indigenous, popular non-reading audience. The novels which are specifically directed at the latter have become available in English translation and can thus be evaluated on the same universal principles as any other work of art. These novels are not devoid of the universal themes and the enigmatic characters of the earlier novels that had established Ngugi's reputation as a writer.

Great literature in the final analysis emerges from the skill with which the creative artist crafts his themes and characters to stand the test of time. But for all the novelty in Ngugi's later writings, it is also apparent that he has opted to simplify and re-cycle his themes and characters - perhaps out of his concern for the vast majority of his less privileged compatriots whom he felt he had to give every chance to clamber aboard and sail with him to the promised land, the New Earth he had long envisaged and written about, though in a foreign tongue. Ultimately, perhaps the less successful of Ngugi's ideas in his later works is the attempt to raise the people collectively, as a community, to the level of heroes - something that can only be attained at the expense of significant characterisation such as he had achieved in his earlier works with the singularly individualistic figures of Waiyaki in *The River Between* and Mugo in *A Grain of Wheat*. But in spite of the author's intentions, characters like Munira in *Petals of Blood* and the mythical hero of *Matigari* do rise to a similar enigmatic stature.

Ngugi's later works are exhaustive and they represent a ritual of homecoming that Ngugi could never go through again, yet the job in hand is far from finished and the road ahead is far from clear of obstacles. As an artist and a "Prophet of Justice", Ngugi has committed his compatriots to a philosophy of socio-political revolution as the only means of achieving a more equitable society. As a politician and a man of action, he knows that such a vision can only be sustained for a decade or two and then it becomes stale and the seer suffers the fate of the likes of the legendary Mugo wa Kibiro whose prophecies were only destined to be realised several generations after his time. It remains to be seen whether Ngugi will heed Matigari's call for action and follow his heroine, Wariinga (*Devil on the Cross*), on the revolutionary road towards enforced change or stop with his earlier hero, Karega (*Petals of Blood*) on the threshold of striking a negotiated compromise that may leave the desired change as elusive as ever. Lisa Curtis is quite emphatic in her indictment of Ngugi's quest for a viable political solution to the scenario he paints in his writings:

> Ngugi's repeated failure to find a solution to the problems he systematically exposes undermines the potential for real change which he ascribes to the political sentiments expressed in his works. It would seem that this failure cannot simply be overcome by the creation of new novel forms. If the new breed of novel is to adequately articulate the spirit of the people, it must express their fears and aspirations, their strengths and power to effect change in a manner which is closely allied to that elusive quality: the people's culture.[5]

It must be added that Lisa Curtis speaks from the point of view of the objective reader who looks at the *Devil on the Cross* in universal terms without having to envisage *Caitaani Mutharaba-ini* through Gikuyu eyes as an extension of the traditional oral tale whose foundations lie in the people's culture. This is not to deny the validity of her conclusions, for ultimately it is in universal terms that Ngugi's later writings will be judged.

These writings form a distinct category in Ngugi's literary canon and in African literature as a whole in which they serve to show the contribution that oral traditional forms can make, not merely towards embellishing what is essentially a western tradition of drama and fiction, but towards

substantially influencing the development of new directions that will enrich these genres. One of the areas of interest opened out by Ngugi's later writings is the generic relationship between drama and fiction which are shown to have a common meeting ground in performance, as in oral literature which utilises several devices to bring the artist and audience together in a collective effort that enhances the appreciation of the creative endeavour.

In these works Ngugi has also attempted to find an answer to the accusation often levelled at African writers that they never write with the African masses in mind because they dismiss this majority as illiterate and uneducated. Andy Gurr completely fails to anticipate the advent of the new Ngugi when he makes the following distinction between the "artist" and the writer in African literature:

> The "artist" in traditional society is more a performer of what already exists than a creator. The [creative] writer therefore has little directly to offer to his community's traditional culture. Even when the stability of social conditions necessary if traditional materials are to build up disappears the writer has little to offer. Tradition by definition is resistant to change, and so resistant to new offerings.[6]

Such was not the experience of Ngugi when he set out to adapt his writing to the traditions of his people. On the contrary, Ngugi found that many such preconceived notions about culture and literature are unfounded. For example, although it was true that many of the ordinary peasants and workers of Kamiriithu were illiterate and uneducated, they were not unintelligent and uncultured, for they taught him most of what he needed to know about Gikuyu oral literature and Gikuyu traditions. And rather than resist his efforts to adapt their traditions and culture to his mode of presentation, they eagerly welcome the innovations and willingly contribute to make it a success. Ngugi is thus able to prove that it is feasible to write for a non-reading audience and in this way provide the incentive and the kind of reading material that should subsequently make literacy more accessible to a greater number of people in the disadvantaged communities in Africa and the Third World.

The idea of writing for a non-reading audience may seem far-fetched until we consider what is happening to some of the popular novels published today, many

of which are being given much wider exposure worldwide through the film media than through actual readership. The exposure that Ngugi's fiction in Gikuyu has enjoyed in being subjected to communal readings is an indicator of the possibilities open to African writings in future if they are genuinely addressed to the people. It can therefore be argued that Ngugi in these works has made a major contribution towards creating a people's literature which is more serious than just Africanised imitations of James Hardley Chase or insipid romances in the Mills and Boons tradition. As Nwankwo asserts, one hopes that, far from being parochial, "this new development in Ngugi's career could stimulate new ideas in other African writers and open 'new vistas' for readers, writers and critics of African literature."[7]

Finally, the researcher hopes that this study has paved the way towards an intensive study of Ngugi's later writings in Gikuyu by a Gikuyu speaker - especially in an environment where it would be possible to gauge the level of comprehension and evaluate the level of success of Ngugi's experiment when the works have been unbanned. Gikandi, who is himself a Gikuyu speaker, hints at the potential of such a reading when he almost rescinds his reservations on Ngugi's avowed intention to write only in the Gikuyu language henceforth - a defensive determination he attributes to Ngugi's dilemma as a writer in exile. In an astounding admission that should silence all those critics who have a high regard for Ngugi's works in English, but who are sceptical of the artistic merits of Ngugi's writings in the Gikuyu language, Gikandi says:

> Now, there is no doubt that Ngugi is a more agile and imaginative writer in his mother tongue than he ever was in English; there is a certain ease with the language and its many nuances which none of the translations of his works has yet been able to capture.[8]

This, then, is only the beginning of what is hoped will be part of a renewed interest in Ngugi's writings and African literature as a whole, particularly with regard to narrowing the gap between oral traditions and the written word. Literature in general can only be enriched by a return to the roots to set new standards and fill in the gaps created by the initial fervour with which African writers hastened to fill up a vacuum and put African literature on the literary world map.

ENDNOTES:

1. Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 1986, "Writing Against Neo-Colonialism", Vista Books, London. Repeated in Petersen, *Criticism and Ideology: Second African Writers' Conference, Stockholm, 1986* (S.I.A.S., Uppsala, 1988).

2. Gikandi, S, 1984, "On Culture and the State: the Writings of Ngugi wa Thiong'o" in *Third World Quarterly Vol 11 No. 1*, p. 156.

3. Nwankwo, C, 1984, "Sifting the Grain from the Husk: An Overview of Ngugi's Writing" in *The Literary Half-Yearly Vol XXV No. 1*, pp. 2-15.

4. Gikandi, *op. cit.*, p. 154.

5. Curtis, L., 1984, "The Divergence of Art and Ideology in the later novels of Ngugi wa Thiong'o: A Critique", *UFAHAMU Vol XIII, No. 1-2*, p. 212.

6. Gurr, A, 1971, "Engagement is not Marriage: Perspectives on Cultural Conflict in East Africa," *Mosaic: a Journal for the Comparative Study of Literature and Ideas, Vol 5 (2)*, University of Manitoba Press.

7. Nwankwo, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

8. Gikandi, *op. cit.*, pp. 155-156.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1A

THE WOMAN AND THE BIRD

Wambũĩ wa Wambũgũ

Once upon a time a pregnant woman went to cut down a banana tree. In the banana tree a bird had built its nest. She found eggs in the nest, and destroyed them. And the bird up in the air asked her:

"You have killed my children, haven't you?
You will cry from sunrise to sunset."

The woman cut down her banana and went home. Now, the bird always went to the woman's place. One day, it flew into the house and saw where the woman had placed the banana. It also saw the woman lying near the store. It therefore noticed that the woman was having labour pains. So it flew away and called other birds. They all came and surrounded the place.

The woman had spread out some millet to dry because she had realised that she was soon going to have a baby. Now when the bird noticed that woman was in great labour pain, for it could see her, it went into the house and poured down all the water there was in the house.

When the woman finally gave birth, there was no water, there was no water because the bird had poured—what? the water.

The question was then asked "who will fetch the water from the river?" A lady whose name was Waigoinĩ ran and got hold of a gourd. She ran and the bird took off with her, it had tied decorative feathers and foot bells on its legs. When the woman started filling the gourd, the bird scratched her, singing:

You, woman come down stream this river and
see for yourself.
You, woman come down stream and
see for yourself.
A dancing bird
A wandering bird which swims in
this pool and in this other one
When I get to this side and to the other side
Ciri, the diviner, ciri it has come home
(implying the new born child).

Now, it would scratch the woman like that (the story teller demonstrates). The woman was unable to draw the water, she just stood there watching. And at home water is still being awaited. A young girl ran down and shouted "Waigoinĩ to what place did you go for this water (implying the undue delay)?"

The bird sang:

You girl, calling Waigoinĩ come down stream this
river and see for yourself.
A dancing bird.
A wandering bird that swims in this pool and in this other one.
When I get to this side and to the other side
Ciri, the diviner, Ciri it has come home.

It then scratched the girl. The girl was unable to draw the water, now the next girl who came said, "Bring this gourd so that I may draw water, it has taken you such a long time to fetch this water!"

The bird sang:

And you, girl drawing water, come down stream
this river and see for yourself.
A dancing bird.
A wandering bird that swims in this pool and in
this other one.
When I get to this side and to the other side,
Ciri, the diviner,
Ciri, it has come home.

It then scratched the girl like that and she was unable to draw the water. She too just stood there. Then there came another woman who called, "Waigoini! What place did you go to fetch this water from?"

You, woman calling Waigoini, come down stream
this river.
And see for yourself
A dancing bird
A wandering bird that swims in this pool and in
this other one.
When I get to this side and to the other side
Ciri, the diviner, Ciri it has come home.

Now, the bird would scratch this woman until the gourd could not be filled. Now, everybody at home kept asking, what happened to this water? You see these people had gone to fetch water for washing a newborn baby, because in those early days, the baby was washed immediately after birth. A small girl went down and the bird said:

You! small girl calling Waigoini, come down
stream this river and see for yourself.
A dancing bird
A wandering bird that swims in this pool and in
this other one.
When I get to this side and to this other side,
Ciri, the diviner, Ciri it has come, home.

The girl too started watching that bird. Watching it because it had tied beautiful feathers and foot bells on its legs. This is the bird that is scratching each person.

The woman at home (the new mother) said, "I shall no longer wait for that water!" She laid down her baby to go and get what?—water. To go and get water. "My baby shall not stay here unwashed let me get the water".

Now, when the bird saw the woman it flew up. The woman then drew water. She went up with the water—this woman who had destroyed the eggs of this bird. Now the birds at home and singing bird which had also flown there by the time the woman got home had eaten the baby and also the millet in the home. The small birds then flew away. Now the woman began weeping. The bird told her:

"*Do not weep, that is how you killed my children,*
this time it is me who killed your child."

And the small bird flew away. The woman was left without a child just like the small bird had been left without any.

The story ends there

APPENDIX 1B

THE OGRE AND THE GIRL

By Wangari

The men organised a dance—a very big *Kĩbata*. There came one man who was extremely handsome. Now when *Kĩbata* was over, the girls followed the man and it was an *Irimũ*. They went on. One girl saw that the man had an extra mouth and she said.

"I was told to go and cut firewood and fetch water." She went back. All of them turned back one by one—one by one. Only one was left. She went all the way and got married to him and stayed. Her sister thought it was good for her to go and visit this one. She started going when she was pregnant. She was told. "On your way if you find a big *Mũgumo* tree, even if it rains, don't stand under it".

She went and went. When she reached where the *Mũgumo* was, it started raining very heavily. She climbed up the tree. She went to the very top of the tree and stayed there. Now the *Marimũ* came one by one dropping corpses there. The son of her sister started to move about restlessly and said.

"Father, up there is a *thambo*" (a small ant that builds in trees).

"Oh sit down."

The boy wouldn't hear of it. He passed where the father was not. He climbed up the tree and said to the woman "give me a finger" she gave him. He said "give me another" she gave him. He ate all the fingers and all the toes and so she fell from the tree. Now the *marimũ* greedily ate her up. The boy said that the two children which were taken from her womb were his. He went and said to the mother;

"Cook for me the rats".

Now this woman had been told that her sister was coming. She thought and looked and saw that these two were children and they were boys—how many? two. She put them in a pot. In the morning when the dawn broke she said.

"If I had my own husband he would slaughter for me a goat".

It was slaughtered. The fat, when it was cold she put in the pot. When that meat was finished she said exactly the same thing. A goat was slaughtered. The two children grew big. They could no longer fit in a pot so she covered one side of a beehive and put them in. Another goat was slaughtered. Then she said;

If I had my husband he'd make for me a spear and a knife—Two knives and two spears because robbers come here.

She got them.

She used to bring out these children everyday and ask them:?

If thieves came here what would you do?

They would rush and show her what they would do with those knives and spears. Then they would be brought back to the house and hidden again. In the evening when the *Irimũ* came back, the boy would ask why there were so many steps. His mother would answer:

All these little footsteps and mine and your fathers, aren't they very many? Going and coming?

The twins would cut the trees—They would put them together and the woman would say:

If you would be able to beat thieves—let me see you carry this load.

The two boys would do it.

One time, when they were big men, they built an *Ikũmbĩ* (store) of trunks of trees. A lot of them put on top of each other. Now one day the *Irimũ* and the boy were told by the woman.

You say you are brave, get between these trunks and see if you can run away with them.

They got in. They tried to move and could not. At this time, the two boys came out and cut them into pieces and they died. Now because there were cows and goats, they took them and together their mother and went back to where the girl had come from.

The story ends there.

APPENDIX 1C

THE GIRL AND THE OGRE

By Fidelis Wanjirũ

Once a woman gave birth to two very beautiful girls. One girl was wooed by a young man and that young man was an ogre. Now, that girl was informed that the man with whom she was in love was a cannibal.

The girl said,

That one, even if he is a cannibal I will go to his place.

So the girl went away with the young man. The other girl was married to a good person.

You know, long ago people used to say that an ogre is like a person and that it can be beautiful like a person. Now, the girl went and gave birth to one child.

The girl who had married a person said,

Since my sister got married I must seek to find out where she got married.

Her husband told her,

Do not go to that place since you heard that her husband is not a good person, do not go to that place.

She said,

Since she is my sister I must go.

She prepared gruel. She set off. When she went she found that the boy and his father were inseparable. And the woman had decided that she would never eat their meat. So with whom was he eating? With that son of his, Mangamanga.

Now, when the girl prepared gruel she went and found her sister. Now, the ogre and his son have gone to a place far away.

Her sister told her.

Now that you have come where will you spend the night and here you will be eaten? Put down those loads and go, go, go, go and now that the rain is about to fall when you come to the Mũgumo tree do not shelter yourself there for the man passes through there.

Now when the woman left there was a terrible wind which blew, it blew, it blew until the woman went to the Mũgumo tree.

Then the ogre came through that place. The child, because it was restless said:

Father up there, there is *Thambo* (a black insect nest)

He was told,

There 'sn't

He told him again,

Father! there is a Thambo.

The father looked and saw there was something. He threw his blade and cut off branches. The woman fell to the ground. Does she have breath? Isn't she pregnant? Now that she was pregnant, now these people went home.

And at home the sister is still saying,

With this rain, my sister had not reached anywhere.

These people, when they went home did they not split the woman open and get two children, two boys? The boy told his mother that,

These are my rats. Let me eat them tomorrow.

The woman took the children and placed them where? In a pot. She placed them in a pot so as to spend time bringing them up. She caught how many rats? Two. The boy, when he demanded his meat he was given the rats. He said,

Ai! mine did not look like this.

He was told by the mother, you are restless. Eat what you are given.

The children were brought up by the woman because she realised that it was her sister who was killed.

Now, when the boy and the father are gone these children are brought out, they would play, they would play. Now when the ogre's son comes he would say,

Father are all these footprints our own?

His mother would tell him,

You are a rattler my son!

Now your footprint and my footprint and your father's

footprint don't they become many?

He would be told that, then he would be told that again. And because she did not eat the meat eaten by the ogres she said,

Me! if I had my husband he would forge for me a sword.

It was made for her. She said,

Me! if I had my husband he would slaughter a bull for me. It was slaughtered. Now, when the husband and the son were gone she gave the things to the two boys. One got the spear and the other got the sword.

Another evening she said,

Me! if I had my husband he would get me some pegs.

And these pegs are for fixing which ogre? One day the ogre came. The woman told him,

You cannot peg me down because I can free myself but

I can peg you down to the ground.

Does the man not lie. The woman called her people. Let him be pierced. When his son is pierced the man says,

MangaManga you keep telling me.

My story ends

APPENDIX 1D

THE DAUGHTER OF KARARU

By Wambūi wa Wambūgū

A long, long time ago, there was a very serious drought. There was no rain not even a little. The goats were hungry, the cattle were hungry and the people were hungry.

A diviner was visited to give a diagnosis. Goats were sacrificed but without any success. It was said that the daughter of Kararū had to be swallowed by the earth in the middle of a field in order to save the community.

Now, all the clans including Kararū's clan were invited to a meeting. It turned out that since she was the most beautiful girl in the whole nation she was the one to be sacrificed. The whole nation paid dowry to Kararū's clan.

Now, when dowry was paid, each of her fathers, junior ones and senior ones, were each given whatever they asked for. Now, the time came to go to the field. The girl stood in the middle of the field and sang as follows:

And my own mother do you say that I should get finished?
My own father do you say that I should get finished?
My junior mother do you say that I should get finished?
My junior father do you say that I should get finished?
Kararū's daughter, I am condemned by fate.
The rains will fall and I will get finished?

She started to sink into the ground. She sang again:

My uncle do you agree that I should get finished?
My senior father do you agree I should get finished?
You girls do you agree I should get finished?
Me, the rains will come and I will get finished?

At that point, her senior father rushed there and brought her to the side of the field. He was asked what he needed. He said what he wanted and it was given. The girl was taken back to the centre of the field. She sang again:

My uncle do you say that I should get finished?
My grandfather do you say that I should get finished?
You small girls do you say that I should get finished?
My senior father do you say that I should get finished?
My junior father do you say that I should get finished?
Kararū's daughter, I am condemned by fate.
The rains will fall and I will get finished?

Her legs sunk up to the calves. She sang again:

My aunt do you say that I should get finished?
My uncle do you say that I should get finished?
Kararū's daughter, I am condemned by fate.
The rains will fall and I will get finished.

She sunk again. She sang:

My own brother (of same mother) *do you say that I should get finished?*
My brother (of a different mother) *do you say that I should get finished?*
My brothers and sisters (community) *do you say that I should get finished?*
Kararū's daughter, I am condemned by fate
The rains will fall and I will get finished.

She sunk up to the knees. At that point, her people would say give us this and that. It would be given to them. All these things were given to persuade them to let her get sacrificed.

As she sang and as she sunk, she would mention people one after the other saying:

My senior mother do you say that I should get finished?
My junior mother do you say that I should get finished?
My senior mother do you say that I should get finished?
My junior mother do say that I should get finished?
Kararũ's daughter, I am condemned by fate
The rains will come and I will get finished.

Now, she sank up to the waist. She would mention each of her people by names as follows:

My aunt do you say that I should get finished?
And, our grandmother do you say that I should get finished?
My junior mother do you say that I should get finished?
My own father do you say that I should get finished?
Kararũ's daughter, I am condemned by fate.
The rains will fall and I will get finished.

Her uncle would say he too needed this or that thing. The nation would get it and give to whoever was asking for anything. Everybody in her clan was given what he needed. She then would sing again;

My own father do you say that I should get finished?
My dear community do you say that I should get finished?
My junior mother do you say that I should get finished?
Kararũ's daughter I am condemned by fate
The rains will come and I will get finished.

She sank up to the breasts. She sang again:

My dear community do you say that I should get finished?
And, my own mother do you say that I should get finished?
Kararũ's daughter, I am condemned by fate.
The rains will fall and I will get finished.

At this point, her people, i.e. her mothers and her uncles, her grandmothe and her junior mothers and senior fathers are all firmly held by people, becaus they wanted to get her out. They were all crying and wanted to pull her ou She sank up to the neck. All the people began to run away because the cloud were very heavy with rain. People began running away and Kararũ's daughte started singing:

Our community do you say that I should get finished?
And my own father do you say that I should get finished?
Kararũ's daughter, I am condemned by fate
The rains will fall and I will get finished.

Now she got swallowed by the earth and was covered. Then the rain fell, i fell, and the people and the goats and the cattle all got enough to eat becaus Kararũ's daughter was swallowed by the earth at the centre of the field. It ha been divined that she should be swallowed by the earth so that the rain coul fall. And the place at which she got swallowed by the earth became an eve lasting lake.

The story ends there.

APPENDIX 1E

THE STORY OF WANJIRU

By Nyokabi wa Maithori

Long ago there was famine in Gikũyũ land. This famine killed cows and goat Only human beings remained and even them, it could be seen that they we not going to live much longer. Now the people asked themselves "What sha we do?" It was decided that the most beautiful girl, one called Wanjirũ, shou be sacrificed to God so that the rain could fall.

She was brought to a place where there was a very big river, she sang;

Rain fall and make this ridge green
Make this ridge green
My father said I should be lost I should be lost
My mother said I should be lost I should be lost
Rain fall and make this ridge green
Make this ridge green

She went down up to the knee, she sang;

Rain fall and make this ridge green
Make this ridge green
My father said I should be lost I should be lost
Rain fall and make this ridge green
Make this ridge green

The water reached her waist, she sang;

Rain fall and make this ridge green
Make this ridge green
My father said I should be lost I should be lost
My mother said I should be lost I should be lost
Rain fall and make this ridge green
Make this ridge green

The water reached her neck, she sang;

Rain fall and make this ridge green
Make this ridge green
My father said I should be lost I should be lost
My mother said I should be lost I should be lost
Rain fall and make this ridge green
Make this ridge green

Her head went in the water. Very heavy rains fell on this land. The grass grew and a lot of food as well and the people began to feel better. Now, when Wanjirũ went she found her people who had died before her. These people had a lot of cows and goats. Now they asked her what she would like. She said she wanted cows and goats. She was given many goats and cows and then she was told to lie down in a place. When she woke up she found that she had returned back to her people. She woke up at a place where there was a river and she had her cows and goats. Now when her people saw her they rejoiced greatly.

The story ends there.

APPENDIX 1F

MŨCŨNGW'A

(A Dance for men and women)

By W. Kabuagara

Ĩyĩ hũĩ kũrĩra	Oh the weeping
Ndariganĩire kĩrĩrĩ	I was forgotten in the girl's bed
Mũthii mũrũ wa Ngoro	Mũthii son of Ngoro
Kĩrĩma kĩa Mũitĩrĩri	Mũitĩrĩri's mountain
Umae hae haiya	*Umae hae haiya*
Ĩ hũũĩ umae hae haiya × 2	*Ĩ hũũĩ umae hae haiya* × 2
Nĩ nĩĩ ngwenjwo ngĩkuhaagwo	I am being shaven roughly
Taarĩ rwenji rũkũrega	As if the lazor is resisting the shaving
Ĩ hũĩ umae hae haiya	*Ĩ hũĩ umae hae haiya*
Ĩyĩ hũũĩ kũrĩra	Oh the weeping
Gwitũ Mbũi ndiũmbanaga	In our Ambũi clan, I am not a lady killer
Magiri marĩ kũnene	
Na ndicukaga ciũmbani	You, the masses in far off places
Umae hae haiya	And I do not backbite lady killers
Na ndicukaga ciũmbani	*Umae hae haiya*
Ĩyĩ haĩ kũrĩra	And I do not backbite lady killers
Mami witũ njugĩrĩria	Oh the weeping
Mami witũ njugĩrĩria	Our mother cheer me × 2
Ndaaga gũkua ngũrĩmĩre	If I do not die I will earn for you
Umae hae haiya	*Umae hae haiya*
Ĩ hũĩ umae	*Ĩ hũũĩ umae*
Hae haiya	*Hae haiya*
Ĩyĩ hae kũrĩra	Oh the weeping
Ndaariganĩire kĩrĩrĩ	I was forgotten in a girls' bed
Kĩrĩa gĩathĩrwo nĩ Mbũi	The one occupied by one of Ambũi clan
Maitũ akiuga nĩ njokerwo	
Ĩ hae umae hae haiya	Mother said I should be fetched
Maitũ akiuga nĩ njookerwo	*Ĩ hae umae hae haiya*
Baba akiuga ndiicookerwo	Mother said I should be fetched
Mũndũ mũka nĩ kĩrimũ	Father said I should not be fetched
Nĩ egũcookia ngarĩ mũciĩ	A woman is a fool
Nĩ egũcookia ngarĩ mũciĩ	She wants to bring the leopard back home × 2
Na oĩ yaninire mbũrĩ	While she knows it finished goats × 2
Na oĩ yaninire mbũrĩ	Which were enough for a wife × 2
Ciarĩ cia mũka mũgima	The dowry remains half paid
Ciarĩ cia mũka mũgima	Chorus
Ũthoni ũtũire gĩtingia	*Ĩ hae ume*
Ĩ hae umae	*hae haiya*
(chorus)	*Ĩ hũũĩ umae hae haiya*
Hae haiya	Which were enough for a wife
Ĩ hũũĩ umae hae haiya	The dowry remains half paid
Ciarĩ cia mũka mũgima	*Umae*
Ũthoni ũtũire gĩtingia	*Hae haiya*
Umae	
Hae haiya	

APPENDIX 1G

NJŪKIA

Kaī ūrīithagia kū
Kaī ūrīithagia kū mūini mwega?
Ch. Haiya kaī ūrīithagia kū-ī
tondū ūtarī rūkarara?
Ndīithagia gītuamba, wa maitū
ndīithagia gītuamba
Ch. Haiya ndīithagia gītuamba-ī
kīa mīkengeria mītheri
Reke tūriganie-ī Gaceeri Waihūgū
Ch. Haiya reke tūriganie-ī
mbūrī irīganagia riika
Haiya-ī rūgano wa maitū rūūrū
nī rūgano
Ch. Haiya rūūrū nī rūgano-ī
nīrūkaganīrwo andū aya
Mūthiaga naū, Wamacaria?
Mūthiaga naū?
Ch. Haiya mūthiaga naū-ī
tondū ūtoonaga kīgira
Nīngūkūūria kīūria haiya-ī
nīngūkūūria kīūria
Ch. Haiya nīngūkūūria kīūria-ī
nyūkwa mathiaga naū?

Where do you herd your animals good dancer?
Ch. Where do you herd your animals since you have no scratch?
I herd them in small thickets, my brother. I herd them in thickets
Ch. I herd them in a thicket of Mīkengeria only.
Let us be next to each other Gaceeri, daughter of Waihūgū
Ch. Let us be next to each other Goats make agemates be together
My brother this is a story
Ch. This is a story. It will be told to these people
With whom do you go son of Macaria
With whom do you go?
Ch. With whom do you go since you never get a millet head.
I will ask you a question, I will ask you a question.
Ch. I will ask you a question, With whom does your mother go?

APPENDIX 1H

KIBAATA DANCE-SONG

Ine na nīwe
Githī nowe wine
Mūndū wa ndūgū
Na ūteti no waku
Kinyaga oro ūguo
Na riitho no riine
Īna nyarūme
Na nyarūme wakūūria ma kenda
Akinyaga oro ūguo
Na mūrū wa ithe
Na mūgendi wa ithe
Kinyaga oro ūguo ūgīthiī
na ūgīcooka

See, it is him
Is it only you who is seeing
A person of my relations
And the wisdom is yours.
You always do step like that
And the eye is focused on you
And the uncles
And the uncle to ask him for the nines.
He steps just like that
And his father's brothers
And his brother
Do always step like that when you go and when you return.

APPENDIX 1I

NDUUMO DANCE-SONG by Wacucu wa Njoroge

A. *Ĩ haĩ ndooka gũũkũ*
Warũgũrũ ngũinio nũũ-ĩ
Ngũinio nũũ-ĩ
Nyina wa Kabogoro
Ngũinio nũũ-ĩ
Ngũinio nũũ-ĩ
haiya
Ĩ nyakĩnyua ya Rũgũrũ
haĩ hũĩ
Ngũinio nũũ-ĩ
Wangarĩ wa Kĩbiro
Niũranyona-ĩ
ha

B. *Wagĩcikũ we wagwitũ*
Worire-ĩ
Tworire-ĩ
nĩ hau
We worire
We worire
Ũgũthiĩ rũgũrũ-ĩ !
We mũndũ wa nyũmba itũ-ĩ
haiya
Na Wangarĩ wa Kĩbiro
Mũini mwega-ĩ
arirĩriri
Mũini mwega-ĩ

C. *Ĩini mũiru wakwa*
Niĩ njetereire ũruge-ĩ
Ũruge-ĩ tũkĩrĩe-ĩ
Gĩcikũ-ĩ
Gĩcikũ matarĩ ũkarĩ-ĩ
arirĩriri
Ĩ waigua akĩnjĩĩra
Mũithiegeni nĩorire-ĩ
Agĩthiĩ agĩtiga Gĩcikũ-ĩ
agĩtiga Gĩciku-ĩ!
haiya

A. When I come here
Warũgũrũ who will be my partner
Who will be my partner
Mother of Kabogoro
Who will be my partner?
Who will be my partner
You old ladies of Rũgũrũ
Who will be my partner
Wangarĩ wife of Kĩbiro

B. Do you see me?
You! of Agacikũ clan from my place
Watch for yourself
Watch for yourself
You watch for yourself
You watch for yourself
As you travel westwards
You member of our big family
And Wangarĩ wife of Kĩbiro
She is a good dancer
arirĩriri.
A good dancer

C. Yes my co-wife
I will wait for you to cook
You cook since we came to Agacikũ clan
Agacikũ are not misers
arirĩriri-ri.
Hear her tell me,
That the member of Aithiegeni clan disappeared
She went and left the member of Agacikũ clan

APPENDIX 1J

MŨTHŨNGŨŨCI

For old Men and Women

By Wanjirũ Kabũagara

Ngũina nooyũ mwega	I will dance with this one!
Nooyũ mwega	This beautiful one
Wa Mũkombi	My fellow dancer
Mwene akĩonaga	With her husband watching!
Ĩhaĩ-ihũĩ—(chorus)	Ĩ haĩ hũĩ
Ngũina nooyũ nooyũ	I will dance with this one,
Wa andũ a Njeri	This very one
Nooyũ nooyũ wa karimũ	Me of Aceera clan
Karĩ mũciĩ ĩ hũĩ	This very one of a fool
Ĩĩ haĩ hũĩ—(chorus)	who is at home.
Ĩ gwitũ nĩ kũnene	Our place is far off × 2
Gwitũ nĩ kũnene	You of Angũi clan
Wa andũ a Ngũĩ	By the time I get there, it is night.
Ĩ ngĩgakinya kwanatuka	By the time I get there it is night
Ĩĩ haĩ hũĩ—(chorus)	You claim to be a dancer × 2
Ĩ ngĩgakinya kwanatuka	People of Aceera clan
Ĩĩ hũĩ	Can get a string out of a stone
Iyĩ haĩ hũĩ	Can you get a string from a stone
Ugaga ũrĩ mũini	I will dance with this respectable
Ugaga ũrĩ mũini	lady × 2
Andũ A njeeri, wonũra	Her husband married her while
Ihiga rũrigi	seeing the beauty
Ĩĩ hũĩ hũĩ—(chorus)	You know I am a good dancer × 2
Ĩ wonũra ihiga rũrigi ĩ hũĩ	The people of Aceera clan
Ngũina na ngatha ĩno	Mũiri tree cannot produce strings
Ngũina na ngatha ĩno	Mũiri cannot produce strings
Mwene agũrire	You dance with the gunny one × 2
akĩonaga ĩ hũĩ	Son of Mũngũiyũ
Ĩ haĩ hũĩ ũmenye ndĩ o mũini	You see her clean × 2
Ũmenye ndĩ o mũini	Good dancer, she sleeps on a sack
Andũ a Njeeri	She sleeps on a sack
Mũiri ndũngĩũnũrwo ndigi	Lady killers you are clever × 2
Ĩ haĩ	People of Aceera clan
Ĩ haĩ hũĩ—(chorus)	My friend when were you beckoned
Ĩ mũiri ndũngĩũnũrwo ndigi	without my notice?

Ĩ mwĩtirwo rĩ na ndĩmenye ĩ hũĩ	When were you beckoned without my notice? Ĩ hũĩ
Mwĩtirwo na mbutu	We were signalled with eye lashes × 2
Twĩtirwo na mbutu	My friend
Ĩ mũndũ ũyũ	With eye-lashes while you waited to be touched.
Na mbutu-ĩ nawe wetereire	While you (plural) waited to be touched
ũkunywo ĩ hũĩ	Our home is far off × 2
Ĩ haĩ hũĩ—(chorus)	People of Anjikũ clan
Ĩ mwetereire mũrĩkunywo ĩ hũĩ	By the time I get home it will be late × 2
Gwitũ nĩ kũnene	I will go by night × 2
Gwitũ nĩ kũnene	People of Aceera clan
Andũ Anjikũ	One's home is never too far
Ĩ ngĩgakinya nĩ gũtuku ĩ hũĩ	Ĩ hũĩ
Ĩ ngĩgakinya kwanatuka	One's home is never too far
I hũĩ—(chorus)	
Nĩ ngũthiĩ no ũtukũ	
Nĩ ngũthiĩ no ũtukũ-ĩ	
Andũ Anjeeri	
Kwa mwene gũtiraihaga	
Ĩ hũĩ	
Ĩ kwa mwene gũtiraihaga	
Ĩ hũĩ—(chorus)	

APPENDIX 1X

GĨTIIRO

By Wacũcũ wa Njoroge na Sarah Wambũi

(A Dance for old Women)

1. *Ndeerirwo ũrĩ gĩaku-ĩ*
   Ndiũĩ nĩa-ĩ
   Guucio na ngathĩ-ĩ
   na kamba na igũrũ
2. *Nyakĩnyua gwĩka wega-ĩ*
   njigue wega-ĩ
   Guucio na ngathĩ
   na kamba na igũrũ
3. *Thĩgĩrĩria-ĩ hũĩ rĩu*
   Wĩnyitie-ĩ
   Guucio na ngathĩ na
   kamba na igũrũ
4. *Ĩ hũĩ Gĩcikũ*
   Njigue wega-ĩ
   Guucio na ngathĩ na
   kamba na igũrũ
5. *Ĩ thiathia rĩmwe*
   Nĩ ngũĩnũka
   Guucio na ngathĩ
   na kamba na irũgũ
6. *Ĩĩ niĩ ngũigua*
   Ta ngũĩnũka-ĩ
   Guucio na ngathĩ na
   kamba na igũrũ
7. *Ĩ hũĩ ndahũragĩrwo*
   kũmenya-ĩ
   Guucio na ngathĩ na
   kamba na igũrũ
8. *Ĩ hũĩ ĩiya*
   Ngũgĩĩka atĩa?
   Guucio na ngathĩ na
   kamba na igũrũ
9. *Ĩ mwene mũciĩ Njikũ*
   Ngĩigue wega-ĩ
   Guucio na ngathĩ na
   kamba na igũrũ
10. *Na rũmena*
    Njikũ ndirĩ
    Guucio na ngathĩ
    na kamba na igũrũ

1. I was told you have your own
   I cannot remember by which
   people Be pulled upwards with
   a ladder and a rope
2. Nyakĩnyua do well
   That I may feel well
   Be pulled upwards with
   a ladder and a rope
3. Now do attempt
   Gird your loins
   Be pulled upwards with
   a ladder and a rope
4. You Gĩcikũ (clan)
   That I may feel well
   Be pulled upwards with
   a ladder and a rope
5. Move once
   I am to go home
   Be pulled upwards with
   a ladder and a rope
6. I feel like,
   going home
   Be pulled upwards with
   a ladder and a rope.
7. I was being beaten
   for knowing
   Be pulled upwards with
   a ladder and a rope
8. Oh dear
   What can I do?
   Be pulled upwards with
   a ladder and a rope
9. The home owner Njikũ (clan)
   That I may feel well
   Be pulled upwards with
   a ladder and a rope
10. And hatred
    I, Njikũ (clan) have none
    Be pulled upwards with
    a ladder and a rope

APPENDIX 1L

GIKUYU PROVERBS (THIMO)

1. *Mūrĩa na gatĩ ndeeciragia mūrĩa na kaara nĩ ekūhĩa.*
   One who uses a spoon does not realise that the one who uses fingers gets burned.
2. *Kwa mūhoro gwakuire ngagūro.*
   Mũhoro's home perished due to meanness.
3. *Ciakorire Wacũ mūgūnda.*
   Meat found Wacũ in the garden.
4. *Tiniĩ Gĩtaũ.*
   I am not Gĩtaũ (the one who reveals secrets).
5. *Ng'aragu ndĩhooyagwo ũhoro.*
   You do not seek information from a hungry man.
6. *Rūrĩ itara rũthekaga rwĩ riiko.*
   The faggot in the *itara* (drying rack) laughs at the one in the fire.
7. *Mūremwo nĩ ndũũgo oigaga nja ĩrĩ mahiga.*
   One who cannot jump claims that the field is stony.
8. *Ngwacĩ ya mwana weene nooyo ĩhoragia mwaki.*
   The sweet potato belonging to another person's child is the only one that puts out the fire.
9. *Igego rĩthekagia itimũ.*
   The tooth laughs at the sight of a spear.
10. *Mũthiĩrwo ũgo-inĩ no ũrĩa akeerwo.*!
    One who sends a representative to the diviner must accept any verdict.
11. *Mwĩĩri etuaga nyoko.*
    A self-evaluator places himself highest.
12. *Mũcĩĩ ũĩo nĩ karaari.*
    The quality of a home is only known by its resident.
13. *Ũtathiaga eciiragia no nyina ũrugaga wega.*
    One who never travels thinks it is only his mother who is a good cook.
14. *Mūrĩo nĩ wĩrĩagĩra*
    Sweetness takes its toll.
15. *Mwarĩ mwega ahĩtũkagĩra thoome wa ngĩa.*
    A beautiful girl passes by the poor man's home.
16. *Mūrĩo uninaga magego.*
    Sweetness finishes the teeth.
17. *Mūmbi arugaga na ngĩo*
    The potter may use the pieces of a pot for her cooking.
18. *Gũtirĩ mwenji wĩenjaga.*
    No barber shaves himself.
19. *Warũgaga nĩ atobokaga.*
    The one who used to jump across the stream may find himself wading through.
20. *Gũtirĩ gũkũra na kũrara keerĩ.*
    There is no difference between growing old and living.
21. *Nĩ cĩĩthambaga na itirue.*
    The prospective initiates may take the initiation bath yet fail to go through the initiation.
22. *Gũtirĩ ĩrumaga imera ĩgĩrĩ.*
    No champion bull dominates two seasons.
23. *Kaihũ gacangacangi gatigaga kwao gũgĩthĩnjwo.*
    The restless mongoose misses the slaughtering ceremony in his home.
24. *Mũkoroki atharaga maaĩ.*
    The greedy man grabs out for water.

25. *Wa kĩrimũ wĩtirimagia na mũũgĩ.*
A fool's staff is used by the wise man to support his own walk.
26. *Ciira wa kirimũ ũtũũraga kĩhaaro.*
A fools litigation lasts forever on the judgement arena.
27. *Gũthekio ti kwendwo*
To be smiled at is not to be loved.
28. *Ng'enda thĩ ndĩagaga mũtegi.*
No living thing is too clever to avoid trapping.
29. *Ũũgĩ mũnene ũtemaga mũnoori.*
Too much sharpness cuts the sharpener.
30. *Wakana mũno wetuunya nyama.*
Too much fire denies itself the meat.
31. *Yũmbũkaga na kĩria ĩmereetie.*
A bird flies off with only what it has swallowed.
32. *Njamba ĩrũndagwo nĩ mũcakwe.*
The warrior may be tripped by a maize cob.
33. *Yũũĩ mũkami ndĩũĩ mũrĩithi.*
The cow knows the man who milks it not the herdsman.
34. *Mĩcingũ ĩĩrĩ yunaga hiti kũgũrũ.*
Two different sweet smells from different directions broke the hyena's legs.
35. *Kũrĩa mbere ti gũkoroka.*
To eat first is not to be greedy.
36. *Mwambĩrĩrio mũũru no wa itimũ.*
The only bad starting is where one is speared.
37. *Thuutha mwega no wa ndũrũme.*
The only good rearside is that of a ram.
38. *Thuutha wa arũme nduoyagwo ruoya.*
Where men have been one cannot pick a good feather.
39. *Gũthekererwo ti kũrĩrĩrwo.*
To be laughed at is not to be mourned.
40. *Kĩhooto kiunaga ũta mũgeete.*
Good reasoning breaks a strung bow.
41. *Ita ritarĩ ndundu rĩhũragwo na njũgũma ĩmwe.*
A disunited battalion gets beaten with one club.
42. *Mũũgĩ nĩ mũtaare.*
He is clever who has listened to advice.
43. *Keereragĩra rũkũinĩ na gakaaya kũigana.*
The worm nurtures itself in dry wood until it matures.
44. *Gũtirĩ ngware nini mahuria-inĩ.*
There is no small partridge when it comes to scrambling for food.
45. *Ithaga rĩene nĩ mũnogia ngingo.*
Another person's ornament tires the neck.
46. *Mũharwo nĩwe ũthingataga gĩthaka.*
One with diarrhoea keeps by the bush.
47. *Hũthũ nĩyo ĩĩyũĩ.*
The weak one knows itself.
48. *Nda yumaga mũici na mũrogi.*
From the womb come the thief and the witch.
49. *Thiia ĩthũire mumianĩriri.*
The antelope detests the one who announces its whereabouts more than the one who sees it.
50. *Hiti ndĩrĩaga mwana.*
A hyena does not eat its young one.
51. *Thenge ngũrũ ndĩathimũraga tũhũ.*
An old he goat does not sneeze for nothing.
52. *Mũgathĩ wa kuona ũteaga wa mwene.*
A necklace you find on the wayside can make you lose your own.

APPENDIX 1M

GIKUYU RIDDLES (NDAI)

1. *Njoroge bundi wa mbaũ.* Njoroge the carpenter.
   a beetle.
2. *Gwata ũgwatĩrĩirie.* Hold and keep holding.!
   Clothes on the human body.
3. *Gwata naniĩ ngwate.* You hold and I hold.
   Cutting of meat into pieces.
4. *Ci na ci.* Ci and ci. (Quiet noise made by needle passing through cloth).
   A needle.
5. *Koima Ikamba keitĩĩte.* It came from Kambaland with a tie.
   The crow.
6. *Mwena ũmwe wa kanya nĩ mwerũ.* One side of the gourd is white.
   Chicken droppings.
7. *Hu.* Hu! (A sound denoting tiredness).
   A pregnant mother.
8. *Ndakuona ndakũona mara.* When I look at you I see you through to the intestines.
   Granary.
9. *Ũũi tũũrĩa-ĩ.* Oh! those little things over there!
   Ripe bananas.

   Ũũi tũngĩ-ĩ (Water in a cave.)
10. *Ndaathiĩ na ũtanjĩĩra hurũka.* I have travelled with one who never tells me to rest.
    My shadow.
11. *Ndathiũrũrũka mũtitũ na kibikibi nduune.* I have gone round the forest with a red motorcycle.
    Rainbow.
12. *Aspro mũtĩ igũrũ.* Aspro up a tree.
    Bird droppings.
13. *Cunguru cema.* Cunguru cema.
    A fly's heart.
14. *Kiririri mbaka kindiri.* Kiririri up to kindiri.
    A motorcycle.
15. *Gathiĩ kahũtiĩ kainũka kahũniĩ.* It went hungry and came back full.
    The small bag for greens (vegetables).
16. *Ndathiĩ mũtitũ ndoimĩra na tũthanju twĩrĩ.* I get into the forest and come out with two sticks.
    Twin kids.
17. *Gĩtarũrũ rũriĩ.* A winnowing tray in the plain.
    An elephant's foot print.
18. *Ndĩ nyũmba yakwa ĩtarĩ mũrango kana ndirica.* I have a house without a door or a window.
    An egg.
19. *Aarĩa matũcũthĩrĩirie tũkũmahe kĩ?* Those peeping at us, what shall we give them
    Trusses of the roof of a house.
20. *Kĩniĩ gĩtaita.* It is upside down but does not leak.
    A cows udder.

21. *Ciarora igūrū ta igūkūya.* They face up as if they are about to lead a song.
    The horns of cattle.
22. *Mwena ūyū no ku ku na ūyū ūngī no ku ku.* There is a swing this side and a swing the other side too.
    A bull's hump.
23. *Mwena ūyū no hiū na ūrīa ūngī no hiū.* You hear *hiū* on this side and *hiū* on the other.
    Tails of cattle.
24. *Ndīna mūndū ūtindaga agīīthekia.* I know a person who is always laughing by himself.
    A maize cob that has been attacked by birds.
25. *Ndīna mūndū wakwa ūikaraga gatagatī ka hiū igīrī na ndatemagwo.* I have a person who stays between two swords but never gets cut.
    The tongue.
26. *Ndatema mūtī ndatiga ūgītoga.* I cut a tree and left it smoking.
    Human excreta.
27. *Mucīī wakwa wa atumia atheri.* I have a home where only women dwell.
    A banana plantation.
28. *Nyūmba yakwa ya gītugī kīmwe.* My house has only one pole.
    The mushroom.
29. *Kurukuru ndūmaini.* I hear a noise among the arrow roots.
    A bird.
30. *Ndaikia mbugi manjarara.* I have thrown a bell to far off places.
    The eyes.
31. *Ndathīī ūū, ndathīī ūū.* I have trodden a zigzag path.
    Trapper's paths.
32. *Cīī ngurunga cīī maitho igana.* Those things in the cave have one hundred eyes.
    Honey combs.
33. *Gera haaha na nīī haaha tūkoohe cūūguo nguo.* Pass through here and I pass through so that we may tie grandma's clothes.
    Granary makers.
34. *Njogu ī gūtū kūmwe.* An elephant with one ear.
    A cup.

APPENDIX 2A

NGUGI WA THIONG'O: WRITER IN TROUBLE

The Weekly Review, January 9, 1978

EAST AFRICA

Ngugi wa Thiong'o: Writer in trouble

IT HAD been a year of triumph for Ngugi wa Thiong'o, East Africa's foremost novelist and head of the literature department at the University of Nairobi. 1977 was the year Ngugi brought out, among much critical acclaim, his latest and most serious literary work, *Petals of Blood*, a novel that had taken Ngugi more than five years to write and which distilled not only his thoughts about literature but also his philosophy on life (see the interview on page 11). The novel, launched by no less a personality than the minister of finance, Mr. Mwai Kibaki, was an instant success, with the bookshops in Nairobi finding it difficult to keep up with demand. For Ngugi, however, the year ended on a note much less pleasant than the acclaim and lionisation which *Petals of Blood* brought him.

First there was the decision by the district commissioner of Kiambu to revoke a licence he had given for the staging of *Ngahiika Ndenda*, a play on which Ngugi had collaborated with a fellow university author, Ngugi wa Mirii (no relation) which attempted to interpret some aspects of modern Kenyan life to the average villagers in terms which the government authorities on the scene thought too provocative. The play (see *The Weekly Review* on page 13) was said by the DC to be an attempt to stir up animosity between various sections of the community on the basis of their respective roles during Kenya's bloody Mau Mau rebellion. That ban left Ngugi and his colleagues both perplexed and in difficulties over what to do about the expenditure and effort which had gone into the preparations for the staging of the play. But the difficulties were nothing compared with what Ngugi was to face later on as the year drew to a close.

Ngugi and wife Wambura

On December 31, in the early hours of the morning, two police vehicles arrived at Ngugi's home near Limuru. Nearly a dozen uniformed policemen came out of the vehicles and entered Ngugi's home. According to his wife, Nyambura, the policemen went to Ngugi's study and after an hour or so in which they were engaged in conversation with the author, they came out carrying bundles of books. Nyambura says she does not remember all the titles of the books the policemen carried away, but she remembers works by Marx and Lenin among the pile that was carted out. Altogether about 100 books were taken from Ngugi's study.

As they were leaving the house, the police told Ngugi they wanted him to accompany them to the local police station in Kiambu because, as Nyambura said, "there were some people at that station who were interested in talking to him". At that point Ngugi asked the policemen to let him take note of all the books they were taking away but this request was turned down. Ngugi then asked the police to tell his wife exactly where they were taking him. The police told Nyambura that they were taking her husband away to the Kiambu Police Station for questioning, that there was nothing serious and that her husband would be back home the following day or even earlier. As it turned out that was not to be the case.

At eight in the morning, Nyambura, accompanied by Ngugi's brother, Wallace Mwangi, went to the Kiambu Police Station only to be told to wait until lunch time to see Ngugi. At lunch time, an officer came to tell them that they could not see Ngugi but that he was in safe hands. They learnt that the police would release the author "in a week's time."

Last week efforts to trace the whereabouts of Ngugi were completely unsuccessful. The acting DC at Kiambu, Mr. Amboka, would not comment when contacted, contenting himself only with claiming that it was a matter for the police. The officer in charge of Kiambu Police Station said it was a matter for the police headquarters in Nairobi to deal with, but when *The Weekly Review* got in touch with the police headquarters they were referred back to Kiambu Police Station. Late Wednesday afternoon however, word was going around that Ngugi had been detained because of the Chinese and other literature found in his possession at the time of the police search in his study. (Chinese literature as well as a number of other specific Communist works are banned in Kenya.) But there was no confirmation from any quarters that Ngugi was indeed under political detention.

Last week's events marked the most serious brush that Ngugi has had with the authorities in Kenya, but he has not been a total stranger to controversy. He was visibly shaken back

in 1969, while teaching at the University of Nairobi, when the police were called in to break up a student demonstration which arose out of the government's refusal to permit the then leader of the opposition Kenya People's Party, Mr. Oginga Odinga, to address a student gathering at the campus. Since then he has on a number of occasions joined academic colleagues to protest similar police intrusions onto the campus to deal with student disorder. He has been outspoken against expatriate influence both at the university and in other spheres of national life. Of late he has been hewing what appears to many as an increasingly marxist ideological line (see interview on page 9) which runs counter to much of the general political and economic mainstream in the country, and he has done so with the same kind of commitment which has permeated most of his writing.

Ngugi's first literary piece of literature was written only after he had told Jonathan Kariara, the editor of Oxford University Press in Nairobi, that he wanted to show his literary senior a short story which he had written. Throughout his career Ngugi seems to have been challenging himself in this way to prove what he knew he was capable of, but which he needed to first produce. At Makerere, he was editor of the literary magazine, *Penpoint* where some of the first and most provocative pieces calling on African artists to come forward were printed. It has been that kind of commitment to defy what Taban lo Liyong once called the "literary wasteland" of East Africa and of the black world as a whole that Ngugi has cherished for some years.

His *Weep Not Child*, published in 1964, was hailed as a monumental turning point in the history of fiction writing in East Africa. In 1965, he published *The River Between*, and in 1967, *A Grain of Wheat*. All three shared Ngugi's flowing, contemplative and poetic prose style. All three put to rest the old myth that there was no such thing as East African literature. More important, each marked a progression in the development of the social vision of Ngugi the artist. Gradually, his vision was getting less mournful. Before he had completed the three novels he had saturated the themes of the cultural conflict between the European coloniali̇ser/Christian and the African. He had examined the scars that the coloniser had left on the African which for that time, he felt were indelible. All three novels were largely about the pre-independence struggles of Kenyan peoples.

Before *A Grain of Wheat* was published Ngugi taught for a time at Makerere University in the faculty of literature, then took a sabbattical year which he spent at the University of Leeds in England. It was at Leeds that he began the actual writing of *A Grain of Wheat*. It was also at Leeds that he began to exhibit greater political awareness. The Black Power movement was strong at that time in Europe and in the west as a whole. With other Africans at Leeds, Ngugi began to concern himself with questions about the role of the artist and writer, and his relationship to society. He became a committed writer.

It seems too that at this time, Ngugi became more aware of what he called in one public lecture "the tie" that binds black and all third world peoples by virtue of their common experience of colonialism and post-colonial independence. His consciousness of especially Caribbean literature grew at this time, for he saw that the kinds of issues that such Caribbean writers as George Lamming were struggling to depict in their art, were very similar to those the African writer was also trying to deal with. The parallels in their experience were at first remarkable to him, and then, he began to see that it was in the common historical experience itself that the answer to their likenesses lay. Out of these inquiries were to emerge a book of essays, although much later, in 1972, called *Homecoming*. But first Ngugi spent a year teaching at Northwestern University in the USA and in America Ngugi was again confronted by Black Power and student power and the issue of the Vietnam war. It was a time for him to synthesise a number of experiences and intellectual strains of thought; and also a time for him to begin work on *Petals of Blood*.

When Ngugi finally finished *Petals of Blood* in 1975, he had struggled with the novel for some time. In some circles, a few people had been whispering that he was a "has been;" but his students to whom he lectured at the the University of Nairobi, where he now headed the literature department, were in no doubt that he was continuing to expand and develop his ideas. Others who knew that Ngugi was not idle were those who watched or participated in his play which he co-wrote with Dr. Micere Mugo which was performed in Lagos at the Festac, *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*. By then, it was plain that Ngugi had gotten over writing about colonial scars. His main concern seemed to turn now to ideological issues and it would seem that it is the idealogical thrust of his writing, especially his seeming attempts to put his ideas into action at the level of what he has called the "peasants and workers," which has run afoul of the authorities.

Part of Ngugi's problem seems to be that as he has moved farther to the left of the country's political ideological spectrum, he has tended to operate in a world which does not allow for objective appraisal of political realities not only in Kenya but in other parts of the world. A year ago, shortly after a visit to Japan sponsored by a leftist writers organisation, he published an appeal to the South Korean government to release from detention one of South Korea's foremost poets and authors. In the same article, Ngugi went out of his way to castigate the repressive regime of President Park Chung Hee, but as in many of his comments on the international scene, Ngugi left the impression that the equally repressive regime in North Korea was far more acceptable than the one in South Korea. Ironically Ngugi's article (see *The Weekly Review*, September 13, 1976) appeared at the same time as North Korea was undergoing one of its most humiliating diplomatic experience, with dozens of its diplomats from even neutral countries like Denmark and Sweden being thrown out for indulging in wide-spread smuggling of cigarettes and liquor as an attempt to help the sagging foreign exchange position of the North Korean Communist regime.

Ngugi, who has been to the Soviet Union on a number of occasions, has never publicly uttered a word against the treatment of writers in the Soviet Union who for one reason or other have earned the displeasure of the Kremlin authorities. It is as if the whole dissidence movement in the Soviet Union and other Communist countries was to Ngugi, as the Soviet and Communist authorities claim; an intellectual embarrassment or nothing but the figment or machinations of the western "imperialist" forces. During the past year or so Ngugi has acted the part of ideologue rather than writer and he has done so with increasing inability to relate to the limits of the sphere of an author's operation which is possible in a developing country in areas where ideas, however noble, can be translated into actions which then have far reaching implications to the general pattern of law and order. According to the administration in the Kiambu District, and it would now seem the government as well, the play *Ngahiika Ndenda* went beyond those limits. Whether there was something else behind his being picked up by the police on New year's eve will presumably come to light very soon.

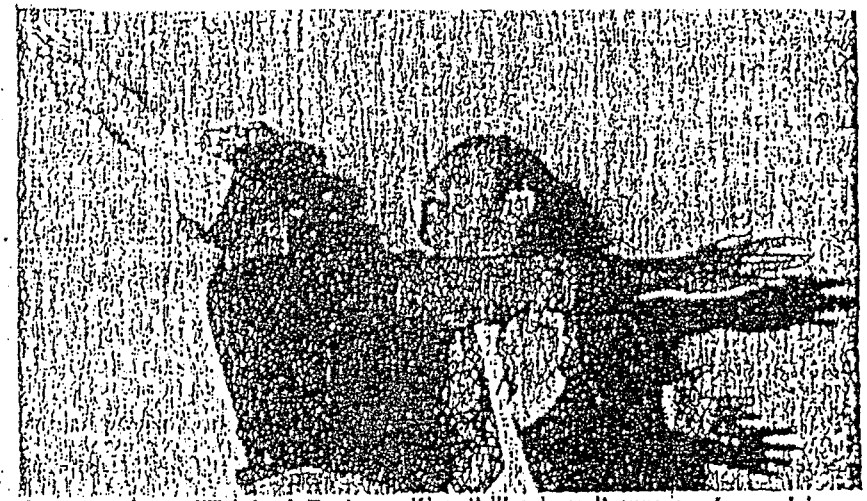
APPENDIX 2B1

TRIAL OF DEDAN KIMATHI IN LONDON

This is the first part of a review of "The Trial of Dedan Kimathi" written by Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Micere Mugo. The play is reviewed by Harry Hilton, a former Kenya Policeman.

Mr. Hilton was an inspector when the Mau Mau freedom struggle was at its height (1953-55) and one of the only three climbers to get to the top of Mount Kenya and return safely at that time. Recently, after seven years of research, he completed his first book entitled, "Kenya — the Mau Mau Mountain."

His reaction to "The Trial", presented at the Africa Centre in Covent Garden, London, by the Wazalendo Players 1984, is predictably both that of a theatre lover and of a member of the forces that clashed with Kimathi's followers during the emergency.



A scene from "Trial of Dedan Kimathi" when it was performed in Nairobi some years ago.

At one point in the play Dedan Kimathi (Ahmed Sheikh), the Mau Mau leader, is mocked by Shaw Henderson (John Goodier) of the Special Branch for confusing dreams with reality times past with time present. People of my generation often seem to have much in common with Kimathi.

The story-line, the African struggle against British colonialism and American neo-colonialism is not new, but the format is a mixture of song, dance, and dramatic moments from Micere Mugo's and Ngugi wa Thiong'o's version of what the struggle was like and continues to be.

The other main ingredient is the revelation of Dedan Kimathi's personality and influence as some imagined them to be in the mid-1950's and as the Kenyan national hero most would proclaim him to be today. The repeated political "messages" delivered mainly by Dedan and Woman (Anita Breeveld) in clear impassioned pleas became, for me at least, a distraction from the drama.

The music and dance routines came via The African Dawn, a group whose members originate from Kenya, Zimbabwe, Senegal, and Ghana. Their singing and mime left little to be desired, the opening sequence which contained dance/mime, representing typical scenes from Kenyan rural life being poignantly performed.

Everything being done in a "collective" (if not confusing cast list!) manner it would, perhaps, not be politic to single out individuals for praise, but — what the hell!

Wanjiru Gichigi had the edge on others on three counts: stage presence, precise position, and an impish smile that would sway any jury. It was "brio" everywhere she breezed. Wanjiro Kihoro "pulled" the music together with great success, flute and drums holding tension or haunting as the action required.

Ahmed Sheikh's Kimathi had the power of the dreadlocks and the eyes of hate I remember so well, alas his vocal projection was less intimidating. The real Dedan Kimathi had a slightly high pitched voice that he somehow managed to project with gusto when addressing large groups of his followers high on the moorlands of the Aberdares (whoops!) — I mean, of course, the Nyandarua mountains.

Ngugi wa Thiongo.

Woman made her points felt in a more restrained, simple fashion and I found this more effective. Girl (Sandara Cole) was limited by her lines and, to a lesser degree, by her movement on stage, but the voice is a memorable one which may have got even African "expert" Basil Davidson, seated behind me, humming the strains of *Sometimes I Feel Like A Motherless Child* — my strict upbringing of the '30s and '40s having still conditioned me not to "turn round and stare at other people in the audience" I was unable to verify this.

The laughs, and this is certainly not a play to laugh about, came from the likes of Torrera Mpedzisi (sole means of face, eyes, and perfect timing) as the white man's stooge Politician and Kwesi Owusu as a zealous pastor amazingly and gracefully striking Christianity into his Kikuyu kindred like a Jove with his thunderbolts.

The Judge (Charles Hunter) was badly cast — far too young even for the Kenyan judiciary of the 1950s and some of the Mau Mau weapons displayed and talked of puzzled this ex-Kenyan copper who was once chased off the slopes of Mount Kenya by a band of 40 irate Freedom Fighters.

Not a panga or simi in sight! Those were the "peasants" tools for the killing game, and a reference to those skilled "blacksmiths" who produced home-made guns (even "machine-guns"!) so that ". . . you couldn't tell the difference. . ." from the real arms (marginal differences!) brought a smile to my lips. True, some of the contraptions could kill and many were the Mau Mau who hanged for it, but frequently the danger was greater for the aimer than the target.

The second part of this review will appear in Saturday's issue of THE STANDARD

This is the second part of a review of "The Trial of Dedan Kimathi", written by Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Micere Mugo. The play is reviewed by Harry Hilton, a former Kenya Policeman.

Mr. Hilton was an Inspector when the Mau Mau freedom struggle was at its height (1953-55) and one of the only three climbers to get to the top of Mount Kenya and return safely at that time. Recently, after seven years of research, he compppleted his first book entitled, "Kenya — the Mau Mau Mountain."

His reaction to "The Trial", presented at the Africa Centre in Covent Garden, London, by the Wazalendo Players 1984, is predictably both that of a theatre lover and of a member of the forces that clashed with Kimathi's followers during the emergency.

Sometimes Ngugi's words failed to flow, unlike those of his novels (I consider his *Petals of Blood* a world classic) and statements like ". . . I should like to vilify the collaborators . . ." and the use of big words such as ". . . jeopardize . . ." stand out like sore thumbs when supposedly uttered by a "peasant" leader with (that redeeming factor in proletarian eyes, surely?) little or no "formal" education.

In fact there is much in the play that reminded me of the old Vietnam war CIA cliche "the big picture" (the one the guys at the sharp end had to be reminded of when, after some particularly nasty operation, they got "a touch of the guilts" — remember?) for this is what Ngugi ends up giving us with nuances, not very subtle at times, and reflections that Dedan Kimathi was most unlikely to have had, and yet, and yet. . . .

At one point in the play the 2nd British Soldier (Jonathan Brooks), just before he tries to interfere with Woman, breaks into an attempted American accent; the intention here, I assume, being to link the past British Imperialism and present day American neo-colonialism (the "clue" being, for those in the know, the recent murder by an American serviceman, who was "let off", of an African woman in Kenya)

Co-author Micere Mugo, co-director Dan Baron-Cohen, Ngugi or others could have been responsible for the device which may or may not have worked with the greater part of the audience, but for the writer of this piece it triggered off a memory of 30 years ago and a face that had a mean look about it and a personality with a particularly vicious streak when it came to the killing game, especially with prisoners.

I remembered that "heroic" face from the fifties in Covent Garden that night and I recalled the book he wrote about his exploits in the forests of Nyandarua (you see how easy it becomes!) Its title? *Mau Mau Man-Hunt*, and the nationality of this author who vividly described how he murdered his male and female prisoners? American. Was that the plan, Dan, or sheer coincidence?

Although the Black and White tableau, the theme of opposites, that Ngugi presents existed and was, in my humble opinion, the clearest demonstration of the massive injustices of the day (the 1950s) it should be borne in mind that the greater part of the African population over the whole of Kenya (illiterate and, for the most part, without radios) went unaware of the Mau Mau movement as portrayed in Ngugi's dramatic terms of imprisonment and torture. This, in a way, is conceded in the play by the interaction of Boy, Girl, and one of the Warders (Toendepi wa Chiwodza) when the two "children" dress as two Maasai, play "dumb", and present themselves as a couple of "hicks from the sticks" during their attempt to contact Kimathi in gaol.

The greatest weakness in the play lies in its simplistic presentation of the ideal of nationhood and hero worship. One thing the history of colonial wars teaches us is to be wary of heroes and villains alike. Remember Amin? Could a Kenya settler of the 1950's have ever envisaged the day when The Queen would bow in respect before the tomb of Jomo Kenyatta as she did in November last year?

So it is with Ngugi's Mau Mau — could the Black have been as spotless as we pretended the White was, or was there grey? Touchy. When Mbaria (Nike Odediran), Dedan Kimathi's brother, "betrays the cause", what comes shining through? Well, bless my soul, if it isn't good old-fashioned capitalistic nepotism!

Big brother Dedan ponders deeply and, surprise, surprise, lets little brother off hook. Consternation consumes the Mau Mau leader's following in the forest and a quick escape by Mbaria comes most conveniently, but we all know in our heart of hearts that Dedan will never live it down

Dedan Kimathi, who was wounded and captured by colonial security forces, tried and later executed

In real life this sort of "forgetfulness" has its grimmer aspect. Am I the only one who remembers Sisters Cecilia (Wangeci), and Rosetta (Njeri) of Baricho, and Sister Eugenia of Mujwa who were slashed to death by Mau Mau Freedom Fighters' Shaw put it in a nutshell, ". . . and so to the end of history murder will breed murder, and always in the name of right and honour and truth", but the greatest irony is left with the real Dedan Kimathi himself for there is one rather important fact that Ngugi chooses to ignore or, perhaps, he is not aware of it?

During the several months between Dedan's conviction and eventual hanging he was visited, at his own specific request, by Father Joseph Whelan and took instruction in the ways of the Roman Catholic Church. An hour before the trap-door opened the Mau Mau leader, for his own good reasons, was received into that Church and Dedan's last words on this earth were those of Christian prayer spoken by the Irish priest (irony of time present) and repeated by Dedan

Father Whelan told me that he had his hands on Dedan's shoulders as the great separation took place "He offered no resistance . ." not a lot of people know that, but sitting in the African Centre the other Friday night amid enthusiastic applause (my own among it) I had the distinct feeling that Dedan's transition in Kamiti prison in Nairobi at 6 a.m. on the 18th of February in the year of Our Lord one thousand nine hundred and fifty-seven was only a temporary one — or am I confusing dreams with reality again?

STANDARD

No. 21901 Nairobi, Thursday, October 18, 1984. CITY EDITION Price 2/-.

Mwangale briefed on Kenyan exiles

NGUGI'S PLAY UPSETS LONDON

Dedan Kim

ENYAN exile Ngugi wa Thiong'o's updated" version of "The Trial of edan Kimathi "has been panned ere as a communist propaganda iece.

The play was the ntrepiece of a so-lled "Kenya Focus" rogramme at the frica Centre, but ved only to provide ther evidence of e self-exiled group's litical stance — and e stance of those. o underwrite it.

From Arnold Raphael
LONDON

Mr. Elijah Mwangale..

The activities of Kenya exiles and their British associates and communist block backers have elicited strong feelings in Nairobi over the group's violently anti-Kenya stance.

Nairobi feels that the activities of the exiles and their local supporters are also damaging to race relations in Britain itself, apart from undermining British foreign policy — and that far more damage is being done by the ripple effect in Kenya of the group's propaganda.

The showing of the play in fact coincides with Kenyatta Day, which the Kenya exiles have re-designated Mau Mau Freedom Fighter Day — and because of the strong anti-Kenya and anti-Western content of the "Kenya Focus" project, the Kenya High Commission here has

Mr. Thiong'o

Mr. Mwangale

Sir Geoffrey

in fact boycotted the programme.

The Africa Centre has pretended distress at the refusal of the Kenya Government to patronise the event

but observers are hardly surprised in that the Ngugi play, or rather the revised version, and its communist-backed sponsors, includes a list of "Basic Facts About Kenya" in the brochure that amounts to an outright attack on the post-independence government of both the late President Kenyatta and President Moi.

NGUGI PLAY BANNED

THE Commonwealth Institute in London has dropped a public performance of Ngugi wa Thiongo's play "The Trial of Dedan Kimathi".

From Arnold Raphael, LONDON, Wednesday.

The Institute is a non-political body devoted to the promotion of cultural, educational and social developments within the Commonwealth.

It is funded by all Commonwealth governments, with the British paying the lion's share. It is believed that London exerted pressure on the institute to ban the play.

It is understood that the institute was concerned not so much by the play itself as by its controversial presentation at the African Centre, where it had been deliberately used as a vehicle to attack the Kenya, British and American Governments by Kenyan exiles and local extremist elements.

The performance, at the Commonwealth Institute was to have formed part of the entertainment planned for the 180 delegates to an African Writers' Conference next week at which Ngugi is the main speaker.

But the Director of the institute, Mr. James Porter, decided to withdraw permission to stage the play because, of its political connotations which offended Nairobi.

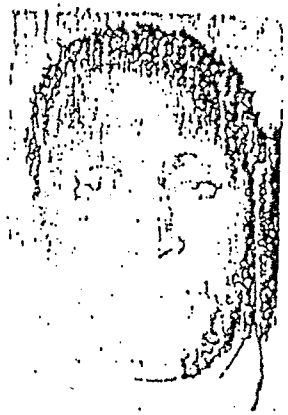
However, the invitation to its author to speak at the writers' conference still stand.

On Tuesday, Mr. Porter telexed the Chief Secretary, Mr. Simon Nyachae, assuring him that the writers' conference was not another political stunt like that put on at the African centre.

He said the conference would be attended by senior academics, writers and critics and they would only discuss non-political matters. He said the topics would include the continuity and direction of contemporary African writing, publishing outlets, oral literature and scriptwriting.

Mr. Porter also took into account that the Kenya High Commissioner to Britain, Mr. B. D. Kipkulei, with his Uganda and Tanzania counterparts would participate in a panel discussion on East African regional development.

Like the writer's discus-



Ngugi . . . play banned

sion and next week's East African Art Exhibition, a future part of the institute's wide-ranging Africa Year programme.

A HAPPY NEW YEAR!

THE Editors and Staff of The Standard wish all their Hindu readers, advertisers and other esteemed well-wishers a Happy and Prosperous Hindu New Year which begins today. We also congratulate them all on the successful Diwali celebrations.

ON THE CARPET

IK awaits this week the results of examinations written in March for a BA Honours Degree in English — and the publication (tomorrow) of his book, "Weep Not Child." In a strange, almost offhand, way he seems to take both events for granted.

But there is no conceit or indifference to encourage this impression; nor is there false modesty. The eyes of this young African author, quietly serious, ask not to be believed or disbelieved; they seek rather for understanding, and reflect, deep down, subdued, something that is akin to laughter and a shrug of the shoulders something that for the present says "so be it" and will, with time, blossom into full confidence.

He was born in 1938 into a large peasant farming family in the Limuru area and started writing seriously only four years ago; he has written two successful books, and a number of plays, short stories and newspaper features; he is the champion of the little man (the little man in a world at war, the little man in situations that he cannot control, the little man close to the soil); he believes in this little man which is also himself — the little man with a growing command of prose that may well see him grow into one of the first real African giants of literature.

JAMES NGUGI

was interviewed by

JOHN de VILLIERS

SLIGHTLY built James Ngugi spoke slowly, earnestly. Only his hands were restless, seeming to fray the air in frustration when his command of the English language, as spoken, left him groping for the word or phrase that would express exactly his meaning.

"I was trying," he said, "to express the feelings of a small village community in Kenya during the Emergency. The terror, the fear of the unknown in which so many of the little people lived. The setting is a local one, which I know and have lived in, but the feeling, I think, is universal; the feelings of the little man, a child, in a world at war. He is caught in a situation he cannot control; he can only live it. . ."

He was talking about his book, *Weep Not Child*, which is being published in Britain this week by William Heinemann.

WAS this your first novel?

No, my first was *The Black Messiah*, which I wrote in 1961 for the competition organised by the EA Literature Bureau.

HOW did it fare?

It won the top prize in the English section which, of course, pleased and encouraged me a great deal. But I was not really satisfied with it; I'm not yet satisfied with my work . . . I feel when I see the finished product that I did not really get to grips with the subject or, perhaps, the language; I feel I want to go back and do it all over again — properly.

BUT I understand this first novel is also due to be published?

Yes, that is what seems to happen when you have your first book accepted; the publishers are prepared to take a look at things you have written before. *The Black Messiah* is due to be published later this year or early next year, but we will probably make changes. There may even be a different title.

WHO is your favourite writer?

Joseph Conrad. Perhaps it is because English was for him a second language. He only really started using it when he was 19 and yet he bent it into a particular shape to express himself; the anguish and agony of a community. For me he had an awareness of the loneliness of man . . . but he did not reject society; he believed in it and was a part of it.

HAS his work made any significant impression on your own?

That sort of thing is very difficult to pin down. I think everything you read and enjoy, every writer you admire must leave a small impression somewhere. I'm a great admirer of Conrad, but it's possible that D. H. Lawrence, if anyone, may have made the deepest impression on me.

WHICH work of his impressed you most?

Possibly *The Rainbow*, but when I discovered him for myself the way one does I just read everything of his that I could lay hands on . . . I was touched by his closeness to the soil; for me he captured the rhythm of life, be it in a small village or in an industrial area.

WHICH brings us to the controversial "Lady Chatterley" . . . ?

It is a great pity that he should be known for this book; he has written so much that is so much better; books like *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love*.

HAVE you been influenced by any of the growing school of new African authors?

Not only influenced but also in many cases helped and encouraged. The West African writer Chinua Achebe (*Things Fall Apart*) attended a conference at Makerere in 1962.

He took a very kind interest in some of my work and it was he who introduced me to his publishers, William Heinemann. There was also the South African writer Peter Abrahams (*Tell Freedom*) who made a strong impression on me.

YOU were educated at the Alliance High School, Kikuyu, and later went on to Makerere to study literature and English. You wrote your final examinations for B.A. Honours in March. Do you think you passed well?

I don't think I failed, but anything can happen with examinations. I should know within the next few days.

WHEN did you actually start writing — I mean professionally?

I started writing short stories by 1960 and the first ones were published in the *Kenya Weekly News*. I then started feature writing to bring in some ready cash. I wrote first for the *Sunday Post* and then started writing for the SUNDAY NATION and other newspapers and magazines. But I was advised a long time ago by Jack Divall, who was the editor of the *Sunday Post*, that I should concentrate on writing for hard covers.

HE was right of course?

I sincerely hope so; there's still a long way to go — but I think I'm learning and I feel I have something to say.

Ngugi wa Thiong'o still bitter over his detention

The following is an excerpt of an interview given to Margaretta wa Gacheru of 'The Weekly Review' by Kenyan novelist and associate professor at the University of Nairobi Ngugi wa Thiong'o who was released from one year's detention on December 12, 1978

The Weekly Review: Could you describe some of your experiences of detention, where you were, and what the conditions were inside?

Ngugi: When I was arrested, I was taken to Kamiti Maximum Security Prison, in Kiambu, where I was kept behind stone walls and iron bars for a whole year. I would like to say this, arising from my detention: Detention without trial is really a denial of the democratic rights of a Kenya national. I believe that every Kenyan has a right to a fair trial in an open court of law. I was not tried in an open court of law. I have never, even now, been told any specific reasons for my detention. I was therefore stripped arbitrarily of my democratic rights as a Kenyan.

The treatment of a detainee in Kenya reduces human beings to the level of animals. The treatment strip's every detainee of every human right. For instance, as I said, I was put into Kamiti Maximum Security Prison like a convicted criminal. I had no access to radio or newspapers. I was for a period confined to a cell for 21 hours a day under the full glare of an electric bulb. This is mental torture. I found that other detainees had been under similar conditions of being confined for 21 hours a day for the previous 2 years. I had no privacy whatsoever. I was also told that I had to be chained as a condition for seeing my family or for medical treatment. Disease is thus used as a form of physical and mental torture. And the occasion of a family visit is used to humiliate a political detainee because of being asked to be chained as a condition for seeing them. So that, though I personally had no direct experience of physical beating in detention, I was always under extreme mental and psychological torture. One is constantly being harassed mentally. I think the purpose of detention in Kenya has been to break up a person physically and mentally. In other words, to produce a human wreck, a vegetable.

As for the so-called Detainees Review Tribunal, which meets with detainees every six months, it is nothing more than a screening team. It has only powers for advise. This tribunal never tells you why you have been arrested or detained. They plead ignorance about any background to your case. And as I said, their recommendations whatever they are (since they are never communicated to detainees) are never mandatory on the part of the authority that detained you.

Q: While in detention were you in solitary confinement or were you living with other men?

A: I was lucky in that I was put where there were 19 other detainees. And I was very impressed by the way in which these detainees had been able to withstand prison pressures for the last three, four, ten years. The detainees also struck me, on the whole, as people who were extremely patriotic, people who loved Kenya and people who had been put in because they had spoken about the poverty of the masses, or rather people who had spoken for the rights of the poor. So, I should say I was very impressed with them, and I shall never forget my one year of interaction with them in prison. I learnt a lot.

Q: Do you feel any bitterness about your detention?

A: Well, frankly, I'm very bitter. Detention without trial is nothing not to be bitter about. In fact, I have become even more bitter when peasants and workers come and ask me: 'Why did they come and detain you? Why did they treat you so cruelly: Is it because of the play that we did at Kimirithu? What wrong things did we do in the play?' I find myself at a loss to know what to tell them. Secondly, by not being told why I was arrested and detained for one year, it gave rise to all sorts of rumours and speculations. I know some write-ups about my detention, including I'm afraid, write-ups in the Stellascope publications, tried to implicate me with all sorts of dreamt-up things; like being in possession of banned literature, or being connected with student uprisings, and strange things like that. And I'm bitter because I know, deep in my heart, that the peasant and worker initiative is the correct thing for Kenyan culture. Detention is a horrible institution. It should be abolished.

Q: So you were not in possession of banned literature?

A: First of all, I believe it is very

NO. 203, P. 30-32

Democracy involves the right of a people to criticise freely without being detained in prison.

wrong to ban any literature; I think Kenyans have a right to the literature published nationally, and also to literature published internationally. But once there is a law about possessing certain literatures, I am very careful not to be in possession of such banned material. The books they took from my house were mostly those by Marx, Lenin and Engels. And books by them are not banned in Kenya. If they are banned in Kenya, I should be told that they are banned in Kenya. The other books they took were 26 copies of *Ngaahika Ndeenda*.

Q: Banning of literature also relates to freedom and democracy. Could you discuss the idea of democracy?

A: Democracy is really a complex phenomenon. It involves the right of a people to criticise freely without being detained in prison. It involves a people being aware of all their rights. It involves the rights of a people to know how the wealth is produced in the country, who controls that wealth, and for whose benefit that wealth is being utilised. Democracy involves therefore people being aware of the forces shaping their lives. I would say, more immediately, it involves people having all their rights. I would even go so far as to say it involves the rights of a people to decent housing, decent clothing, and decent food. It involves a people's right to all the benefits of modern science. It involves a people's right to be able to write freely in the languages of their own choice.

For instance, I believe I was detained because of my creative writing. And also, for the position I have consistently held in the struggles of our national languages and national cultures to free themselves from the stranglehold of foreign languages and cultures. I still hold those views, even more strongly. I still hold that our Kenyan culture must be totally free from foreign domination in at least the following areas: Our national languages, e.g. Kiswahili, Kikuyu, Dholuo, Kikalenjin, Kigiriama, Kimaasai, Kikamba, Kiluhya, and the languages of all the other nationalities have a right to develop. At present, these national languages have been relegated to the dustbins. Instead, English, French, German, are given the pride of place in our schools. By being so encouraged to hate their national languages, the children are being encouraged to hate, or at least, to despise the begetters of these languages, i.e. their peasant parents. And they are thus encouraged to admire the begetters of English, French, German, i.e. foreigners.

The children also come to hate or look down upon the cultures carried by their national languages, i.e. the peasant-based national cultures. By the same token, they come to admire the cultures carried by foreign languages, in this case, foreign cultures. Look at our theatre for instance. Our theatre is dominated by foreigners. The so-called Kenya National Theatre is controlled by foreigners and by foreign-based groups, like City Players. This is reflected in the administration of the Kenya Cultural Centre. The British Council have their offices there. The chairman of the governing council is a British National. 99 per cent of the plays at the Kenya National Theatre and in other theatres in Kenya are all foreign. Look at the plays currently in fashion at the National Theatre. *Oklahoma,* for instance. Other titles are equally interesting. *Gulliver, Carmen, King and I;* this is the kind of cultural fare which is being laddled to us Kenyan people. If you look at the record, you'll see that foreign theatre in foreign languages has been allowed to flourish freely with governmental encouragement. The Kenya National Theatre is, for example, under the ministry of social services.

National theatre in national languages, on the other hand, has not been encouraged. There has been governmental suppression of theatre in national languages. And the best example, is Kamiriithu Community Educational and Cultural Centre at Limuru which produced a play which was seen by thousands of peasants and workers from all over the area. Then the licence to

perform this was withdrawn, and one of the authors was detained in a maximum security prison.

If is these kinds of things that make me feel that national theatre, national literature in national languages have tended to be suppressed, and in their stead, national theatre and literature in foreign languages have been allowed to flourish. To go further, I believe that our national theatre, our national literature can only be truly so if they are based in our national languages, and if they correctly reflect our society, and the class forces that are at work in that society. For instance, I believe that the play, *Ngaahika Ndeendā*, was very popular because it talked about the extreme poverty of the people. I believe the play was popular because it talked about landlessness in our country. I believe the play was popular because it talked about the betrayal of the peasants and workers by the political "big-wigs". I believe the play was popular, because it talked about the arrogance and the greed of the powerful and the wealthy. Again, I believe the play was popular because it depicted the true conditions of the rural people in the rural villages. And so on.

It reminds me in a sense of the image in *Petals of Blood* where a huge tree, a ruthless huge tree is seen as suffocating little plants and preventing them from reaching out to the light. So I come back to that belief that we must be able to develop our national languages and develop literatures in those national languages, and that that literature must be able to freely and correctly mirror our society in all its strengths and weaknesses. It is only through this kind of mirroring of the truth, or mirroring what is actually happening in our society, that we can build unity and democracy in Kenya.

Q: You have recently described yourself as a "student" of the peasants of Kenya. Could you explain what that means to you?

A: To answer that question fully, I'd like to see the play, *Ngaahika Ndeenda* being restaged in order for everybody to see what peasants and workers can do, when given a chance. This play was not a one-man's act. It was the result of co-operation among many people. For instance, the whole of *Gitiiro opera* sequence in the play was written word for word at the dictation of an illiterate peasant woman at Kamirithu. And anyone who saw the play could tell you that the *Gitiiro opera* sequence in the play was one of the most beautiful, the most wonderful aesthetic experiences on the Kenyan stage.

Again, if you see the high level of acting and presentation by the peasants and workers at Kamirithu in that play, you will realise that we have much more to learn from the peasants and workers than we can give them. If you see how they utilise language, how they have collectively designed and constructed their open air theatre, then you will realise what potential there is in Kenyan people when allowed to rely on their resources. So I would say, that if you want to see your question properly answered, ask the authorities to let the play be restaged so that everybody can be in no doubt as to what kind of play it was, the kind of performance it was, and everything the whole presentation pictured.

Q: You have been the chairman of the literature department at the University of Nairobi. Could you tell us what your status in vis a vis the University. And what are your plans for the future?

A: At present, I have no plans. I have been waiting to hear a word from the university. But the university has been silent about my position. I have had, in the same period, offers of jobs abroad at fantastic salaries. But at the same time, I know that I cannot accept any job abroad, no matter how high the salary. I am much happier working in a small village, trying to build our culture together with other people. At present, I am simply trying to rest and think about one or two things. You see, I have been away for a whole year.

Q: Could you discuss any literary plans you may have for the future?

A: At present, I am not involved in the writing of anything. Nevertheless, *Ngaahika Ndeendā* showed me the road along which I should have been travelling on all these past 17 years of my writing career.

Q: You have been away for a year. Could you discuss the changes you have observed — politically, socially, economically, culturally — since you have been back.

A: I am trying to read up old newspapers and trying to learn from people what has been happening in our country for the last one year. Nevertheless, I don't think there have been fundamental changes in our society. For instance, I went to Nairobi the other day, and it seemed to me that in one year, there are fewer Africans and more foreigners in Nairobi. And I doubt whether anything has been done about the exploitation of Kenya's wealth by foreign merchants. So that foreign economic and cultural interests, in alliance with some locals are still ravaging our country and nation. But I think that no country can truly develop while the speed of the outflow of wealth from the country is higher than the inflow of wealth into the country. In other words, I don't believe we can really develop while our wealth still goes to feed merchants in foreign countries

I believe that our national theatre, our national literature can only be truly so if they are based in our national languages, and if they correctly reflect our society and the class forces that are at work in that society

NATION KAMIRITHU REVISITED

Friday magazine

KAMIRITHU

M swept over the of Kamirithu In u just over a yeer hen the licence to a play in Kikuyu, *hika Ndenda* lly, I will marry I feel like it) was d.

that time, the tion was entering rth week of record mances and well 10,000 people from ners of the country ine to see it.

n a month later — to t, on New Year's Eve, one of the authors, gugi wa Thiong'o was d and consequently d, Kamirithu's cup of tions seemed to be ng.

planations were forth- and the cause of ents of those weeks only be speculated on. ardly a soul raising a above a whisper.

would therefore think e "Kamirithu People," mall-plot owners and ers who are the tants of the village, I have given up on then newly founded urity, Cultural and tion Centre. But they and have not.

ht literacy classes, tion lessons and ations and [illegible] ctures activities were

lough the open-air re which had been constructed and re esentation *Ngaahika* ou had now been nobody molested it in st

CREATIVE

lay one year later, from natural wear and the theatre stands the long grass being ly evidence that it has en since used.

ange, it sounds, but as a rithu Community, ural and Education e spokesman puts it: were disheartened yes. e had to go on!"

life did indeed go on. centre's "orchestra" ingers who performed at play kept up their ve spirit and last year wo records, *Kigunda Kieha kia Wangeri* (the tribulations of Wangeri) on the flip side, and *Murika Murika* with its flipside carrying *Ndungeri ya Watu* ("the rich man and the peasant").

The second single carries the same title as the orchestra "Mwiki Mwiku," which literally translated becomes the sporting question "Where are you all people?"

Since most of the Kamirithu residents and most of the members of the centre are either labourers on the nearby tea and coffee farms, workers at the Limuru Bata factory nearby or just self-employed vegetable sellers, the need for collective self-reliance has been very vital for their corporate image.

And since all the activities have to be done after working (after five in the evening), it has, as one can imagine, called for a lot of discipline.

The women, as is increasingly evident nowadays, got together and made plans on how to work together to increase their incomes on which so many families in Kamirithu are dependent.

FY villagers greet Prof. Ngugi wa Thiong'o at a welcome-home party soon after his release from detention.

> If we were a bit early in raising our voice against corruption, it is because we were some of those who were hit hardest...

By Miriam Kahiga

Instead of going away daily alone to look for "contract" jobs, (which are mainly tilling other people's shambas) the women negotiate together, and each day's wages for work done corporately goes to one woman. They work for as many days as the number of women in the group, until everyone has received her wages.

If one woman does not want to receive wages for her turn, she can request that they work on any job she wants, usually on her piece of land. This way they have been able to increase their incomes steadily as well as lighten the individual burden that one has to do to earn, say the equivalent of one term's fees.

Besides, the cast of *Ngaahika Ndenda*, still rehearse their lines.

And as a member put it: "We never saw the need to abandon our lines since we always retained the hope of restaging the play one day. We urged and encouraged each other to go on rehearsing, even if only in our own homes."

And now that they have been rehearsing, the question uppermost in their, and most Kenyans' minds is: "Shall *Ngaahika Ndenda* be restaged again?"

First of all, the centre has not yet applied for a licence and been turned down. This, as the centre says, is because "having been given once and then withdrawn, we can only have the confidence to do so again if there is a positive indication from the Government that they have got nothing against the play".

This, as a spokesman says, is not easy. First, the actors and the entire population of Kamirithu were morally hit when the licence was revoked.

"Already, we feel very sorry boosted with the President's directive that all detainees be released, and in our case, the return of Ngugi wa Thiong'o is something we shall always be grateful for."

Isn't that, then, a good indication that they could get a hearing?

Yes and No. Yes because with the current call for people to intensify their self-help efforts, they feel they have hope. No because, when the play was suppressed, by the same token, foreign theatre in this country was boosted and now, according to Kamirithu, enjoys free enterprise, with the protection and the blessings of the Government.

The argument is difficult to follow. For Kamirithu has some very strong points which they feel are the basis for their fear to apply for a licence just now.

First, they argue, *Ngaahika Ndenda* was the first rurally and nationally cultural activity initiated by the people. It is national, they say, because it was initiated by the workers and the small plot holders who constitute over 90 per cent of this country's population, and by the same token it was a national initiative. Its suppression meant several things.

First, that the Government showed that it was displeased with the efforts of its rural populace to show initiative in the matters of culture and self-development of the mind. Secondly it showed that there is, after all — and as the enemies of national languages will have it — something wrong with reviving drama in the languages of the people, the languages they understand best.

And thirdly, that by suppressing this theatrical enterprise, it was a moral boost to the foreign theatrical enterprises who are now enjoying the national facilities as well as monopolising theatre patronage.

What could be done to rectify this and in the same breath be a positive indication that such an effort in the future will not be so ruthlessly suppressed?

First, it is only fair, as a centre spokesman puts it, for the Government to understand that we were the first people to put in words and in actions the sentiments of many people who felt helpless at the exploitation caused by nepotism, tribalism and sellishness of a few people who used their power to do so!

As he goes on to say, It is this same nepotism, corruption, *mogendo* and exploitation that the Government is now condemning and has sworn to root out.

"If we were a bit early in voicing ourselves against it, it is because we were some of those who were hit hardest".

On this account, Kamirithu, I think, need not have a problem. Their theme of fair play is in rapport with that of the new Government and I do not think they need any more indication that their request will be met with sympathetic consideration.

Trouble with a request for a positive indication is that with an issue like culture, a positive vote cannot be legislated. Culture takes the shape that people want it to take, and in this case, the shape that the people will help the Government make it take...

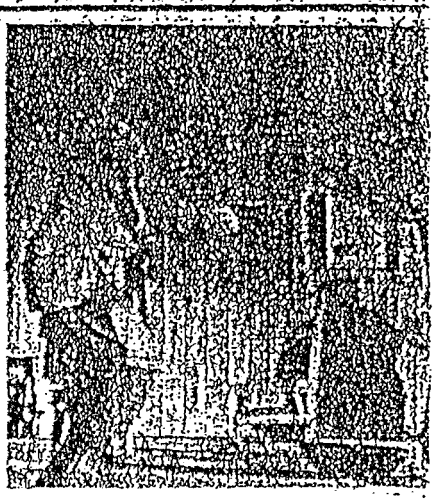
GUIDELINE

"We do not see ourselves as a model, (for the rest of the country) but we see ourselves as having done something which we believe is right and good, something that had not been done before in the history of this country, something that could be used as a guideline for other similar centres to be set up, thus nationalising efforts towards rebuilding and enhancing our culture, which at this time could easily slip our reach if something is not quickly done".

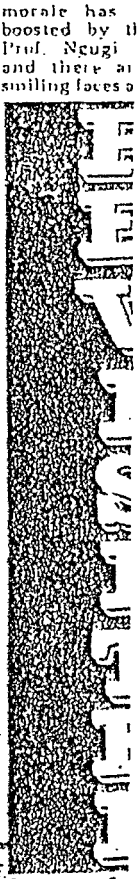
What the spokesman means is that soon after *Ngaahika Ndenda* was well on its way to becoming a box-office hit, the centre received many requests from other villages asking them for advice on how to set up a similar centre.

"If our efforts had not been clubbe suddenly, ther how many oth its kind s bul existence", sa centre directo this happened authors deta were filled w uncertainty. stopped co indicating that not confined alone. "In oth initiative whic become nati thwarted with the pen."

It is heaven to note that morale has boosted by t Prof. Ngugi and there a smiling faces a



SCENE from the play Ngaahika Nde



BIBLIOGRAPHY

A. NGUGI WA THIONG'O'S WRITINGS

FICTION

Ngugi wa Thiong'o — *The River Between*, Heinemann, London, 1965.

---------- — *Weep Not Child*, Heinemann, London, 1964.

---------- — *A Grain of Wheat*, Heinemann, London, 1967.

---------- — *Secret Lives*, short stories, Heinemann, London, 1975.

---------- — *Petals of Blood*, Heinemann, Nairobi & London, 1977 / Dutton, New York, 1978.

---------- — *Caitaani Mutharaba-ini (Devil on the Cross)*, Heinemann, Nairobi, 1980. English edition: Heinemann, London, 1982.

---------- — *Matigari*, Heinemann, Nairobi, 1987 & London, 1989.

PLAYS

Ngugi wa Thiong'o — *The Black Hermit*, Heinemann, London, 1968.

---------- — *This Time Tomorrow: Three Plays*, East African Publishing House, Nairobi, 1970.

Ngugi wa Thiong'o & Githae-Mugo, M — *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*, Heinemann, Nairobi & London, 1976.

Ngugi wa Thiong'o & Ngugi wa Mirii — *Ngaahika Ndeenda (I Will Marry When I Want)*, Heinemann, Nairobi, 1980). English edition: Heinemann, London, 1982.

Ngugi wa Thiong'o — *Maitu Njugira (Mother, Sing for Me)*, yet unpublished.

NON-FICTION

Ngugi wa Thiong'o "Kenya: The Two Rifts", in *The New African 1*, September 1962. Rpt. in *Homecoming*, pp. 22-25.

---------- "Mau Mau, Violence, and Culture", 1963. Revised version in *Homecoming*, pp. 26-30.

---------- "A Kind of Homecoming", address, Makerere University, Uganda, September 1968. Rpt. in *Homecoming*, pp. 81-95.

---------- "Satire in Nigeria: Achebe, Aluko and Soyinka", in Pieterse and Munro (eds), *Protest and Conflict in African Literature*, Heinemann, London, 1969, pp. 56-69.

---------- "George Lamming and the Colonial Situation", paper presented to the Thirteenth Annual Meeting of the African Studies Association, Boston, 21-24 October 1970. Rpt. in *Homecoming*, pp. 127-144.

---------- *Homecoming: Essays on African and Caribbean Literature, Culture and Politics*, Heinemann, London, 1972 / Lawrence Hill, New York, 1972.

---------- "J.M. - a Writer's Tribute", in *Weekly Review*, 24 March 1975. Rpt. in *Writers in Politics*, pp. 82-85.

---------- "Writers in Politics", in *Busara 8, No. 1*, 1976.

---------- "The South Korean People's Struggle Is the Struggle of All Oppressed Peoples", address, International Emergency Conference on Korea, Tokyo, 12-14 August 1976. Rpt. in *Writers in Politics*, pp. 117-122.

---------- "'Handcuffs' for A Play (or the Difficulties of Staging a Kenyan Play on Kenyatta Day)", in *Daily Nation*, 15 October 1976. Rpt. in *Writers in Politics*, pp. 49-52.

---------- "Kenyan Culture: The National Struggle for Survival", in *The Guardian*, 7 June 1979. Rpt. in *Writers in Politics*, pp. 42-48.

---------- "Return to the Roots: National Languages as the Basis of a Kenya National Literature and Culture", address, Kenya Press Club, 17 July 1979. Rpt. in *Writers in Politics*, pp. 53-65.

---------- "The Writer of his World", address, Africa Centre, London, in *West Africa* 22/29 December 1980.

---------- *Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary*, Heinemann, Nairobi, 1981.

---------- *Writers in Politics*, essays, Heinemann, Nairobi & London, 1981.

---------- *Barrel of a Pen: Resistance to Oppression in Neo-colonial Kenya*, New Beacon Books, London, 1983.

---------- "The Role of the Scholar in the Development of African Literatures", in *Research Priorities in African Literatures*, Bernth Lindfors (ed), Hans Zell, Munich, 1984, pp. 7-12.

---------- "On Writing in Gikuyu", in *Research in African Literatures 16*, 1985, pp. 151-156.

---------- *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*, James Currey, London; Heinemann, Nairobi & Zimbabwe Publishing House, Harare, 1986.

---------- "Writing Against Colonialism", Vita Books, London, 1986. Rpt. in Kirsten Petersen (ed), *Criticism and Ideology: Second African Writers' Conference, Stockholm, 1986*, S.I.A.S., Uppsala, 1988, pp. 92-103.

---------- *Moving the Centre*, James Currey, London, 1992 / East African Educational Publishers, Nairobi, 1993.

B. WRITINGS ON NGUGI WA THIONG'O

Abdelkarim, C "*Petals of Blood*: Story, Narrative, Discourse", in *Echos du Commonwealth, No. 6*, 1980-81, pp. 37-51.

Banham, M & Wake, C "Kenya: James Ngugi, Kenneth Watene, and Notes on Other Playwrights, in *African Theatre Today*, Pitman Publishing, London, 1986.

Bjorkman, I *Mother, Sing for Me: People's Theatre in Kenya*, Zed Books, London, 1989.

Brown, D M "Matigari and the Rehabilitation of Religion", in *Research in African Literatures*, Vol. 22, No. 4, Indiana University/ Ohio State University, 1991.

Carlin, M "The Second Novel", a review of Ngugi's *The River Between*, in *Transition Vol. 4 (19)*, 1965, pp. 52-53.

Chesaina, C C "Who is on Trial in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*?", in *Busara Vol. 8 No. 2*, 1976.

Chileshe, J "*Petals of Blood*: Ideology and Imaginative Expression" in *Journal of Commonwealth Literature No. 15*, 1980, pp. 133-137.

Cochrane, J "Women as Guardians of the Tribe in Ngugi's Novels", in *Association for Commonwealth Language and Literature Bulletin 4*, Mysore, 1977). Rpt. in Killam, *Critical Perspectives on Ngugi wa Thiong'o*, pp. 90-100.

Cook, D "A New Earth: A Study of Ngugi's *A Grain of Wheat*, in *East African Journal Vol. 4 (12)*, 1969, pp. 13-20. Rpt in his *African Literature: A Critical View*, Longman, London, 1977.

-------- "The Solitary and the Submerged: A Study in Western and African Literary Environments", in his *African Literature: A Critical View*, Longman, London, 1977.

Cook, D & Okenimkpe, M *Ngugi wa Thiong'o: An Exploration of His Writings*, Heinemann, London, 1983.

Curtis, L "The Divergence of Art and Ideology in the Later Novels of Ngugi wa Thiong'o: A Critique", in *UFAHAMU Vol. XIII No. 1-2*, 1984, pp. 186-215.

Duerden, D & Pieterse, C "Ngugi wa Thiong'o", in *African Writers Talking*, Heinemann, London, 1972, pp. 121-131.

Dusaidi, C B — *East African Drama: A Study of the Plays of Elvania Zirimu, John Ruganda, Francis Imbuga and Ngugi wa Thiong'o* , M.A. thesis, University of New Brunswick, 1981, pp. 115-148.

Elders, D — "James Ngugi: *A Grain of Wheat*", in Eldred D Jones (ed.) *African Literature Today No. 1*, 1972.

Eyoh, H N — "Ngugi wa Thiong'o", interview in *Journal of Commonwealth Literature 21*, 1986, pp. 162-166.

Gachukia, E — *Notes on Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's The River Between*, Heinemann, Nairobi, 1977.

---------- — "The Role of Women in Ngugi's Novels", in *Busara, Vol. 3 (4)*, 1971, pp. 30-33.

Gakwandi, A S — "Ngugi's *A Grain of Wheat* and Sembene Ousmane's *God's Bits of Wood*, in his *The Novel and Contemporary Experience in Africa*, Heinemann, London, 1977.

Gikandi, S — *Reading the African Novel*, James Currey, London / Heinemann, Nairobi, 1987.

---------- — "On Culture and the State: the Writings of Ngugi wa Thiong'o", in *Third World Quarterly Vol. 11 No. 1*, 1989, pp. 148-156.

---------- — "The Epistemology of Translation: Ngugi and the Politics of Language", in *Research in African Literatures*, Vol. 22, No. 4, Indiana University/ Ohio State University, 1991.

Githae-Mugo, M — *Visions of Africa: The Fiction of Chinua Achebe, Margaret Laurence, Elspeth Huxley and Ngugi wa Thiong'o*, Kenya Literature Bureau, Nairobi, 1978.

Glenn, I — "Ngugi wa Thiong'o and the Dilemma of the Intellectual Elite in Africa: A Sociological Perspective", in *English Today 8*, 1981.

Glinga, W — "*The River Between* and its Forerunners: A Contribution to the Theory of the Kenyan Novel", in *World Literature Written in English, Vol. 26 No. 2*, 1986, pp. 211-228.

Gowda, H H A — "Ngugi wa Thiong'o as Novelist", in *Literary Half-Yearly Vol. XVI (2)*, 1975, pp. 27-51.

Gurnah, A — "Matigari: A Tract of Resistance", in *Research in African Literatures*, Indiana University/ Ohio State University, 1991.

Gurr, A — "Engagement is not Marriage: Perspectives on Cultural Conflict in East Africa", in *Mosaic: a Journal for the Comparative Study of Literature and Ideas, Vol 5 (2)*, University of Manitoba, 1971, pp. 65-79.

---------- — "The Fourth Novel: Ngugi's *Petals of Blood*", in D. Jefferson and G. Martin (eds), *The Uses of Fiction: Essays on the Modern Novel in Honour of Arnold Kettle*, Open University Press, Milton Keynes, 1982.

Howard, W J — "Themes and Development in the Novels of Ngugi", in Wright, Edgar (ed), *Critical Evaluation of African Literature*, Heinemann, London, 1972/ Inscape, Washington, 1976, pp. 95-119.

Ikiddeh, I — "James Ngugi as Novelist", in *African Literature Today No. 2*, Heinemann, London, 1969, pp. 3-10.

---------- — "Ngugi wa Thiong'o: The Novelist as Historian", in B. King & K. Ogungbesan, *A Celebration of Black African Writing*, Ahmadu Bello University Press, Zaria, 1975, pp. 204-216.

Julien, E — "Heroism in *A Grain of Wheat*", in *African Literature Today No. 13*, Heinemann, London, 1983, pp. 136-45.

Kemoli, A M — "The Novels of Ngugi wa Thiong'o" in *Joliso 2*, Nairobi, 1974, pp. 69-85.

Killam, G D — *An Introduction to the Writing of Ngugi*, Heinemann, London, 1980.

---------- — "A Note on the Title of *Petals of Blood*", in *Journal of Commonwealth Literature No. 15*, 1980, pp.125-132.

---------- (ed.) — *Critical Perspectives on Ngugi wa Thiong'o*, Three Continents, Washington, 1984.

----------	"Ngugi wa Thiong'o", in his *The Writing of East and Central Africa*, Heinemann, Nairobi, 1984.
Larson, C R	"The Search for the Past: East and Central African Writing", in *Africa Today, XV, 4*, August/September 1968.
Lewis, P	Review of *A Grain of Wheat* in *Nexus, Vol. 1 (2)*, 1967, pp. 45-46.
Lindfors, B	"Ngugi wa Thiong'o's Early Journalism", in *World Literature Written in English 20.1*, 1981, pp. 23-41.
Lo Liyong, T	*"Weep Not, Child* and *Origin East Africa"*, in his *The Last Word*, East African Publishing House, Nairobi, 1969, pp. 179-186.
Maughan-Brown, D A	"Four Sons of One Father: A Comparison of Ngugi's Earliest Novels with Works by Mwangi, Mangua and Wachira", in *Research in African Literatures 16*, 1985, pp. 179-209.
----------	Review of Cook and Okenimkpe's *Ngugi wa Thiong'o: An Exploration of His Writings*, in *Research in African Literatures 16*, 1985, pp. 283-293 .
----------	"Not Yet the Freedom: The Changing Image of `Mau Mau in Ngugi's Novels", in his *Land, Freedom and Fiction: History and Ideology in Kenya*, Zed Press, London, 1985.
Mbughuni, L A	*"A Grain of Wheat, Song of Lawino, Song of Ocol and Kongi's Harvest"*, in *UMMA, Vol. 5 No. 1*, 1975, pp. 64-74.
----------	"Old and New Drama from East Africa", in *African Literature Today, No. 8*, Heinemann, London, 1976.
Monkman, L	"Kenya and The New Jerusalem", in E. D. Jones (ed.), *African Literature Today No. 7*, 1973, pp. 111-116.
Moore, G	*Twelve African Writers*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1982.
Nazareth, P	*The Black Hermit*, a review, in *Transition 9*, 1968.

---------- "Is *A Grain of Wheat* a Socialist Novel?", in *Literature and Society in Modern Africa*, East African Literature Bureau, Nairobi, 1972, pp. 128-154.

---------- "The Social Responsibility of the East African Writer", in his *The Third World Writer: His Social Responsibility*, Kenya Literature Bureau, Nairobi, 1978.

Ngubiah, S N Discussion of Ngugi's *The River Between*, in C.L. Wanjala (ed.), *Standpoints on African Literature*, Kenya Literature Bureau, Nairobi, 1977.

Nnolim, C E "Background Setting: Key to the Structure of Ngugi's *The River Between*", in *Obsidian 2*, 1976, pp. 20-29. Rpt. in Killam, *Critical Perspectives*, pp. 136-145.

Nureldin, S "Ngugi wa Thiong'o: A Study of His Artistic Vision and Craftsmanship", unpublished PhD thesis, University of Nairobi, 1988.

Nwankwo, C "Sifting the Grain from the Husk: An Overview of Ngugi's Writing", in *The Literary Half-Yearly Vol 25 No. 1*, 1984, pp. 2-15.

Obumselu, E "*A Grain of Wheat*: Ngugi's Debt to Conrad", in *The Benin Review, No. 1*, 1974, pp. 80-91.

Ochola-Ojero, P "Of Tares and Broken Handles, Ngugi Preaches: Themes and Betrayal in *A Grain of Wheat*", in *Busara Vol 8 No. 2*, 1971, pp. 38-46. Rpt. in C.L. Wanjala (ed), *Standpoints on African Literature*, East African Literature Bureau, Nairobi, 1973.

Otu-Ato, S "Tragedy in *The River Between*", in B. Lindfors (ed), *Research in African Literature Vol. 16, No. 2*, University of Texas Press, Austin, 1985, pp. 157-178.

---------- "The Refusal of Agency: The Founding Narrative and Waiyaki's Tragedy in *The River Between*", in B. Lindfors (ed), *Research in African Literature Vol. 16, No. 2*, University of Texas Press, Austin, 1985, pp. 157-178.

Pagnoulle, C — "Ngugi wa Thiong'o's Journey of the Magi: Part 2 of *Petals of Blood* ", in B. Lindfors (ed), *Research in African Literature Vol. 16, No. 2,* University of Texas Press, Austin, 1985, pp. 264-275.

Palmer, E — "Ngugi wa Thiong'o", in his *The Growth of the African Novel*, Heinemann, London, 1979, pp. 288-305.

Peck, R — "Hermits and Saviours, Osagyefos and Healers: Artists and Intellectuals in the Works of Ngugi and Armah", in *Research in African Literatures Vol. 20 No. 1,* University of Texas, Austin, 1989.

Rauch, E — "The Central Male Female Relationship in *The River Between* and *Mission to Kala*", in *Busara 7,* 1975, pp. 42-54.

Ravenscroft, A — "Novels of Disillusion", in *Journal of Commonwealth Literature, No. 1*, 1965, pp. 117-121.

---------- — "James Ngugi: East African Novelist", in P. Paricsy (ed) *Studies in Modern Black African Literature* Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Budapest, 1971, pp. 17-82.

Reed, J — "James Ngugi and the African Novel", in *Journal of Commonwealth Literature, No. 1*, 1965, pp. 117-121.

Rice, M — "*The River Between* - a Discussion", in *English in Africa 2*, 1975, pp. 11-21. Rpt. in Killam, *Critical Perspectives*, pp. 125-135.

Richard, R — "History and Literature: Narration and Time in *Petals of Blood*", in *Echoes du Commonwealth, 6*, 1980-81, pp. 1-36.

Riemenschneider, D — "David Cook and Michael Okenimkpe, *Ngugi wa Thiong'o: An Exploration of His Writings*", review in *World Literature Written in English, Vol. 23 (2)*, 1984, pp. 341-343.

Robson, C B — Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Macmillan, London, 1979.

Roscoe, A — "Prose: Ngugi wa Thiong'o", in his *Uhuru's Fire: African Literature East to South*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1977, pp. 170-190.

Sander, R & Munro, I — "'Tolstoy in Africa: An Interview with Ngugi wa Thiong'o", in *Ba Shiru, 5,1,* 1973, pp. 21-30. Rpt. in Killam, *Critical Perspectives*, pp. 45-57.

Sharma, G N — "Ngugi's Christian Vision: Theme and Pattern in *A Grain of Wheat*", in E. D. Jones (ed), *African Literature Today, 10*, 1979, pp. 167-176.

Sicherman, C M — "Ngugi wa Thiong'o and the Writing of Kenyan History" in *Research in African Literatures Vol. 20 No. 3,* 1989, pp. 347-370.

---------- — *Ngugi wa Thiong'o: A Bibliography of Primary and Secondary Sources 1957-1987*, Hans Zell, London, 1989.

---------- — *Ngugi wa Thiong'o: The Making of a Rebel: A Source Book in Kenyan Literature and Resistance*, Hans Zell, London, 1990.

Soile, S — "Myth and History in Ngugi's *Weep Not, Child*", in *Ife African Studies 1*, 1985, pp. 77-91. Rpt. in Killam, *Critical Perspectives*, pp. 170-181.

Stratton, F — "Narrative Method in the Novels of Ngugi", in E. D. Jones (ed) *African Literature Today, No. 13*, 1983, pp. 122-134.

---------- — "Cyclical Patterns in *Petals of Blood* ", in *Journal of Commonwealth Literature, 15*, 1980, pp. 115-124.

Tejani, B H — "Local Significance and the Importance of the Local Audience in Modern African Writing: Studies on Ngugi, La Guma, Mphahlele, Okara and Peters", unpublished PhD thesis, University of Nairobi, 1973.

Thorpe, M — "Neo-colonial Reaction", review of Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Decolonising the Mind*, in *The Literary Half-Yearly Vol. XXVIII No. 2*, 1978, pp. 231-232.

Wake, C & Burnham, M — "Theatre Today", in *African Theatre Today* , Pitman, London, 1976.

Wandiala, C L — *For Home and Freedom*, Kenya Literature Bureau, Nairobi, 1980.

---------- — *The Season of Harvest: Some Notes on East African Literature*, Kenya Literature Bureau, Nairobi, 1978.

Williams, L — "Religion and Life in James Ngugi's *The River Between*", in E. D. Jones (ed) *African Literature Today, 5*, 1971, pp. 54-65.

C. THEORY AND CRITICISM OF AFRICAN LITERATURE

Amuta, C — *The Theory of African Literature: Implications for Practical Criticism*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1989.

Awonoor, K — *The Breast of the Earth: a Survey of the History, Culture and Literature of Africa South of the Sahara*, Doubleday, Garden City, 1975.

Achebe, C — *Morning Yet on Creation Day*, Doubleday, New York, 1975.

Ashcroft, W D — "The Function of Criticism in a Pluralist World", *New Literature Review, No. 3*, 1978.

Ashcroft, B, Griffiths, G & Tiffin, H — *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures*, Routledge, London-New York, 1989.

Chinweizu, J & Madubuike I — *Towards the Decolonisation of African Literature*, Howard University Press, Washington, 1983.

Dorsinville, M — *Caliban Without Prospero*, Press Porcepic, Erin - Ontario, 1974.

Fanon, F — *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann, Grove, New York, 1967.

Gates, H L (ed) — *Black Literature and Literary Theory*, Methuen, London & New York, 1984.

Griffiths, G — *A Double Exile: African and West Indian Writing between Two Cultures*, Marion Boyars, London, 1978.

Gurr, A & Zirimu, P — *Black Aesthetics*, East African Literature Bureau, Nairobi, 1973.

Gurr, A & Calder, A (eds) — *Writers in East Africa*, Kenya Literature Bureau, Nairobi, 1974.

Gurr, A — *Writers in Exile: the Identity of Home in Modern Literature*, Harvester, Brighton, 1981.

Heywood, C — *Perspectives on African Literature*, Heinemann, London, 1971.

Hower, E — "The Post-Independence Literature of Kenya and Uganda", in *East African Journal Vol. 7 (10)*, 1970, pp. 24-34.

Irele, A — *The African Experience in Literature and Ideology*, Heinemann, London, 1981.

JanMohammed, A — *Manichaean Aesthetics: The Politics of Literature in Colonial Africa*, University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst, 1983.

Jefiyo, B — *The Truthful Lie: Towards a Radical Sociology of African Literature*, New Beacon, London, 1980.

Killam, G D — *African Writers on African Writing*, Heinemann, London, 1973.

King, B & Kolawole, O (eds.) — *A Celebration of Black and African Writing*, Ahmadu Bello University Press, Nigeria / Oxford University Press, London, 1975.

Larson, C R — *The Emergence of African Fiction*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1971.

Memmi, A — *The Coloniser and the Colonised*, Orion Press, New York, 1965.

Nazareth, P — *An African View of Literature*, Northwestern University Press, Evaston, 1974.

---------- — *The Third World Writer: His Social Responsibility*, Kenya Literature Bureau, Nairobi, 1978.

Ngara, E — *Stylistic Criticism and the African Novel*, Heinemann, London, 1982.

--- — *Art and Ideology in the African Novel*, Heinemann, London, 1985.

Okpewho, I — *Myth in Africa*, Cambridge University Press, London, 1983.

Olney, J — *Tell Me Africa: An Approach to African Literature*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1973.

Ong, W J — *Orality and Literacy: The Technologising of the Word*, Methuen, London, 1982.

Palmer, E — *An Introduction to the African Novel*, Heinemann, London, 1972.

--- — "Ngugi's *Petals of Blood*", in *African Literature Today No. 10*, Heinemann, London, 1979, pp. 153-166.

--- — *The Growth of the African Novel*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1979.

Parry, B — "The Problems in Current Theories of Colonial Discourse", in *Oxford Literary Review, 9, Nos. 1 & 2*, 1987.

Slemon, S — "Monuments of Empire: Allegory, Counter-discourse/Post-colonial Writing", in *Kunapipi, 9,3*, 1987.

Soyinka, W — *Myth, Literature and the African World*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1976.

Spivak, G C — *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics*, Methuen, New York and London, 1987.

Wauthier, C — *The Literature and Thought of Modern Africa*, Heinemann, London, 1978.

D. ORAL LITERATURE

Kabira, W M — *The Oral Artist*, Heinemann, Nairobi, 1983.

Kabira, W M & Karega wa Mutahi *Gikuyu Oral Literature*, Heinemann, Nairobi, 1988.

Kenyatta, J *Facing Mount Kenya: The Tribal Life of the Gikuyu*, Secker & Warburg, London, 1938, 1974.

Osabutey-Agyedze, I D *The Principles Underlying The African Religion and Philosophy*, Maillu Publishing House, Nairobi, 1990.

Vansina, J *Oral Traditions as History*, James Currey, London/ Heinemann, Nairobi, 1985.

E. GENERAL REFERENCES

Abuor, C *White Highlands No More*, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1970.

Amsden, A *International Firms and Labour in Kenya, 1945-1970*, Frank Cass, London 1971.

Baxter, E J *Mau Mau: The Terror that has Come to Kenya*, East African News Review, Nairobi, 1950.

Bennett, G *Kenya, a Political History: the Colonial Period*, Oxford University Press, London, 1963.

Bennett, G & Rosberg, C *The Kenyatta Election: Kenya 1960-61*, Oxford University Press, London, 1961.

Bewes, T F C *Kikuyu Conflict, Mau Mau and the Christian Witness*, Highway Press, London, 1953.

Bienen, H *Kenya: The Politics of Participation and Control*, Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1974.

Blundell, M *So Rough a Wind*, Wiedenfeld & Nicholson, London, 1964.

Brett, E A *Colonialism and Underdevelopment in East Africa: The Politics of Economic Change, 1919-1939*, Heinemann, London, 1973.

Buijtenhuijs, R *Mau Mau - Twenty Years After: The Myth and the Survivors*, Mouton, The Hague, 1973.

Carey Jones, N S *Anatomy of Uhuru*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1966.

Clayton, A — *Counter-Insurgency in Kenya, 1952-1960*, Transafrica Publishers, Nairobi, 1976.

Furedi, F — *The Mau Mau War in Perspective*, Heinemann, Nairobi, 1989.

Gatheru, M — *Child of Two Worlds*, Routledge, London, 1964.

Gertzel, C — *The Politics of Independent Kenya, 1963-1968*, East African Publishing House, Nairobi, 1970.

Giceru, M — *Land of Sunshine*, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1958.

Hobley, C W — *Kenya: From Chartered Company to Crown Colony: Thirty Years of Exploration and Administration in British East Africa*, Frank Cass, London, 1970.

Huxley, E — *White Man's Country, 1870-1914 Vols. 1-2*, Praeger, New York, 1967. First published in 1935.

---------- — *The Red Strangers*, Chatto & Windus, London, 1944.

---------- — *Settlers of Kenya*, Highway Press, Nairobi, 1948.

---------- — *Sorcerer's Apprentice*, Chatto & Windus, London, 1948.

---------- — *The Flame Trees of Thika*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1962.

---------- — *The Challenge of Africa*, Aldus, London, 1971.

Huxley, E & Perham, M — *Race and Politics in Kenya*, Faber & Faber, London, 1956. Originally published in 1944.

Itote, W — *Mau Mau General*, East African Publishing House, Nairobi, 1967.

Kaggia, B — *The Roots of Freedom, 1921-1963*, East African Publishing House, Nairobi, 1975.

Kanogo, T M J — *Squatters and the Roots of Mau Mau*, Heinemann, Nairobi, 1987.

Kariuki, J M — *Mau Mau Detainee*, Oxford University Press, London, 1963 / Nairobi, 1975.

Kenyatta, J — *Suffering Without Bitterness*, East African Publishing House, Nairobi, 1971. First published in 1938.

Kitching, G — *Class and Economic Change in Kenya: The Making of an African Petite Bourgeoisie*, Yale University Press, London, 1980.

Lambert, H E — *Kikuyu Social and Political Institutions*. Oxford University Press, London, 1956.

Leakey, L S B — *Mau Mau and the Kikuyu*, Methuen, London, 1952.

---------- — *Defeating Mau Mau*, Methuen, London, 1954.

---------- — *The Southern Kikuyu before 1903*, Academic Press, London, 1971.

Leo, C — *Land and Class in Kenya*. Toronto University Press, Toronto, 1984.

Leys, C — *Underdevelopment in Kenya: The Political Economy of Neo-Colonialism, 1964-1971*, Heinemann, London, 1975.

Maina wa Kinyatti (ed) — *Thunder from the Mountains: Mau Mau Patriotic Songs*, Zed Press, London, 1980.

Mboya, T J — *Freedom and After*, Andre Deutsch, London, 1963.

McGregor Ross, W — *Kenya from Within: a Short Political History*, Frank Cass, London, 1968. first published in 1928.

Mungeam, G H — *British Rule in Kenya, 1895-1912*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1966.

Muriuki, G — *A History of the Kikuyu*, Oxford University Press, Nairobi, 1974.

Oginga Odinga — *Not Yet Uhuru*, Heinemann, London, 1968.

Rawcliffe, D H — *The Struggle for Kenya*, Gollancz, London, 1954.

Sandbrook, R — *Proletarians and African Capitalism: The Kenya Case, 1962-1970*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1975.

Sandbrook, R & Cohen, R (eds) — *The Development of an African Working Class*, Longman, London, 1975.

Singh, M — *History of Kenya's Trade Union Movement to 1952*, East African Publishing House, Nairobi, 1969.

Sorrenson, M P K — *Land Reform in Kikuyu Country*, Oxford University Press, Nairobi, 1967.

---------- — *The Origins of European Settlement in Kenya*, Oxford University Press, London, 1968.

Stoneham, C T — *Mau Mau*, Museum Press, London, 1953.

Tamarkin M — "Social and Political Change in a Twentieth Century African Community in Kenya", unpublished PhD thesis, London University, 1973.

Throup, D W — "The Governorship of Sir Phillip Mitchell in Kenya, 1944-1952", unpublished PhD thesis, Cambridge, 1983.

---------- — "The Origins of Mau Mau", *African Affairs, Vol. 84, No. 336*, 1985, pp. 399-434.

---------- — *Economic and Social Origins of Mau Mau*, Heinemann, Nairobi, 1991.

Tignor, R L — *The Colonial Transformation of Kenya: The Kamba, Kikuyu and Maasai from 1900 to 1939*, Princeton University Press, Princeton-New Jersey, 1976.

Van Zwanenberg, R M A — *Agricultural History of Kenya*, East African Publishing House, Nairobi, 1972.

---------- — *Colonial Capitalism and Labour in Kenya, 1919-1939*, East African Literature Bureau, Nairobi, 1975.

Wasserman, G — *Politics of Decolonization: Kenya Europeans and the Land Use, 1960-65*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1976.

Wolff, R D — *Britain and Kenya, 1870-1930: The Economics of Colonialism*, Transafrica Publishers, Nairobi, 1974.

Wray, J A — *Kenya: Our Newest Colony, Reminiscences, 1882-1912*, Marshall Brothers, London, 1928.