

DIDACTICISM IN THE NOVELS OF NGUGI WA THIONG'O :  
A GRAIN OF WHEAT, PETALS OF BLOOD AND DEVIL ON  
THE CROSS.

by

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A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE UNIVERSITY OF ZAMBIA  
IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE  
DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS IN AFRICAN LITERATURE.

THE UNIVERSITY OF ZAMBIA

Lusaka.

DECLARATION

I, Twisema Shishau Muyoya, hereby declare that this dissertation represents my own work and that it has not been previously submitted for a degree at this or any other university.

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APPROVAL

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## ABSTRACT

Ngugi is one of the most articulate among renowned African writers. He has unequivocally stated, at various forums and in his critical essays, that literature is didactic. Although the specific impact of a work cannot be easily determined in 'tangible terms', Ngugi, like most Marxists, is a firm believer in the potential of literature as an instrument of change in society. His works of fiction have attracted much critical attention and have been the subject of interesting, sometimes heated, debates in African literary circles. The tendency, however, has been to isolate one or two aspects of his works and focus all powers of literary observation and analysis thereon. There, as yet, has not been a thorough treatment of didacticism per se. Few, if any, scholars of African literature have seriously taken on the engaging task of measuring the strength of the didacticism in Ngugi's fiction against his openly stated convictions.

This study attempts, if only in a small way, to break some fresh ground on the scholarship on Ngugi by endeavouring to probe an area that has remained largely unexplored. The first chapter provides the background for the keynote chapters - 2,3 and 4. This initial chapter offers a definition of didacticism, taking into account such aspects as the distinguishing features of a didactic work, types of didacticism and the modes, techniques and devices that may be put to didactic use. The chapter also looks at the attitudes to didacticism before examining Ngugi's own views on didacticism and literature. The next chapter presents an analysis of plot, style, narrative and character and establishes the extent to which each

of these literary elements contribute towards the communication of the author's intended message to his intended readership in A Grain of Wheat. Petals of Blood and Devil on the Cross are given similar treatment in chapters three and four respectively. The conclusion re-states the salient features of the keynote chapters and the general impression that emerges from the study.

It is our hope that this study will stimulate further inquiry into this area not only with respect to Ngugi's works but also those of other African writers. It is our hope, too, that the study will open up debate on the extent to which various literary techniques and devices can further the cause of the author or work against it.

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My sincere appreciation goes to Dr. A.S. Crehan, whose able supervision made the completion of this study a most stimulating, at times exciting, endeavour.

I wish to thank Joseph Mwayu and George Samiselo for assisting with some of the sources; the staff of The University Library (Lusaka) for their patience in locating Journals.

I wish to thank, too, Friday E. Mulenga and Jacob A. Chirwa for a memorable companionship.

As words alone seem inadequate to express my gratitude to my wife Bupe, perhaps only God can reward her and our children -Chiteu, Chendeende and Mpukuta.

DEDICATION

To the memory of my father,  
MPUKUTA DAVID MUYOYA, who  
alone saw the possibilities.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### 1.0 Didacticism - A Definition

Of all the arts it is in literature, more than anywhere else, that didacticism is most predominant and is easily discernible. Even in the beginnings of Greek civilisation<sup>1</sup> the pedagogical function of literature was the subject of political and religious debate. Today the prevalence of state and religious censorship indicates the seriousness with which the authorities view the didactic element in literature. But what exactly is meant by didacticism? What characteristics distinguish a didactic work from those which are non-didactic? What are the fundamental attitudes to didacticism?

The Oxford English Dictionary (Volume III) defines didacticism as the 'practice aiming at the conveyance of instruction.' In the Dictionary of World Literary Terms - Forms, Techniques and Criticism ( Shipley, 1970:85-6) it is defined as the 'belief' that the primary function of a work of art is to 'teach.' Since works of art - particularly those of literature - have some 'moral or normative value' art is didactic, though this will, of course, vary in nature and intensity from one form to another and from work to work. This succinct definition, which finds justification in the need for economy in a dictionary, is clearly inadequate for a detailed study of didacticism in works of fiction such as we intend to carry out below. There is, hence, need not only to define this key term rigorously but also to explore its ramifications which, perhaps, can best be brought out through

a brief survey of a work or two.

Works of fiction in which the 'instructional' element is strongest or is clearly predominant are didactic. A didactic work is one which, whether through the author's conscious efforts or otherwise, explicitly teaches something or influences the reader to think in a particular manner or along a predetermined course. The influence is likely to be stronger where the narrator is intimately linked with both the characters (hence the content) of his narrative and the reader. In some didactic works the narrator will overtly seek to identify with the reader by addressing him directly using the term "reader" (as Swift does in Gulliver's Travels<sup>2</sup>), or "you", or the more intimate "friend." On the other hand, the author will facilitate intimacy with the characters by using the collective pronouns "we", "us", or "our". In such works there is a mutual interaction between author, reader and narrative.

Because it is meant to influence public thought or ends up doing this, a didactic work obliges the reader to make a stand on the issues it raises. He or she is expected to pass some kind of judgement and take sides. For instance, as one reads Charlotte Bronte's Jane Eyre or Chinua Achebe's No Longer At Ease one learns

something of the class discrimination in nineteenth century England and Igbo society of the twentieth century. In Bronte's novel, the heroine, Jane, cannot marry the man she so passionately loves, Mr. Rochester, until the gulf of class separating them can be overcome. Similarly, in Achebe's novel, the marriage between Clara, who belongs to the slave caste of osus, and Obi Okonkwo is, in traditional terms, socially impracticable. Although the opposite may turn out to be the case, one is expected to sympathise<sup>3</sup> with the 'couples' who are, without doubt, victims of a social injustice condoned and perpetuated by the respective societies. Where sympathy is successfully evoked, one is more likely to regard these discriminatory social practices as grossly unjust and perhaps no less oppressive than the prohibition of love and marriage between people of different races - particularly between whites and Africans - in racially segregated South Africa.

These two works are sympathetic to the interests and aspirations of the members of the lower orders of society who, as it were, are socially the least important, politically the least influential and economically the most deprived. In finally marrying off Jane to Rochester, Bronte is using plot to suggest to readers that social and class barriers can be broken down; that the individual can stand against the tyranny of society and emerge triumphant. Bronte is asserting the achievable social equality of all human beings by removing the class barrier superficially separating the master, Rochester, from his servant, Jane. Needless to say, equality - be it political, economic or cultural - is one of the greatest aspirations of people belonging

to the lower classes. By breaking down the artificial barrier between Rochester and Jane, Bronte is, therefore, giving them reason to hope, a cause to live for. While Bronte's novel might be termed positive, Achebe's might be considered negative. In Achebe's story Clara, unlike Jane, does not marry Obi eventually in spite of their love for each other. Society proves too strong and overwhelms the hapless individual. The reader learns that a society set in its ways rarely takes kindly to the violation of what has, over many decades, become its established tradition. If change must come, let it be gradual, and not this single-handed effort of isolated individuals - that would seem to be the message borne out by the proverbs: 'A single finger cannot kill a louse' and 'A finger dipped in oil soils the others.' Change in society is better achieved through collective endeavour, but a social crime committed by an individual will bring embarrassment to the whole community. Obi, therefore, cannot change tradition without the backing of his clansmen who will not allow him to bring shame on their reputable clan.

Although one is championing individuality and positively advocating change, while the other is promoting solidarity and casting social rebellion in a pessimistic frame, both Achebe and Bronte employ plot to focus our attention on the need for social equality among members of various classes, and, perhaps, to make a case for the freedom of individuals ultimately to determine their own lives.

Although in literature various, even conflicting, interpretations are possible, it is observable in our two examples that didactic

works propagate an ideology of one kind or another, one that may be political, economic, cultural, religious or a combination of any of these. For instance, the social ideology which upholds individual freedom and social equality (as in Bronte's novel) may be seen as constituting the rudiments of a grand political scheme whose ultimate goal is the creation of a society founded on equality, one that guarantees personal freedom. On the other hand, the failure to break down traditional barriers in Achebe's novel might be interpreted as advancing the cause of the conservatives whose interests lie in the preservation of custom even where this has outlived its usefulness.

Achebe's and Bronte's novels exemplify two types of didacticism. Achebe's conforms with traditional moral didacticism such as is commonly found in most oral narratives. This kind of didacticism teaches what is generally accepted - universal principles, moral truths, social rules, traditionally-governed values et cetera. Bronte's, on the contrary, is a roman a these.<sup>4</sup> This form of didacticism preaches something whose validity is yet to be established. It has, therefore, a case to argue; to prove what is as yet not understood and generally accepted as valid. The second, Bronte's, is obviously the more challenging of the two. This is the challenge Dickens and Ousmane take up in Hard Times and God's Bits of Wood respectively.

The didacticism in Hard Times and God's Bits of Wood stares us in the face. Both aim at instruction and belong to the protest tradition. Ousmane assumes an anti-establishment stance on behalf of the workers for whom he is writing while Dickens' uncompromising

treatment of the philosophy of utilitarianism captures some of the fears of the middle and lower classes who, in the face of industrialization, felt vulnerable to the dehumanizing influence of overpragmatism in a machine-oriented society. Both novelists avoid ambiguity - Dickens is clearly attacking utilitarianism while Ousmane's sympathies obviously lie with the workers and their families. Dickens' unrelenting attack on utilitarianism is effectively rendered by the highly rhetorical narrative. His satirical characterisation brings the whole philosophy of utilitarianism into ridicule and by denying Louisa a satisfactory adult life and letting Tom degenerate into a 'whelp' Dickens uses plot to achieve his didactic purpose. Ousmane, too, puts plot to good use by awarding eventual victory to the workers after a protracted, sometimes violent, labour dispute. His narrative, which favours scene over summary and is conversation-based,<sup>5</sup> allows for the depiction of the community of workers and their families as an active rather than a passive mass of people without resolve and indifferent to their own plight.

From these few examples we can see that didacticism is that attribute in a work of literature which embodies some form of teaching inspired and informed by a particular ideology.<sup>6</sup> The author often assumes this ideological posture on behalf of those for whom he purports to be writing. The teaching is usually meant for particular groups of people who, more often than not, are economically, politically and culturally homogeneous. The message to these selected sections of the population may be political, moral, social or religious. To convey his message the writer

usually has to rely on a number of literary techniques which he considers most suitable for his didactic purpose. He may, for instance, infuse his work with flat characters who are stereotypes representing 'bad' and 'good.' The 'bad' characters, like Konnie in Ekwensi's Lokotown, rarely escape punishment, while the 'good', such as Bintu in the same story, are rewarded. The writer may elect to criticise society through satire and irony as Armah does in The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born and Oyono in Houseboy<sup>7</sup>. Unrestrained exposure, such as we encounter in Ngugi's I Will Marry When I Want, might suit the writer better. But whatever the techniques he settles for, the task of the didactic writer is to identify problems for the benefit of the reader and, perhaps, to suggest ways, if not of eliminating, at least of alleviating the hardships. The writer may do this through suasion or provocation, directly or indirectly, crudely or subtly.

Analysis of the author's methods (and how these relate to the intended reader) is central to any serious investigation of didacticism in works of fiction. The author's handling of plot, narrative, character and style, among other devices, will determine the didactic impact of his work. We shall, therefore, endeavour to determine the extent to which Ngugi exploits these four devices in A Grain of Wheat, Petals of Blood and Devil on the Cross in chapters two, three and four. But as we have so far only dealt with the definition of the key term we must now consider the attitudes, especially Ngugi's, to didacticism.

As noted earlier, literary didacticism has, from the earliest

times, occasioned much debate and generated just as much interest among politicians and sociologists as it has among scholars of literature and writers themselves. Attitudes to and arguments about didacticism in literature have sprung from two main premises - the esthetic and the didactic.

### 1.1 Esthetics.

Entertainment has been widely<sup>8</sup> acknowledged as an important function of art in general and of literature in particular. Enthusiasts, among them writers and critics, would discuss works of literature only in terms of their pleasing qualities. For esthetes, works of literature are 'self-sufficient, need serve no ulterior purpose, and should not be judged by moral, political or other non-aesthetic standards' (cited in Preminger, 1975:6). In their view, 'The whole point of "creative" writing was gloriously useless, an "end in itself" loftily removed from any social purpose' (Eagleton, 1983:21). This approach was aptly expressed in the phrase 'Art for art's sake' coined by Coussin, one of the first French esthetes. In Britain Wilde and Pater were among the leading exponents of estheticism. Pater, who had considerable influence on Wilde's interpretation of literature, 'urged the sensitive individual ... to find the most precious moments of his life in pursuit of his sensations raised to the pitch of "poetic passion, the desire of beauty, the love of art for art's sake"' (cited in Preminger, 1975:7). For Wilde, there was only one way of looking at art, which, he contended, 'never expresses anything but itself.' Included among the esthetes are Gustave Flaubert, Henry James and James Joyce.

Flaubert embraced art with almost religious fervour. Artists, he

argued, must wholly dedicate themselves to art. For him, art was a powerful phenomenon which submitted to no authority and knew no boundaries - racial, cultural, political et cetera. Flaubert(1979: 6) made a passionate appeal to fellow artists:

Let us devote ourselves to Art, which is greater than nations, kings and crowns; art is always there, held aloft by enthusiasm with its divine diadem.

The artist should desist from subordinating art to social, moral or political issues. To contend that art should 'convey some moral or other teaching' is to misunderstand it entirely for, in the words of Wilde(1891:87), 'Lying, the telling of beautiful<sup>(sic)</sup> untrue things, is the proper aim of art.' The claim that art could be used for didactic purposes was without foundation.

Both James and Joyce, like Flaubert before them, believed that a work of art 'owed its primary allegiance to itself' ; it had an 'independent life' and could, therefore, hardly be exploited for propaganda. The main aim of art, according to James, was to be 'amusing, to be interesting' culminating in 'my and your fun.' Flaubert(1979:198) was more succinct.

What seems to me the highest ... achievement of Art is not to make us laugh or cry, nor to arouse our lust or rage, but to do what nature does - that is to set us dreaming.

Joyce(1934: 57), too, believed that emotions induced by art were different from sympathy, anger, sorrow, happiness, love, hate, envy, et cetera. In literature the 'emotion we experience is the esthetic emotion, wherein the mind is arrested and raised above desire and loathing.'<sup>9</sup> James(1907:345) argued that 'good' art ought to produce a 'dream-effect' and he appealed to his readers: 'I am moved to ask but an earnest invitation to the reader to dream in

my company.'

For Flaubert, James and Joyce, the essence of art lies not in reason, but in the esthetic emotion it induces. Writers must find inspiration and guidance in this important attribute alone. Since the beauty of a work is largely determined by form (if it can be seen as being distinct from content), form is far more important than content. They all attached great importance to form and, like Archibald Macleish, they believed that art 'should not mean but be.' A work of art was not to be admired for its sincere portrayal of 'social misery, dreadful dramas, the monotony of life...' (cited in Brombert 1966:8). For Flaubert, 'only the appropriate use of language and rhythm can provide the texture and structure which alone make up literary beauty.' He so loathed preoccupation with content that if such a thing were possible, he would have been among the first to discard it altogether. In a letter to his friend, Louise Colet, in 1852, Flaubert (cited in Steegmuller 1979:144)

What seems beautiful to me, what I should like to write is a book about nothing, dependent on nothing external, which would be held together by the internal strength of its style.... a book which would have almost no subject, or at least in which the subject is almost invisible.

In 'pure' art Flaubert saw 'no such thing as subject - style itself being an absolute manner of seeing things.' In spite of this attitude, Flaubert did in fact depict the 'social misery' of everyday life so well that, like Balzac, it was the realism in his works that brought him literary fame.

For James and Joyce, too, content only assumed significance because it provided the 'raw material' for form. But like Flaubert, neither could dismiss content outright - the best they could do

was to subordinate it to style. Acknowledging the inevitability of content, James (1907:xvii) says that unless a work has esthetic appeal, nothing of its subject 'could possibly transpire in the mind of the reader.' Joyce (quoted in Kyf, 1964:195) believed that no work of literature could 'function as valid and significant commentary on our world and ourselves' without esthetic appeal. If there is room for content and subject matter, then there is also a place for the non-esthetic in the discussion of literature.

## 1.2 Beyond Esthetics.

In so far as art is the product of human creative labour, it has cultural significance, without which its existence has no justification. Literature plays a significant role in society. For instance, in preliterate societies oral literatures effectively functioned as a vehicle for the socialisation of the young. Oral narratives helped to regulate conduct by admonishing bad behaviour while lauding and encouraging exemplary behaviour. Most of these narratives, especially in African societies, instructed the young in matters of etiquette and strove to rehabilitate the deviants. In much the same way children's literature performs a similar function in literate communities. Apart from imparting norms and values to the young, it helps to hold in check anti-social behaviour deemed injurious to society by reminding individuals to regulate their own conduct. In her book, Fact and Fiction, Rockwell (1974:4) observes that

fiction is not only a representative of social reality, but also a necessary functional part of social control ....It plays a large part in the socialisation of infants, in the expression of official norms such as law and religion, in the conduct of politics, and in general gives symbols and modes of life to the

population particularly in those less easily defined but basic areas such as norms, values, personal and interpersonal behaviour.

It is, therefore, not surprising that religious and political authorities cannot ignore or simply dismiss literature as a mere pleasurable hobby. By their insistence on censorship (no doubt a time-consuming and sometimes expensive venture) they acknowledge that fiction is not 'merely a pastime which temporarily excites the emotions, but that it may have some lasting effect on the opinions of the population and consequently affect their social behaviour' (Rockwell, 1974:29). Politicians have, from time to time, interpreted certain works of literature as pernicious to the political and social stability of their societies. Indeed, where censorship has been inadequate, writers have been incarcerated. This reaction suggests that the authorities do not share the esthetes' view that literature cannot teach. Their fears, both real and unfounded, confirm that literature can perhaps be seen to be instrumental in 'helping man to recognize and change social reality.' It is this positive potential for works of literature to set people thinking about issues they have always taken for granted or have come to accept unquestioningly which Tolstoy, Achebe and Brecht, among others, see as the foremost parafictional attribute of literature.

Rather than transcending life, or providing a temporary escape from everyday woes and drudgery, Tolstoy argued, art performs the more important function of bringing the realities of life closer, thus enabling man to take a closer look at himself and his environment. Essentially moralistic in his approach, Tolstoy (1898:10)

argued that 'good' art should not be merely descriptive, impassively reflecting society to man.

verbal compositions are good and necessary, not when they describe what happened, but when they show what ought to be; not when they tell what people have done, but when they set value on what is good and evil.

The writer is a kind of guide who invites the reader to join him in identifying the virtues of societies while isolating and diagnosing its ills. Achebe likens this guide to a teacher whose responsibility it is to lead the reader back into the right path. Responding to a question during an interview he gave to Nwoga in 1964, Achebe unequivocally declared: 'I saw my role, this is one of the roles of the writer, as teacher.' As a writer, one has an obligation to one's society. One of the tasks of the African novelist in the early 1960s was the re-orientation of the African's attitude to his own culture. The writer had to help the African reassert himself, he had to help Africa, in Okot p'Bitek's (1973:vii) words, 're-examine herself critically .... discover her true self, and rid her self of all "apemanship".' It is this blind 'apemanship' which Achebe (1964:8) referred to in his discussion of the writer's role.

He has the responsibility to teach his audience that there is nothing shameful about the harmattan, that it is not only daffodils that can make a fit subject for poetry but palm trees and so on.

Achebe's concerns, like those of Tolstoy, are basically moralistic, aiming at separating wrong from right, evil from good. Although he saw the chief function of art as lying beyond 'pure' esthetics, Brecht was more radical in his approach. To conceptualize art in purely esthetic terms was for Brecht (1965:96) to underrate its full measure and to ignore its real value.

To describe art as the realm of the beautiful is to set about it in too passive all-embracing a way.

According to Brecht, we can only begin to understand art when we 'get rid of the conviction that art cannot be appreciated till one abandons sobriety and approaches intoxication.' A 'good' work, instead of transporting the reader to a dream-world, must involve the reader in decision-making and call upon his power of judgement. The audience, or readers ought to take a clearly defined stand from which they can define for themselves 'good' and 'bad' elements before finally judging life as it is presented to them in the work and then relate this judgement to their own reality. Brecht(1957:71) expects the readers or audience to say:

I'd never thought it - That's not the way - That's extraordinary, hardly believable - It's got to stop - the sufferings of this man appal me, because they are unnecessary - That's great art: nothing obvious in it - I laugh when they weep, I weep when they laugh.

For Brecht, therefore, mere moralising is not in itself enough. The reader must proceed further into the realm of positive remedial action after he has been alienated.<sup>10</sup> As for the artist, he must not, like Achebe and Tolstoy, be contented with the mere blowing of his moral trumpet and the cataloguing of social injustices. Commenting on his own time, Brecht(1957:75) observed:

Undoubtedly, there were some painful discrepancies in our environment, circumstances that were barely tolerable, and this not only on account of moral considerations. It is not moral considerations that make hunger, cold and oppression hard to bear. Similarly the object of our inquiries was not to arouse moral objections to such circumstances ... but to discover the means for their elimination.

Unlike Achebe and Tolstoy, Brecht found in art a useful revolutionary ally. By enlightening the reader without necessarily passing judgement on his behalf ( this is a significant departure from

Ngugi's posture as we shall see later) art enables man to understand his environmental conditions of life better and so to discover ways of changing those conditions.

Brecht, Achebe and Tolstoy all emphasize, each in his own fashion, that didacticism is the most important function of literature. Brecht(1957:80) dismisses the esthetes' claim that didacticism robs drama of its beauty; of its entertaining qualities.

For theatre remains theatre even when it is didactic, as long as it is good theatre it is also entertaining.

The esthetes, however, are totally uncompromising towards didacticism. They contend that any work that purports to be didactic is necessarily unesthetic; that it has little, if any, beauty and deserves to be dismissed as propagandist. Brecht disdainfully refers to the esthetes as 'servants of the word.' The good writer, Brecht(1965:94) urged, should never be obsessed with stylistic perfectionism but should use his craft, like the surgeon uses his scalpel, efficiently and with good effect, for 'The surgeon who has heavy responsibilities needs the little scalpel to lie lightly in his hand.' Ngugi Wa Thiong'o is one novelist who has deliberately delegated to himself such 'heavy' responsibility.

### 1.3 Commitment: Ngugi Wa Thiong'o on Didacticism.

Ngugi Wa Thiong'o has explicitly stated at various forums that literature has great potential as an instrument for socio-political change. Ngugi(1981b:6) proclaims that literature

does shape our attitudes to life, to the daily struggle with nature, the daily struggles within a community, and the daily struggle with our individual souls and selves.

Like Achebe, Ngugi believes that literature cannot be innocent

of political, economic and cultural realities. The writer, like his trade, is held captive by what Achebe calls the 'burning issues of the day.' But it is typical Maoist<sup>11</sup> reasoning that Ngugi(1981b:ii) echoes when he concludes, without reservation, that

literature cannot escape from the class power structures that shape our everyday life: Here the writer has no choice. Whether or not he is aware of it, his works reflect one or more aspects of the intense economic, political, cultural and ideological struggles in society. (My emphasis)

Though a perpetual 'prisoner,' literature does not merely reflect society's 'intense struggles'; it is not an impassive mirror that merely throws back only what is before it - no more, no less. Ngugi (1983:57) defines literature as

a form of knowledge about reality acquired through a pile of images. But these images are not neutral. The images given us by the arts try to make us not only see and understand the world of man and nature, apprehend it, but to see it and understand it in a certain way, or from the angle of vision of the artist.

This definition reveals one of Ngugi's rhetorical devices - piling up of images; repetition of words and phrases or even clauses - a device he uses (as we shall see in the following chapters) both in his critical writing and in his fiction to ensure that his points sink home. The definition also explains Ngugi's attitude to his readers whom, we might say, he regards as a flock waiting to be led out of bondage. Unlike Brecht who wants the audience or the readers to think critically and independently and to find their own solutions, Ngugi sees the writer's position as a special one because the writer has a 'better' vision of society; the writer has the answers which he may write on the 'blackboard' in big capital letters. But the writer should not, according to Achebe's

recent stand, 'prescribe remedies.' Achebe(1987:14) senses danger in the 'certitude' associated with a teacher( Ngugi's view of a writer).

when a man thinks he knows the answer to everything and all you have to do is abandon everything and follow him, then you are in deep trouble.

When this(accepting to be led) happens, Brecht(1957:71) says, 'it means any attempt to understand the world has been given up.' Ngugi understands the world in terms of polarities - good and evil, love and hate, wealth and poverty, exploiter and exploited, oppressor and oppressed et cetera. Literature, in Ngugi's view, often chooses one or the other of these poles; 'it is partisan: it takes sides.' It follows, too, that the writer cannot stand aloof and claim neutrality in the on-going struggle between the privileged classes and the underprivileged peasants and workers. Writers, Ngugi(1983:69) argues, have

to choose whether they will use their art in the service of the exploiting, oppressing classes ... or in the service of the masses engaged in a fierce struggle against human degradation and oppression.

His own stand is unequivocal: 'I have indicated my preference. Let our pens be the voice of the people.' For Ngugi(1981a:xi) there has been no nobler cause than this: 'to write for, speak for and work for the lives of peasants and workers was the highest call of patriotic duty.'

Though a self-appointed spokesman who has given himself the mandate to speak and write on behalf of peasants and workers, Ngugi's thought and action are not typical of them. The views propagated in A Grain of Wheat, Petals of Blood and Devil on the Cross are clearly Ngugi's. The arguments, revolutionary or otherwise, advanced

One finds a clear parallel between the readership of Devil on the Cross and Dickens' (sometimes a heavily didactic writer) Victorian middle class readership. Dickens' novels were read in families with the literate member of the family reading out aloud to the rest. This, no doubt, conditioned the kind of novel Dickens wrote and one might anticipate a similar development in Ngugi's future<sup>12</sup> writing. But will Ngugi strive to broaden the scope of his readership?

It is evident from the author's own testimony that his readership was clearly a special one which did not, as it were, embrace all workers and peasants of Kenya. The oral actualizations Ngugi appears to take pride in did, in fact, exclude peasants and workers from non-Gikuyu-speaking sections of the Kenyan population - the Luo, Luhya, Kamba, Embu, Meru, Kisii, Kalenjin, Kipsigis, Majikenda, Turkana, Nandi, Masai, Ogaden, Tugen, Elegy and Swahili. Arguably, one could contend that the use of Gikuyu might have been even more exclusive than English which, admittedly, imposes its own constraints that render A Grain of Wheat and Petals of Blood inaccessible and leads Riemenschneider(1984:84) to the conclusion that 'although Kenyan peasants and workers rediscover themselves in the action' of the novels they are alienated by the 'literary means and language.' Because of the choice of the literary mode, the didacticism in A Grain of Wheat, Petals of Blood and Devil on the Cross probably is defective as far as the majority of Kenyan workers and peasants are concerned because, as Eagleton (1983:80) remarks,

*The kind of reader whom literature is going to affect most profoundly is one already equipped with the 'right'*

*most profoundly is one*

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kind of capabilities and responses, proficient in operating certain critical techniques and recognizing certain literary conventions.

Perhaps we should add here that writing aimed at specific groups would make the illiterate among them aware of their inadequacies and thus possibly inspire them to learn to read for themselves rather than be held to ransom by the professional readers or depend entirely on their literate relatives who occasionally might feel disinclined to oblige them. Having learned to read they might then strive to acquire a literary sophistication that will enable them to enjoy and benefit fully from the writer's *didacticism*.

Literarily ill-equipped and generally handicapped, as they presently are, by the language of the works - be it English or Gikuyu - the three novels are, we shall argue, endangered by *didactic redundancy*. Ngugi seeks to avoid this, however, and attempts to make his works discursive and highly rhetorical. The use of motifs and outright repetition does improve the chance of the novels' major concerns coming through. This approach may only be partially successful as the unsophisticated peasants and workers might still fail to grasp the basic themes. The impact of the Kamiriithu production of I Will Marry When I Want suggests that perhaps the novel is not the best and most effective way of communicating with peasants and workers.<sup>13</sup> Ngugi does acknowledge that the novel is not the most suitable literary mode for the underprivileged poor peasants and workers the majority of whom are, at best, only semi-literate. But since one may achieve one's didactic aim by instructing either the victims or the erring party,

Ngugi(1983:69) is aware that his novels can function

to increase the anxieties of oppressive regimes ...  
to 'murder their sleep' by constantly reminding them  
of their crimes against the people and making them  
know they are being seen.

A reading of the novels reveals the nature of their implied readership. A Grain of Wheat reaches out for a Kenyan(African) patronage and does not exclude a white readership. Petals of Blood seems to suit radical students best but can also be read by the Kenyan(African) bourgeoisie so that they 'know they are being seen.' The language of Devil on the Cross (original version) makes it appropriate for a literate Gikuyu readership consisting of workers and peasants. The English version and the nature of its content draws in students who, in Ngugi's view, ought to take up their position beside the peasants and workers in the struggle against neo-colonialism. Also drawn in are the Kenyan bourgeoisie because Ngugi wants to 'murder their sleep.' But to what extent does Ngugi's handling of plot, narrative, character and his choice of style contribute towards the achievement of his didactic aim?

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. See, for instance, the section that deals with the history of didacticism in J.T. Shipley ed. , Dictionary of World Literary Terms - Forms, Techniques and Criticism and R.F. Egan, The Genesis of the Theory of 'Art for Art's Sake'
2. The actual words Swift uses are: 'The Gentle Reader.'
3. A review of Jane Eyre in Fraser, December, 1849(p. 692) reads:  

We took up Jane Eyre one winter's evening, somewhat piqued at the extravagant commendations we had heard and sternly resolved to be as critical as Croker. But as we read on we forgot both commendations and criticism, identified ourselves with Jane in all her troubles, and finally married Mr. Rochester at four in the morning.
4. A roman a these is a thesis novel supporting a certain theory which may or may not be new.
5. There is some form of conversation on almost every one of this novel's 245 pages.
6. By ideology we mean a way of looking at and understanding the world; the laws governing human relationships and the set of values developed on the basis of this world view.
7. One can think of several examples which would include Beti's The Poor Christ of Bomba and Soyinka's Kongi's Harvest.
8. Both Ngugi and Brecht (and others who advocate didacticism) do not deny the importance of entertainment in works of art.
9. Though uttered by Stephen Dedalus these views are Joyce's. Among the functions a character performs in a novel is acting as a vehicle for the author's views. Forster(1927), Booth(1961), Boulton(1975), Harvey(1965) offer interesting discussions on this aspect of literature. Also see Baker(1950-1).
10. See Brecht on Theatre 136-140 for a full description of the alienation effect.
11. Ngugi even quotes from Mao. See Writers in Politics pp. 6-7.
12. Ngugi has recently published a novel in Gikuyu - Matigari Njirugi which means: Those who survived the Bullets.
13. Like Ousmane, Ngugi has shown interest in cinema which he considers a more effective way of reaching the peasants and workers.

## CHAPTER TWO

A Grain of Wheat is the story of a village community caught in the grips of an economic conflict that quickly assumes a political dimension and degenerates into armed confrontation between the Colonial Government forces and the self-proclaimed land freedom army - later known as Mau Mau.<sup>1</sup> The villagers face three choices: to actively espouse the Mau Mau cause; to offer assistance to the colonial authorities; or to play a double role without being caught by one or the other of the contending foes. Either of the first two choices seems a safer choice than the third. One could positively contribute to the Mau Mau effort either by enlisting with the fighting forces or by retaining civilian status to obtain and supply intelligence information, weapons and ammunition; to provide food, clothing and, occasionally, refuge for fighters on the run. Cooperation with the Colonial authorities, on the other hand, could take the form of secretly spying and informing on Mau Mau activists and Mau Mau operations, or of overt involvement by joining the anti-Mau Mau squads such as the homeguards, police or army. The third alternative demands both nerve and cunning and offers future security regardless of which side wins the war. The adventures of such dual role-playing would, most certainly, add greater intrigue to the plot but Ngugi simply settles for straightforward dichotomy<sup>2</sup> in his characterisation. The plot of A Grain of Wheat becomes complex because of a careful blending and intricate interweaving of the lives of all the major characters.

Kihika, a revolutionary leader of one of the Mau Mau units, confides in Mugo who then betrays him, through John Thompson, to

the colonial authorities. Kihika's sister, Mumbi, inadvertently induces Mugo's confession. Mumbi marries Gikonyo, who confesses the Mau Mau oath to secure his release from detention. Gikonyo's long-standing rival, Karanja, not only confesses the same oath but also turns into a loyalist so that he may remain within Mumbi's reach and it is on his account that she falls into dishonour.

Also drawn into this web of relationships are Kihika's faithful lieutenants, General R. and Koinandu who, following Mugo's stunning public confession, carry out Old Testament justice - an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, a life for a life - and some significant white characters. Lieutenant Koinandu rapes Dr. Lynd who, several years later, narrates the ordeal to John Thompson. Thompson becomes the District Commissioner (Thabai and Rungei) following the death of Thomas Robson at the hands of Kihika. Fate draws the lives of Thompson and Mugo together. It is to Thompson that Mugo volunteers information about Robson's killer. Mugo and Thompson come face to face again at Rira detention camp where the latter, as officer-in-charge, obliges himself to personally interrogate the detainees who include the former. Thompson's wife, Margery, 'entertains' Karanja and for a few fleeting moments even contemplates greater intimacy. The 'thrill' stimulated by Karanja triggers off Margery's memories of her affair with the late Dr. Van Dyke.

Karanja, however, has more important links with Thompson whom, as a symbol of colonial power and white dominance, he considers an 'invincible' insurance against retribution from Mau Mau survivors and sympathisers. While his relationship with Thompson is carefully thought out and deliberately sought after, his relationship with

Mugo is purely circumstantial. If Mugo's reputation absolves him, in the eyes of the villagers, of any possible complicity in Kihika's betrayal, Karanja practically invites scorn and suspicion by openly and gleefully embracing the colonial regime. General R. and Lieutenant Koinandu even plot, on the strength of this suspicion, his return to Rungei so that he may publicly confess his part in Kihika's betrayal.

The picture that emerges from this intricate and carefully interwoven plot is one of a well-knit community in which individual thought and action, conscious or otherwise, is directly motivated and overtly influenced by the behaviour of others. The life of an individual character always affects, and is affected by, those of others but, in turn, his own decisions limit the range of choices open to his colleagues. The relationship between cause and effect is thus clearly established in the novel. The author endeavours to explain the important decisions and actions of individual characters in terms of their personal motivation and extrinsic pressures through such narrative means as analepsis.<sup>3</sup> These influence the reader's final judgement,

If Ngugi's intention was to write a 'moving story full of sympathy for the characters'(Ngara,1982:96) then, in Cook's (1977: 98) view, the plot helps him to attain that goal.

*... a powerful plot it is - those whom we might have pilloried as "guilty" are already within the ambit of our sympathetic concern, and we are in a position to compare, in their favour, the pressures upon them and the struggles they have undergone with those of externally 'blameless' characters.*

*'Powerful' or not, the plot certainly does create an atmosphere which cries out for the reader's sympathetic appreciation of its characters' faults. Guided by a fundamental interest in the*

complex nature of human relationships, their concomitants and ramifications, the plot finds justification in Ngugi's (1972:31) authorial concern:

I write about people; I am interested in their hidden lives; their fears and their hopes, their loves and their hates, and how the very tension in their hearts affects their daily contacts with other men; how, in other words, the emotional stream of the man within interacts with social reality.

With its numerous analepses and abundant detail unmistakably linking effect to cause, the plot of A Grain of Wheat does serve the author's psychological purpose. There is no doubt that the novel teaches a number of lessons. Through his handling of plot, Ngugi shows us that no individual can cut himself off from his community and escape involvement in its affairs. Involvement in community affairs calls for sacrifice and dedication. Decisions must be taken and not just once but throughout one's life. Failure to take sides, as a result of indecision, necessarily turns one into a foe, for, like Jesus, Ngugi believes that 'he who is not with me is against me.' We also learn that we are basically social beings and that our actions affect others whose behaviour, in turn, influences us. Perhaps even more important, Ngugi shows, through a series of betrayals, that no one is innocent. This reminds one of the scribes and pharisees (John 8:3-11) who, intent on punishing an adulterous woman, found themselves at a loss when they were challenged by Jesus: 'Let him who has not sinned be the first to cast a stone at this woman.' Like the scribes and pharisees, all the major characters in A Grain of Wheat are guilty and, perhaps, we might have discovered a flaw in Kihika had the author allowed us to know him directly - not through the eyes of the other characters - and intimately. If the society of A Grain of Wheat is guilty because its members are guilty, then its salvation lies

in the repentance of each of those members. This outlook conforms with bourgeois humanism which places the individual at the centre of everything, society is thus understood in terms of its individual members. Any change, therefore, must first occur in the individual and then in society. This bourgeois-humanist approach makes the explication of the failings of individual characters and the subsequent confessions a major preoccupation in the novel.

To begin with, it could be argued that 'issues', as such, receive less attention than characters, and that events only assume significance to the extent that they highlight a trait or because of their impact on individual characters, as Ngara(1982:87) observes:

The writer focuses our attention not on events as abstractions but on their effects on the individual soul and individual mind, and on person-to-person relationships.

The reader encounters the characters - Mugo, Mumbi, Kihika, Gikonyo, Karanja, Warui, Wambui, Wanjiko, Thompson, Margery, Dr. Lynd et cetera - as individualised beings first of all, and less as representatives of a class or stratum of a class. The sympathetic concern, where it is evoked, is for the characters as individuals. If indeed one does end up feeling compassion for a character, it is( except in one instance which we shall discuss later) not because that character belongs to the underprivileged classes of workers and peasants, but because he is a member of the fallible human race. For instance, class issues have very little, if any, relevance to Mugo's act of treachery, Gikonyo's and Karanja's confessions, Mumbi's and Margery's infidelity. Between them, these different types and shades of betrayal constitute the

core of the plot and yield the bulk of its details. If one is inclined not to judge Mumbi's infidelity too harshly given Karanja's persistence and calculated slyness, it is because she is a woman - vulnerable and frail as all humans are. But such is not the case when Gikonyo and his cooperative are swindled out of purchasing Mr. Brown's Green Hill Farm. Gikonyo's failure to secure the farm has little to do with his humanity, but everything to do with economically-motivated business interests. However, the didactic potential of this event is not fully realised, since it receives very scant treatment - the MP remains anonymous, little more than a title, and his motivation a matter for conjecture. The whole episode takes up, altogether, no more than two pages at most in this two-hundred-page novel, much of which is devoted to Mugo, who is in no way directly linked to the 'grand betrayal'<sup>4</sup> of the peasants and workers by the new political elite. Since the plot is so handled as to make the readers feel compassion for certain characters before they are identified as guilty' (Cook and Okenimkpe, 1983:69-70), A Grain of Wheat is a novel about people as individuals; about how such historical events as the Mau Mau Uprising influence, for better or for worse, the lives of individuals. This concern with the lives of people, of characters, entails the kind of empathetic involvement which may have an adverse effect on some reader's involvement in the plot. In A Grain of Wheat some of the suspense is lost as a result of the author's preoccupation with empathy. Although bourgeois humanism demands that we begin with the individual, Mugo's private admission of his crime before the public confession reduces the suspense in the novel.

Mugo's confession to a most unsuspecting, awed crowd of admirers is the ultimate climax in the novel's plot. If the surprise and shock is complete and real for the villagers (except Mumbi), it is not so for the reader, for whom his earlier private disclosure to Mumbi pre-empted the climactic public confession of the element of mystification. By confessing first to the sister of the man he betrayed, Mugo has already taken the most decisive step. Self-revelation before the village gathering is, by comparison, a small matter: after all, everyone may eventually learn the truth from Mumbi. Having confirmed<sup>5</sup> Mugo's guilt prior to the public show, the reader anticipates, if not Mugo's impending self-exposure, then at least the public discovery of his crime.

... we all vaguely expected that something extraordinary would happen. It was not exactly a happy feeling; it was more a disturbing sense of inevitable doom.(188)

Indeed, Mugo's doom. Given this portentous observation, and aware of Mugo's hand in Kihika's death, it is an unperceptive reader who will move on to encounter the 'climax' without diminished interest. For the perceptive reader, who has been picking up hints of Mugo's possible guilt, what might otherwise have been a moment of heightened release simply melts into semi-climax, perhaps even anti-climax for some. Mugo's last act of 'courage' cannot be interpreted only in terms of incomparable heroic fortitude; it might, for all we know, have been the last dignified effort of a man without a choice (Mumbi could have revealed his crime), a man who has resigned himself to fate, a man who 'perceives that all struggle is useless. You are condemned to die. Let the sword come quickly.'(117)

As we come to the end of our discussion of plot we surely cannot fail to notice a contradiction (which we shall examine in detail in the discussion of character) that arises from the plot. Since no one is innocent, it is imperative, if we are to continue living together, that we learn to accommodate the shortcomings of others; to forgive one another, for forgiveness is the basis of reconciliation, as Gikonyo and Mumbi's case demonstrates. But this spirit of forgiveness is counteracted by the Old Testament justice meted out to Mugo after his confession. Karanja, too, is not pardoned by his community and at the end of the novel, the unforgiving community renders him 'homeless.' Is Ngugi saying we can forgive and yet not forgive? This contradiction apart, the plot of the novel is too subtle for the work to have much overt didacticism. If, then, the didacticism is not easily discernible, is it made explicit by the narrative method?

Although the actual events of A Grain of Wheat span little more than the five days preceding independence, the omniscient narrator traces the history of political struggle in Kenya from the Uhuru celebrations in 1963 down to pre-colonial semi-legendary times, with primary focus on the most turbulent period - the 1950s - during which agitation for land reforms and demands for political emancipation became most pronounced. It is from this period of increased militancy that the author-narrator draws the bulk of his details which he carefully blends into the events of the five days leading to Kenya's independence. The process of integrating past with present, of tying the latter to the former, has been described by many<sup>6</sup> as a variation of the 'flashback' technique, but some

consider this term inadequate if not altogether inappropriate. The patterning of events and their time sequencing, they argue, provide not for mere backward and forward movement in time but for a complex series of parallels of reminiscences which are of central importance to the work. While nomenclature is, to all intents and purposes important, the actual method and function of fusing past and present ought to command the greater part of our interest.

In A Grain of Wheat the backward transpositions in both time and events are facilitated mainly by the need to elucidate some new or unknown concept or to provide background information for some event. For instance, at the end of chapter one the term 'party' is casually introduced. The reader cannot help asking: What is 'the party,' who is 'the 'party,' and why the 'party' anyway? It is obviously to satisfy this deliberately cultivated curiosity that the extradiegetic narrator devotes the whole of the second chapter to the history of the party from the earliest struggle against political domination to the threshold of the post-colonial era. Objects and natural phenomena also provide occasion for the narrator to reach back into his repertoire of knowledge to select the relevant details to appease the reader, whose interest and curiosity he is constantly manipulating. General R.'s apparently innocent production of Kihika's Bible, which triggers off memories of Kihika's exploits in the early 1950s, is a good example. Mugo's walk through the village is yet another example. As Mugo walks along the village's main street the narrator takes the reader back to the pre-state-of-emergency days to the original Thabai village. In a similar way,

the description of Thabai Ridge melts almost imperceptibly into an account of the Gikonyo-Mumbi courtship. But details relating to concepts and objects are by no means the only way the narrator unearths the past. The process of adding depth to character and social perspective to the community, is the commonest method used to bring past and present together.

Quite often in the opening chapters of the novel activity or conversation is temporarily suspended while the author-narrator either offers some illuminating personal detail or recalls similar earlier events involving one or more of the characters who are at the centre of current narration. The account of Mugo's progress from his hut to his shamba through the village is interrupted firstly, as the narrator pauses to describe the history of the village and then again, to analyse the unusual relationship between Mugo and Gitogo's mother. Interruptions also affect conversation. For example, in chapter three the conversation is deferred not just once but three times as Gikonyo, Warui and finally Wambui are introduced to the reader. It is worth noting that each of the paragraphs describing each of the three envoys stems from Mugo's gaze: Looking at Gikonyo .... , raising his eyes to Warui .... , and Mugo looked at her (Wambui)(18-9). Through Mugo, the author brings the reader's attention to focus, one at a time, on each of the three characters. Predictably, some, not all, information about Gikonyo, Warui and Wambui is supplied soon after they engage in conversation. Here again it is assumed, and rightly so, that the reader would be curious about the characters presented so far.

The transition from present to past is often so smoothly

effected that the reader is not likely to notice until he is well into the 'flashback.' We are following Mugo as he walks towards his shamba when we read:

So he was near the end of the main street where the old woman lived. Nobody knew her age; she had always been there, a familiar part of the old and new village. In the old village she had lived with an only son who was deaf and dumb. Gitogo, for that was the name of the son, spoke with hands often accompanied with guttural noises. He was handsomely built, a favourite at the Old Rungei centre where young men spent the time talking the day away.

The narrative slips into the past, with ease, and moves quickly from one aspect to another - from the village street to the old woman in the first sentence; from the old woman to the son in the third and from the son to social habits of the young men of the village in the fifth sentence. The author-narrator keeps on shifting perspectives, questioning political morality in the context of Gitogo's death and subtly brings the focus of attention back to the old woman before dutifully returning us to Mugo's 'trek' to the shamba. If the backward transitions are well-executed, the return to the present is quite often the opposite. In many instances the forward movement in time from the past is rather abrupt, creating a jolting effect not unlike a sudden awakening to reality from some captivating dream. Take, for example, the description of the widower Warui's disappointment (dating back to the second World War) which ends with the sentence: 'But now Mukami had died and his sons had failed him.' (148) Returning us to the present, the next sentence reads: 'After a few inconsequential words Gikonyo plunged into the subject of the visit.' We surely 'plunge' from the past into the present and literally jump from Warui to Gikonyo. If abrupt shifts, such as this one, from past to

present serve any stylistic purpose it is hard to see and is probably difficult to defend.

The pattern that emerges, then, is one of smooth, assured narrative movement as the present gently flows back into the past, alternating with uncertain, jerky leaps as the past is suddenly abandoned for the present. The latter can quite often be irritating and sometimes even frustrating for readers who become engrossed in the past. On the other hand, the reader, whose interest lies in the present, will find the digressions into the 'past' just as irritating and frustrating. The constantly 'shifting perspectives' certainly entails frequent breaks in the narrative, denying it the continuous flow readers accustomed to linear chronological narratives find pleasant and easy to follow. Unless carefully regulated, the backward and forward shifts may create chaos without pattern. A Grain of Wheat is clearly in no such danger but the 'distinction between the past and the present is sometimes so blurred that the reader loses his way and finds himself in a tangled mesh' (Ikiddeh, 1969:9). Such a reader may have to flip back a few pages, perhaps whole chapters, to reestablish the chain of events. Problems of continuity arise and easy reading is not guaranteed. Surely, this will not help the learning process as the narrative method is working against the author's didactic purpose. Gakwandi (1977:118) considers the narrative method of A Grain of Wheat a serious setback. He finds the technique 'cumbersome' and one that is more likely to 'irritate and confuse the reader and interfere with the sense of continuity.' Such a reader will learn very little from the novel.

There can be little doubt that Ngugi's narrative technique does

tax the patience of the reader who, for instance, must read on until page 23 to hear the last word of a conversation that starts on page 9, but which, if uninterrupted, would cover three or four pages altogether. Some scholars, however, find no fault with this. Prominent among these is Cook(1977) and with Okenimkpe(1983). He considers the frequent time shifts, and hence the numerous digressions, as 'essential to all that A Grain of Wheat has to say to us.' If what is 'essential' is the teaching of political ideals or some Christian morals, either or both of which must be adequately explicated to avert any possible misinterpretation, then the mass of detail made available by the analepses justifies the choice of narrative method.

The enormous amount of detail, the bulk of which comes from the experiences of the characters during the State of Emergency and the period following it, is, nevertheless, didactically significant. Like the 'good' teacher he is, Ngugi endeavours to supply as much information as he considers essential to the understanding of this period of Kenya's history. Not only the events, but those characters who are the chief vehicle for conveying this historical information, must be backgrounded and their minds carefully explored to facilitate an informed assessment of personal aspirations and motivations which, consequently, place into perspective their private actions and conduct in public. Mugo is a fine example. His pathetic upbringing, devoid of affection and lacking trust, can be interpreted as being largely responsible for his self-withdrawal and social isolation in later life. Details relating to Mugo's childhood make his sense of insecurity(though largely unfounded), in the face of involvement in communal affairs,

plausible and certainly do mitigate, if only in a small way, his treacherous collaboration with Thompson. These details, thanks to the 'flashbacks', do defend their inclusion in the narrative.

There are, however, dangers in supplying too much detail. A valuable point may very easily get lost in a mound of details. If, for example, there is a strong case being made in the novel against self-centredness, it lies somewhere in the mass of details about Mugo's estranged life, and the reader is likely to end up feeling sympathy for Mugo instead of censuring and repudiating his rather egocentric behaviour. Providing too much detail also poses the danger of including irrelevant or redundant material.

By the time he reached the Indian shops he was very weak and could not walk. So he dropped his jembe and panga near a mound of rubbish at the back of a shop and sat down to regain strength. At the back of every shop was such a mound from which came a stench of decaying rubbish. Indian children and sometimes men shat there. African children often rummaged through the heaps, turning over newly thrown rubbish with their feet, looking for bread or forgotten coins. Their feet would dig into the small "loads." The boys would swear horribly and occasionally would throw stones at the Indians in revenge. Once three African boys were caught holding an Indian girl to the ground just behind the heap, beside which Mugo now sat to rest. They were accused of raping the girl. Because of their age, the magistrate only sent them to Wamumu Approved School. Mugo was not thinking of these sordid details in the shop's past. (170)

Most of these details here serve no obvious purpose as they have no bearing on the present. They are not only thematically peripheral but do not, in any way, facilitate the development of the plot; nor do they add to our understanding of Mugo's personality. Indeed, why does the narrator bother if 'Mugo was not thinking of these sordid details in the shop's past'? If Ngugi's

intention was, presumably, to show us the racist nature of colonial Kenya, the point might easily be missed because he fails to weave it in satisfactorily. Too much detail might also, in the absence of meticulous attention, jeopardise consistence. Reading about Kihika's arrest, we learn:

Soon after Jomo and the other leaders were arrested in October 1952, Kihika disappeared into the forest .... A year later Kihika was captured alone at the edge of Kinenie Forest .... Kihika was tortured .... Others say he was offered a lot of money and a free trip to England to shake the hand of the new woman on the throne. (15-7)

Queen Elizabeth II's accession to the throne in 1952 corroborates these details, but we later discover that Thomas Robson, for whose killing Kihika is hanged, is still alive in 1955.

His activities came to a climax in May 1955. One evening, driving from Rungei to the District Offices, he saw a lone man walking on the tarmac road .... The man came towards the jeep falteringly .... Suddenly, the old man straightened himself, whipped something from his pocket, and two quick shots thudded into Tom's body .... he died three hours later. (162-3)

In spite of these weaknesses, the skilfully controlled narrative technique of A Grain of Wheat permits the author, through the many 'flashbacks', to create characters with 'a fullness of life which can draw freely from both the past and the present, one embellishing and interpreting the other' (Ikiddeh, 1969:8-9). As readers, what lessons can we learn from Ngugi's portrayal of characters, especially the major ones?

As with most novels, the characters in A Grain of Wheat consist of two broad types - the 'lifelike' and the 'pasteboard.' All the major characters - Mugo, Mumbi, Karanja and Gikonyo except Kihika - belong to the first category. They are portrayed

with sufficient depth and complexity and, in their wholeness, they cannot be described in a phrase or a sentence. In Mumbi reposes all the positive attributes Ngugi sees in women. She is motherly, kind, understanding, willing to serve the community and not vindictive, and as Gikonyo's wife, she is irresistibly likable. Mumbi, however, is not idealized, for like all human beings, she is fallible. Having faithfully waited for Gikonyo's return from detention for several years, she suddenly succumbs 'in an incredible display of gratitude at the news that her husband was to be released from detention'(Nkosi,1981:40). Because they find Mumbi such a likable personality, some readers and critics (Cook, for example) interpret her infidelity not as an act of adultery, but as seduction. Upon discovering that his wife has had a child by his long time rival, Karanja, Gikonyo is unforgiving. Unlike Mumbi, who calmly forgives Mugo after hearing his confession, Gikonyo feels so deeply betrayed that he finds it impossible to accept the 'new' Mumbi. In his rage, he does not take into consideration the 'psychological and emotional buffeting Mumbi has endured'(Cook and Okenimkpe,1983:80) during his absence. In spite of his own betrayal - he confessed the oath to hasten his release from detention - Gikonyo is, almost to the very end, stubbornly unforgiving and unaccommodating. Mumbi's forgiveness(of Mugo) and Gikonyo's unforgiving intransigence are thus contrasted clearly enough for the reader to be able to conclude that to forgive is better than not to forgive. But, as we earlier noted, how far can we extend this particular lesson? Surely, not very far: historical crimes, major betrayals of what was, after all, an indigenous struggle for the people's land and freedom, and the brutality of the colonial system, are not, we

assume, things we, as readers, are invited to forgive. Thus the universality of human guilt, as a Judaeo-Christian concept, and the equally Christian concept of the 'forgiveness of sins', sit uneasily with the latent political standpoint of A Grain of Wheat.

Gikonyo's intransigence inevitably hounds Mumbi out of their home and it is not until Mugo has made his public confession that Gikonyo comes to realise his own fallibility:

What difference was there between him and Karanja or Mugo or those who had openly betrayed the people and worked with the whiteman to save themselves? (212)

It is this realisation that finally enables Gikonyo to 'heal the breach in the marriage.' Karanja, the cause of the 'breach', is probably the most despised, among the Africans, of Ngugi's characters in A Grain of Wheat. Few critics have kind words for him. Elders, for instance, describes him as a 'willing tool of the whites,' while Cook and Okenimkpe consider him a pitiable deviant who has 'abandoned all communal standards.' But the most scathing attack comes from Cook's (1977:95) earlier critique:

Karanja, the man who betrays his people by becoming a chief and working with the white man during the emergency, is the character in the novel whose life most obviously amounts to waste and failure, swayed as he is by the impulse of the moment, living only in the present situation, solving only the immediate problems which disturb his comfort; and so it is Karanja who at last walks out of the novel aimlessly, heading nowhere.

This all-round condemnation extends to Karanja's colleagues, most of whom hold him in contempt while a few allegedly grudge him his close association and influence with the whites. Although Karanja is, in the context of the struggle, definitely culpable, he at least has the decency to openly declare his allegiances. His

openness is hard to find in other characters. Confronted by Kihika, Mugo fails to communicate his obsession to avoid involvement and commitment in the affairs of the community in general and in the struggle in particular. The MP dare not tell Gikonyo the truth about the farm Gikonyo, for his part, dare not reveal that he had confessed the oath for fear of losing 'everything', including the chairmanship of the party and the top position in the cooperative. In all fairness, Karanja does deserve credit even if only for this single virtue - sincerity - which he ironically shares with the martyred Kihika, the man many villagers would gladly believe he had betrayed.

Kihika is the most celebrated character in the novel. He is the only one whose revolutionary exploits remain unblemished by some ethical or physical failure. Nkosi(1981:40) argues that 'with the possible exception of Kihika, this novel has no heroes.' Kihika not only possesses a sober and intelligent mind but is very articulate. He is a gifted orator whose rhetorical speeches captivate many among the crowd of listeners. With remarkable ingenuity, he exploits the teachings of the Bible to preach revolution and insurgency. Kihika sacrifices personal comfort and the security of the village to go and live in the forest from where he wages his war against the colonial authorities. A natural leader, Kihika excels in the bush war, directing a number of successful raids on government forces and their strongholds. Like Nkosi, Jabbi(1980:55-6) is impressed by Kihika and his achievements.

Kihika is endowed with a brilliant guerilla record. He has effected many daring exploits as a leader in the forest, has captured a formidable police garrison, and is almost worshipfully venerated by his men and is seen as a living legend by the people long before the

*Robson exploit.*

It is, we assume, Ngugi's intention that, like Jabbi, we should find Kihika admirable. As a character, Kihika is an exemplar - a stoic, incorruptible leader. Ngugi has endowed him with all the positive qualities of a revolutionary hero. His unwavering espousal of the cause makes him an inspiring model we should emulate. Kihika, however, is too consistent to be a "rounded" character. He is presented, mainly through the other characters, as a 'flawless' individual - we see, at every turn, an exemplary revolutionary leader who never loses sight of his political ideals. Kihika is a hero who is remembered, talked about, whose exploits are recorded and discussed by the villagers. We are not allowed to know his inner thoughts, his motivation, his fears, his secrets et cetera. We are almost entirely dependent on the villagers' assessment. But can this externally focalised assessment be accepted as an accurate account of Kihika's heroism? Surely, we have good reason to question the villagers' sense of judgement given their mistaken impressions of Mugo. Perhaps their assessment of Kihika is as fallible as they are human.

If Kihika is venerated by the villagers, so is Mugo who, in their eyes, is no less a hero than the former.

They remembered heroes from our village, too. They created words to describe the deeds of Kihika in the forest, deeds matched only by those of Mugo in the trench and detention camps.(177)

Blindly revered by the villagers but filled with torturous remorse for a crime the community does not know he committed, Mugo constitutes the biggest irony in the novel. Almost all his actions are interpreted in a positive light, and none of the villagers

ever suspect that he is, in reality, an anti-hero. Mugo is the most extensively described character in the novel. For this reason, many critics have had their fair lot to say about Mugo who, obviously, is the biggest culprit, though one not without a redeeming quality that in the final analysis wins him some exculpatory sympathy. Although he sent one man to his death through treachery, Mugo, by coming forward to own up his crime, saves the life of another, albeit a lesser man. While his self-imposed withdrawal from society might be excused by his background, his repeated refusal to abandon his 'shell' and join active communal life, is an undesirable quality which earns him condemnation.

Heroism is problematic in the novel. Ngugi's handling of Kihika's and Mugo's characterisation suggests that heroism depends on our having only partial knowledge of a character. Kihika is a hero to the villagers and the readers because neither know him very well, as the author provides few, if any, insights into the inner personality of the man. Mugo, on the other hand, remains a 'hero' (until the confession) to the villagers who, unlike the readers, have not had the privilege to know what goes on in his mind. Without the confession or had he died early Mugo might have been martyred Kihika. Are we, then, to understand that one is a hero when part, perhaps much, of his personality remains hidden from us because full exposure threatens to strip him of the 'heroism'? This seems to be a contradiction - we tend to give such special status to someone we know thoroughly well. Alternatively, Ngugi might be telling us, since all characters are guilty (even Kihika might have been harbouring some hidden secret), that there are no 'real heroes' - only fake ones. This notion is borne out by the fact

that the struggle carries on and is, presumably, brought to a successful end in spite of Kihika's death. By not creating a replacement for Kihika, Ngugi might be suggesting that there is no longer any need for heroes in the struggle. The workers and peasants, who feature more prominently as classes<sup>7</sup> in Petals of Blood and Devil on the Cross, must not sit and wait for a 'messiah' to lead them out of political and economic bondage, but must, instead, seize the initiative and 'engineer their own deliverance.' This is obviously a valuable lesson and if it, indeed, is the point Ngugi wants us to see, then, it is unfortunate that it is a lesson that might easily be missed because it is made too subtly.

If this contradictory characterisation of the 'real hero', Kihika, and the 'false hero', Mugo, finds justification in the teaching that we should no longer indulge in hero-worshipping, the contradiction relating to the concept of forgiveness seems hard to defend. While preaching the importance of forgiveness, since we are all guilty, Ngugi pardons only those who have sinned against other individuals. Those who have transgressed against society, we are led to believe, are not to be forgiven - neither Karanja nor Mugo is forgiven. This principle would be a good deterrent if adhered to and Ngugi would have taught us an important lesson. But we almost immediately notice that some individuals go unpunished in spite of having transgressed against society. Gikonyo, for instance, by closely guarding his betrayal, not only escapes retribution but rises to a position of affluence and political eminence in his community. The MP, who betrays Gikonyo and his cooperative, too, is never punished and acquires Green Hill Farm. Surely, Ngugi is not suggesting that an individual can cheat society (and get away with it) after showing us, through Mugo's

and Karanja's eventual fate, that it does not pay to go against society. These didactic intentions - the bourgeois humanist notion that the individual must be forgiven and changed for the better if society is to have a chance of improving its own lot and the socialist ideal that places society above the individual and, therefore, anyone who offends against the community must not be forgiven - are mutually incompatible. One thing that is compatible with Ngugi's didactic intentions is his style.

The story of A Grain of Wheat is told in easy, flowing language which poses few, if any, problems of comprehension. This is in line with the author's didactic intentions. Surely, no writer who aims, as Ngugi does in this novel, at influencing his intended readers into seeing things in a new light; at making them understand the importance of personal relationships and of an individual's relationship with society, will complicate his self-set task by using language that might obscure his message. Since long complex sentences sometimes do create problems in decoding, the sentences in A Grain of Wheat are generally short - on average 12-15 words - comprising mainly familiar expressions as can be discerned in the following description of Mugo's attitude to life.

Previously he liked to see events in his life as isolated. Things had been fated to happen at different moments. One had no choice in anything as surely as one had no choice in one's birth. He did not tire his mind by trying to connect what went before with what followed after. (149)

These sentences express, with great clarity, Mugo's failure to relate cause to effect and thus explains his reluctance to accept social responsibility. Judging by his portrayal of Mugo in the whole novel, Ngugi does not approve of this fatalistic reasoning from which he dissociates himself by implying, through the phrases:

he liked and He did not, that this is Mugo's choice - a choice which has not been influenced by the author or any one else. By dissociating himself from Mugo's reasoning Ngugi seems to be inviting us to distance ourselves from the belief that man is so helpless that he has absolutely no control over his own destiny. Had Ngugi chosen to be sympathetic to Mugo, he would have portrayed him as someone forced by circumstances into this choice rather than as someone who still has at least one other alternative available to him. Ngugi would then have avoided the phrases: he liked and He did not, possibly replacing the latter with He could not. But settling for the phrases he uses, Ngugi, we assume, is subtly manipulating us into rejecting Mugo's fatalistic reasoning, and, perhaps, his effort is not entirely unrewarded.

Ngugi's selection and use of language to convey his message effectively is easily discernible in the speech given by General R. on independence day.

(1) You ask me why we fought, why we lived in the forest with wild beasts? (2) You ask why we killed and spilled blood?

(3) The whiteman went in cars. (4) He lived in a big house.

(5) His children went to school. (6) But who tilled the land on which grew coffee, tea, pyrethrum and sisal? (7) Who dug the roads and paid the taxes? (8) The whiteman lived on our land. (9) He ate what we grew and cooked. (10) Even the crumbs from the table, he threw to his dogs. (11) That is why we went into the forest. (12) He who was not on our side, was against us. (13) That is why we killed our black brothers. (14) Because inside they were whitemen. (15) And I know even now this war is not ended. (16) We get Uhuru today. (17)

Tomorrow we shall ask: where is the land? (18) Where is the food? (19) Where are the schools? (191-2)

Through General R., Ngugi is warning us, and through us, the workers and peasants of Kenya, of the impending neocolonialism but he does not plunge into it straightaway. To prepare us for this important message, which is withheld until the end, Ngugi employs a number of

rhetorical devices to convince us on the issue of the economic injustice and exploitation perpetuated by the authorities during colonial rule. To make it easy for us to follow his argument, Ngugi seems to have deliberately avoided long loose sentences which would have combined a number of the short ones he has opted for into long complex ones with trailing constituents<sup>8</sup>. His sentences are noticeably short - of the nineteen, only 1,6 and 10 have more than ten words. Coordinate and subordinate clauses are conspicuously absent, rendering the sentences not only short but rather simple and, therefore, easy to understand.

Another device Ngugi employs in the speech is anaphora. More than half the sentences are anaphoric - 1&2; 3,4,5,8&9; 11&13; and 18&19. By repeating words and expressions, Ngugi is trying to ensure that the reader's interest remains focused on the main issues throughout the speech.

Through this speech, with its whole catalogue of colonial injustices, Ngugi is clearly trying to influence us to turn against capitalism. One detects syllogism in Ngugi's argument: Colonialism is exploitative; Neocolonialism is an extension of Colonialism; Neocolonialism, therefore, is exploitative and must be fought just as Colonialism was.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Mau Mau is 'an anagram of a Kikuyu term "Uma Uma", meaning "Go Go". See Barnett and Njama(1966:77-8).
2. According to Ngugi, one is either on this or on that side; there is nothing like being neutral in life. See Writers in Politics.
3. Genette(1972:40) defines analepsis as 'any evocation after the fact of an event that took place earlier than the point in the story where we are at any given moment'.
4. The coming of independence brought along with it hopes, among those who had been dispossessed, of land redistribution and many politicians took advantage of this by promising the return of the alienated lands if peasants gave them their votes. But when this did not happen after independence, the peasants naturally felt they had been betrayed. This is what Cook and Okenimkpe refer to as the 'grand betrayal'.
5. Mugo's guilt is hinted at throughout the novel with the first clue appearing on page 53.
6. See, for instance, Cook(1967); Elders(1968); Ikiddeh(1969) Jabbi(1980) and Ngara(1982).
7. The characters in A Grain of Wheat are portrayed as individual villagers rather than as representatives of the peasant class. There is little, if any, indication that they are aware of their existence as a class.
8. Leech and Short(1981:225-30) make the following distinction between anticipatory and trailing constituents:

Anticipatory

1. initial dependent constituents
2. paranthetical constituents

Trailing

1. final dependent constituents
2. non-initial coordinate constituents

### CHAPTER THREE

By the early 1970s Ngugi's socialist thought had crystallized. His commitment to what he calls 'the proletarian and poor peasant struggles against the parasitism of the comprador bourgeois[sic] (1981b:78), was common knowledge to those who had heard him speak or read his critical writings. But it was not until 1977, with the publication of Petals of Blood, that Ngugi's much talked about commitment found its way into his fiction. Since he had not written an explicitly didactic work before, one would expect Ngugi to show a preference for those techniques and devices that would convey his intended message to a receptive readership. But to what extent and how well do plot, narrative, character and style serve the author's didactic purpose?

The most obvious feature of the plot of Petals of Blood is its compactness. As in A Grain of Wheat, the lives of the main characters - Munira, Karega, Abdulla, Wanja, Chui, Mzigo and Kimeria - are interwoven. This makes it easy for the reader to work out the associations between these characters and if there are any lessons to be learned from their relationships with one another, then the reader has a good chance of learning from their experiences. Although Karega, Munira, Abdulla and Wanja are not peasants or workers, they represent the classes of the underprivileged. Chui, Kimeria and Mzigo, on the other hand, stand for the comprador bourgeoisie. Hence there is much that the reader can learn from the interaction between these two groups of characters. The interaction represents an inter-class relationship, a relationship characterised by the dominance of one class over another. But Ngugi does not believe

that the lower classes are inferior. It is precisely this misconception that he seeks to set right using plot in Petals of Blood.

In order to show us that the 'purported' difference is, in fact, fallacious, Ngugi shows us separate intimate sexual relationships between Wanja and members of the privileged class (Chui, Mzigo and Kimeria), on the one hand, and between Wanja and members of the underprivileged class (Munira, Karega and Abdulla), on the other. That all six men, in spite of differences in their personalities and social standing, find pleasurable companionship in the same woman could be seen as an important lesson for the workers and peasants who must, first of all, rid themselves of an inferiority complex that leads them to a passive acceptance of their plight. It is only when they recognise this basic human, if not social equality, that they will begin to assert themselves and agitate for their fair share of society's wealth and an equal say in the determination and formulation of its policies. Seen in this light, the interwoven plot, which brings all the major characters to the same level, serves a didactic purpose, albeit a subtle one.

The relationships between the six men do, of course, extend beyond a shared sexual partner. A variety of other relationships is developed between the characters. Although not all of these constitute important lessons for the reader, the relationships between Wanja and Abdulla and Kimeria present a few valuable points. Abandoned after being seduced and impregnated and later sexually humiliated during the march to Nairobi by Kimeria, Wanja survives to avenge herself, as does Kimeria's other victim, Abdulla. But it is Wanja who gets there first. By having Wanja kill Kimeria, Ngugi is telling us that the bourgeoisie will one day pay for their atrocities

against the peasants and workers just as a miscreant cannot, in the final analysis, escape punishment for his crimes. Although Wanja's act of revenge might be interpreted merely in personal terms, it does, on a social level, assure the workers and peasants that there will come a day when they will get their own back. Yet another lesson relates to the notion of women being considered as the weaker sex which Ngugi believes is fundamentally wrong. Far from being an inferior brand of humanity ordained to perform the menial task of housekeeping and child-rearing, women are, for Ngugi, equal to men and are not without initiative and courage. In Wanja, as in other female characters in Ngugi's works, women readers might be expected to find some inspiration while men, for their part, may learn that women ought to be treated as equals. Once liberated from male chauvinism, women can take up their position next to their menfolk in the struggle against exploitation and oppression.

The struggle against the bourgeoisie is more likely to succeed if peasants and workers join forces with the progressive underprivileged petty-bourgeoisie some of whom, like Karega, are potential leaders. The relationship between the newcomers - Munira, Karega (teachers), Abdulla (shopkeeper) and Wanja (barmaid) - and the peasants of Ilmorog suggests the possibility of such an alliance, an alliance we see at work during the march to the city and which is referred to at the end of the novel.

... we are planning another strike and a march through Ilmorog.

But who?

The movement of Ilmorog workers... not just the union of workers at the breweries. All workers in Ilmorog and the unemployed will join us. And the small farmers... and even some small traders. (343)

In this kind of unity lies their sole hope of emancipation from

economic exploitation and political oppression. This is one of the central themes in the novel.

Though this showing of worker and peasant solidarity is explicitly didactic, the plot of the novel does not allow for the full elaboration of the process of the mobilisation of the workers and others belonging to the underprivileged class. The step by step awakening of the workers, which Ngugi's 'students' expect, is not given. Instead, things happen by leaps and bounds; we are told just enough to enable us keep track of events. Anonymous propaganda pamphlets begin to appear 'suddenly' and after six months of exposure to these pamphlets, the workers automatically form a union. It is perhaps worth noting that there is not a single dissenter among the workers. The new union engages its adversary almost immediately and achieves instant success. Surely, how viable is this considering that the union is led by inexperienced men like Karega<sup>1</sup>? But more perplexing, even to Karega, is the sudden appearance of the workers' movement (see p.50). This movement, which springs up overnight and appears leaderless, seemingly awaiting Karega's release, can be seen as indicating the possibility of spontaneous uprising by workers and peasants. From this, workers and peasants can, perhaps, learn that they are capable of rising against their oppressors even without the guidance of their leaders. Although leaders are important, Ngugi seems to be saying, they are not indispensable. Just as the struggle continues in A Grain of Wheat in spite of Kihika not having been replaced (after his death), Karega's detention cannot dishearten and discourage the workers and peasants from marching on in the struggle against exploitation and oppression. Certainly, this is an important message that

encourages the workers and peasants to show initiative, to take important decisions, instead of just waiting to act on instructions from the leadership. But again, this point is made very subtly.

The relationship between Karega and Chui is clearly intended to teach a few lessons. The initial principal-pupil relationship is metonymic of the ruler-subject relationship. When the ruler turns out to be oppressive, the subject rebels, but the rebellion (the pupil strike at Siriana against Chui's administration) is crushed and the rebel leader (Karega) is exiled (expelled). The lesson here seems to be: non-violent protest and peaceful rebellion', more often than not, achieve no satisfactory or permanent results. Just as Chui's administration refuses to give in to the demands of the striking pupils, the directors of Theng'eta breweries, among them Chui, do not yield to the pressure of the workers' union but resolve to sack all the workers should they go ahead and carry out the strike action. Like the pupils of Siriana, victory evades the workers' union and their leader, Karega, has been arrested. Even if they are planning another strike, success can hardly be guaranteed where they have failed before and not just once. They, Ngugi informs us, have been dogged by defeat from 'Koitalel through Kang'ethe to Kimathi' and now Karega. These failures cast doubt on the future possibility of the oppressed liberating themselves from exploitation and oppression. Taken seriously, the failures might create despondency, as Straton (1980:120) comments:

The view of human history that we get from the novel, then, is that there will always be exploiters and exploited .... First there is exploitation which is followed by resistance with acts of heroism and betrayal. Next, if the cause is won, there is elation, visions of new beginnings, hope. Then a new set of oppressors step in and resistance begins again.

This 'cyclical pattern' aptly fits the history of Siriana where the successful petition for Fraudsham's removal ushers in Chui, who despite having himself led a similar protest against Fraudsham, turns out to be even more oppressive than his predecessor and the pupils are the worse for it.

On the other hand, Ngugi might have used these failures to tell workers and peasants that the task before them was not an easy one and that they should not expect victory at the first attempt. The struggle calls for dedication and endurance. But perhaps more important, Ngugi's message might be that mere change in personalities, as happens at Siriana, will solve none of the problems confronting the workers and peasants, real and permanent change can only be achieved when the whole capitalist system is 'dismantled' and replaced by 'a socialist order'(Chileshe,1980:134).

Although this may not have been the author's intention,<sup>2</sup> the pessimistic message seems to come out more strongly than does Ngugi's call for the establishment of a 'new social order'. But the fact that readers, us for instance, may come up with interpretations which are not only different but contradictory, implies that the lesson has not been taught well. Surely, Ngugi does not want to risk his readers choosing the pessimistic message!

If parts of the plot of Petals of Blood are ambivalent, does the narrative technique help to clear up this ambivalence while rendering his other messages more accessible?

The narrative pattern of Petals of Blood follows closely that of A Grain of Wheat, with the author attempting(perhaps with less effect) to achieve a greater degree of complexity in this longer

work. The attempt at greater complexity is inherent in the shift from concern with a single central character, such as Mugo in A Grain of Wheat, to several - Munira, Karega, Abdulla and Wanja. Each of these take turns at narrating the story. In addition to following the experiences of these four characters, there is the account of the changing Ilmorog community. In narrating all these stories, Ngugi is like a movie director with five cine-cameras at his command. Selection and blending of the pictures into a coherent whole that is balanced is no menial task, it demands both keen perception and manipulatory skill. Does the interweaving of these stories create problems for Ngugi's readers?

The most obvious narrative element in Petals of Blood is multiple narration. Although much of the story is told through Munira's reminiscences, the other three characters also narrate parts of their own stories. The account of the transition of Ilmorog is given by the community acting as 'narrator' (Chileshe, 1980:134). An extradiegetic narrator complements the efforts of the four characters and the community, supplying information that fills in any gaps that may have been left by the 'non-omniscient' narrators. Multiple narration makes the narrative very complex, one which 'calls for a complex response from the reader', requiring him to contend with three different aspects: narrator, subject and period. Firstly, because of the changes of narrators, the reader must identify the one narrating the story and determine his or her biases and how these may possibly influence his or her narration. Secondly, the reader has to ascertain the theme of the narration and how it relates to those preceding and following it. Thirdly, the reader not only has to determine the period to which the events being narrated belong but also work out how this particular period ties-

in with the other periods dealt with in the novel. Contending with all three at once requires some effort, even the finest readers, according to Riemenschneider(1984:84), may have to 're-read and reassemble parts of the book.'

The complexity of the narrative raises a contradiction. A didactic work, such as Petals of Blood is intended to be, is supposed to present its message simply and clearly. The constantly changing perspectives certainly do not keep Ngugi's teaching simple. There is the risk of readers failing to make some vital connections and possibilities of misinterpretation become real. These links are vital, for us as readers, to work out the associations between characters; between events and characters. These links are particularly important in establishing the relationship between past and present and thus in elaborating the process of historical change.

The time span of the novel is very expansive, covering, as Masilela(1979:20) suggests: 'four historical phases: Phase I, Precolonial era; Phase II Mau Mau rebellion period 1950s[sic]; Phase III, the euphoric period of independence; and, Phase IV, the neo-colonial period, 1970s.' Hence the task of linking the events of these different periods becomes especially important. Ngugi recognises this and avoids breaking the continuity whenever he can and where he cannot, we observe him making desperate attempts to bridge the gaps in time.

But that was twelve years after .... (5),  
 Twelve years later .... (47),  
 Munira was later to write .... (117),  
 ... wrote Munira years later .... (190),  
 Later in his statement .... (224),  
 ... relived the scene two years back .... (295),

It was now his tenth day .... (295),  
 ... ten days earlier .... (300),  
 ... despite nine days of questioning.... (309),  
 On the tenth day after his arrest ... (319),  
 It was only on the tenth day ... (320).

This monotony could have been avoided had Ngugi used the long reminiscences in moderation. Some of the reminiscences are so long that the reader will lose track of time and either has to be reminded or has to 're-read' parts of the novel. This is an additional task for the reader and one which most certainly interferes with the intended learning process. The use of numerous reminiscences also has an adverse effect on the message of the novel. Crehan(1986:4) outlines the problem:

More often, "action-in-the-present" is brought to a halt for the sake of sombre reminiscences; movement of the mind thus replaces "dramatic" progression, creating the effect of mental wandering and physical stasis.

This again might have been avoided had Ngugi not been too preoccupied with the 'past histories of the characters.' Although the present can be best understood in terms of our knowledge of the past, we must guard against obsession with the past. Our interest in the recollections of the individual characters can never be so overriding that we must constantly defer present action in preference for memories of the past. Besides, the past, by itself, remains irrelevant history and only becomes pertinent and meaningful in so far as it enhances our understanding of the present, a present that, as a story, sustains the reader's interest. Unless the reader's interest is sustained it is doubtful he will learn much.

'Subordination of scene to summary' is one of the novel's more serious narrative setbacks, especially when one considers that Petals of Blood is meant to be didactic. Sustained

conversations, which hardly ever find adequate space in 'summary', are few and far in between. Though it does hasten the pace of narration, 'summary' has the disadvantage of telescoping 'a substantial amount of diegetic content or a substantial period of story time' (Crehan, 1986:18). Part of the content so telescoped might just be the key that will open the door for our understanding of some didactically important event. Perhaps providing the key is not Ngugi's aim. Afraid that his lessons might be misconstrued or impatient to gloss over the message, Ngugi does not give us the 'key', for he has already opened the doors. What he fails to see or does not care to admit, is that the overuse of summary drains didactic life out of the narrative. To learn effectively, one must see and observe, experience for oneself rather than be taught in the past tense of reported speech.<sup>3</sup>

If, in its complexity, the narrative of Petals of Blood can be seen as having any positive qualities, they are purely artistic, and ones which hardly serve the author's didactic purpose. On the whole, the narrative is 'too involved', making the novel a rather difficult reading that is taxing for the reader it is apparently intended to preach to. Does Ngugi's handling of character atone for this? Do the novel's characters form part of the 'arsenal' of those who are intent on 'shooting' Petals of Blood to pieces or do they, on the contrary, provide 'ammunition' for those who are keen on defending it?

The array of characters in Ngugi's fourth novel form an interesting spectrum the centre of which is occupied by Munira, Karega, Abdulla and Wanja. Being the only woman among the four, Wanja's place in the novel is a special one. She is the centre of

the social and emotive force that draws the lives of the other three 'alienated characters' together. Her genial disposition easily wins her the confidence of Munira, Abdulla and Karega, each of whom finds her sexually attractive. Wanja's sexual appeal is a necessary asset given that she has been living and will return to the life of a prostitute. Although prostitutes are regarded as moral miscreants, Wanja is portrayed in such a positive light that 'she remains insulated from degradation' (Cook and Okenimkpe, 1983:95). Her personal qualities make her likable and easy to accept. Wanja's unrestrained involvement in the affairs of the Ilmorog community brings out the essential goodness that is common to all of Ngugi's female major characters. Like her grandmother Nyakinyua, Wanja is endowed with leadership qualities, organising the women during the harvest and playing a leading role in the march to the city. Wanja is a strong woman who lives through humiliation, at the hands of men of whom Kimeria is an exemplar, to take revenge. Wanja's revenge, like that of Wariinga in Devil on the Cross, teaches the reader that those who suffer intolerable indignities can and should fight back, and it also warns those who make use of women's bodies for selfish sensual ends to take note.

Men, too, particularly those who belong to the peasant or worker class, suffer humiliation at the hands of their more 'fortunate' brothers and sisters. Abdulla is a typical example of those condemned to a life of perpetual poverty and political and social insignificance. In spite of having patriotically fought in the Mau Mau war to liberate the lands that had been confiscated by the colonial government, Abdulla gets no reward for his personal sacrifice memories of which he carries around with him in the stump

of his leg.

As the only ex-freedom fighter, Abdulla performs a special didactic function in the novel. He embodies the frustration and disillusionment of those who made personal sacrifices and fought against economic injustice and political oppression 'only to see everything they fought for being put to one side'(Ngugi, 1987\*). Through Abdulla's continued suffering, Ngugi is, presumably, saying that the new African leadership has betrayed the peasants and workers who, by fighting the British colonialists, hastened the coming of independence and then voted them into power. Abdulla is also an exemplar of patriotism and courage. He has a great sense of responsibility towards his community. Though a cripple, Abdulla will not be talked out of doing his 'man's' share when it comes to communal work, as he demonstrates by insisting on walking, like all the other adults, during the journey to the city. As a matter of fact, Palmer(1979:163) notes, Abdulla does more, he is 'the rallying force, sustaining the others, in spite of his disability, by sheer resourcefulness.' From this the reader may learn not to look for excuses to avoid active involvement in communal work. With Wanja, Abdulla shares 'the values of courage, devotion and self-sacrifice, beauty, warmth and compassion'(Sharma,1979b:313). If Abdulla and Wanja are, in spite of their suffering, admirable characters, Munira is not.

Of the four, Munira is the most pathetic, and occupying the most central position (he tells most of the story) he has, inevitably, drawn comments from many critics most of whom find little, if anything, worthy of praise. Nkosi(1981:73) accuses Munira of failing to come to terms with reality, hence his resorting to 'mystification of

religion as a way of resolving the contradictions in his society'. Sharma(1979b:310) concurs with Nkosi; he sees Munira as representing

the high-minded and well-meaning intellectuals of Kenya, who having little understanding of socio-economic issues, advocate the moral approach.

Palmer(1979:158) is even more scathing in his attack. For him, Munira

is an anti-hero, an ultra-sensitive young man whose life is a failure. Unlike Mugo, his sense of insecurity degenerates into an inferiority complex, a conviction of his irretrievable mediocrity.

These observations suggest that Ngugi has succeeded, as appears to be his intention, in creating in Munira an object of scorn. The only one among the four who fails to be fully assimilated into the class of the underprivileged, Munira is apparently meant to be a warning to peasants and workers to be wary of people with a background such as his although they seem to have revolutionary<sup>4</sup> potential. Munira is a failure both in the world of the privileged and in that of the underprivileged. The focalisation of most of the narrative through him seems to be a technique deliberately chosen not only to fully expose Munira's weak character but also to ensure that the reader misses none of his inadequacies as a potential ally of the peasants and workers. His feelings of inadequacy and sense of failure drive him to insanity and murder, murder committed because of his fanatical desire to 'save' Karega from what he has come to believe is the devil in the person of Wanja. But if there is any one who needs to be saved, it is Munira himself.

Karega is a positive hero.<sup>5</sup> He does not complete school as this would qualify him for the middle-class ranks and he would probably end up in a position more or less identical to that of

the lawyer. Munira's animosity towards him drives Karega away from Ilmorog thus providing him with invaluable opportunities to learn about the realities of the relations of production. When he returns to Ilmorog later, Karega is no longer an inexperienced youth whose knowledge of labour relations is basically theoretical. The acquisition of experience comes after his intellectual exchanges with the lawyer. By rising to the leadership of the workers' union, Karega becomes 'Ngugi's prototype of the oppressed poor who learn to resist their oppression and envisage the reconstruction of society' (Cook and Okenimkpe, 1983:97).

This quick Bildungsroman<sup>6</sup> distinguishes Karega from the other characters in the novel - he is the only one who undergoes noticeable and significant change. Through Karega's development, from a 'half-baked' student-rights-agitator to a unionist, we learn that one can become a leader of the workers only through first hand personal experience, not from books and intellectual debates.

Karega and the other three main characters are caught between two groups of characters the first of which constitutes the 'flock' upon which they can exercise their leadership 'gifts.' This is the group of villagers whose personal lives are not given full treatment, though Ngugi seems to say enough about them for Cook and Okenimkpe (1983:93) to conclude that they are 'materially poor but rich in values (and they) uphold human dignity and integrity.' The villagers and the philanthropic lawyer deserve not just our sympathy but our patronage.

The other group serves as adversaries for the main characters. The clash between this second group, on the one hand, and the main characters and the villagers, on the other, provides Ngugi with the opportunity to expose, for our benefit, vices such as ruthlessness

and greed (Kimeria), oppression (Chui), hypocrisy (Waweru and Kamau), and political incompetence and corruption (Nderi wa Riera). Ngugi's unsympathetic treatment of this second group suggests that we are to desist from conducting our affairs in a manner similar to that of these men, not to emulate their life-style. But it is from the relationships of the four main characters that we, perhaps, learn the more valuable lessons.

The portrayal of the four central characters has a distinct pattern which pairs Wanja and Abdulla while it clearly polarises the other two characters. Both Wanja and Abdulla have gone through a lot of suffering and both have suffered humiliation at the hands of Kimeria. Both plan to kill him though it is Wanja who gets there first and it is Abdulla who rescues Wanja from the fire and finally succeeds in getting her pregnant. During the best moments of their lives they share business as equal partners and in hard times they stand by each other. Abdulla and Wanja are absolutely compatible - as compatible as Munira and Karega are incompatible. Munira's and Karega's histories are largely at variance. Munira's rich father employs Karega's mother who needs a job and land because her poor husband owns no land of his own. Karega's brother, Nding'uri, joins the Mau Mau fighters while Munira's father is their publicly avowed enemy. Munira violently clashes with Karega whom he blames for the death of his sister, Mukami, and accuses him of enticing Wanja away from him.

There are two lessons to be learned from this pattern of relationships. The first is that people with a common background, such as Abdulla and Wanja, can genuinely work together to their mutual good, but that no healthy relationship can develop between people with conflicting backgrounds as are Munira and Karega. The

The second lesson is that as the clash between the classes is unavoidable, the confrontation between the leaders of peasants and workers, Karega for example, and the representatives of the non-progressive forces is inevitable..

There is a lot we can learn from the characterisation but the language of Petals of Blood sometimes does create problems of comprehension, because, like the narrative, it can be taxing on the reader.

Although we do come across a number of short, straightforward sentences which remind us of A Grain of Wheat, much of the language of Petals of Blood consists of much longer sentences (in some cases comprising more than 100 words) which are usually complex. But whether short and straightforward, as the passage describing Abdulla's part in the journey to the city, or long and complex, as in the description of Karega's world view, the language of Petals of Blood seems clearly intended to produce certain specific responses, as a close reading of the following will show.

I was never one for the public limelight or really interested in the affairs of others. My life was a series of disconnected events; I was happy in my escape-hole in Ilmorog, at least before Wanja came.(49)

As in Mugo's case (see p.44 above), there is a tone of disapproval pervading these lines. The phrase my escape-hole, surely, carries heavy connotations. But instead of relying on language alone, as he does in A Grain of Wheat, Ngugi employs the technique of interior monologue to dissociate himself (and by implication, the reader too) from Munira's reasoning which echoes that of Mugo. In other parts of the novel Ngugi uses a variety of traditional rhetorical techniques to get his message through. For instance,

in one of the longest sentences in the novel, Karega uses no less than 129 words to make his point.

We are all prostitutes, for in a world of grab and take,  
in a world built on a structure of inequality and injustice,  
in a world where <sup>A</sup>some can eat/while/<sup>B</sup>others can only toil,  
<sup>A</sup>some can send their children to school/<sup>B</sup>and/<sup>B</sup>others cannot,  
in a world where <sup>A</sup>a prince, a monarch, a businessman can sit  
on billions/<sup>B</sup>while/<sup>B</sup>people starve or hit their heads against  
church walls for divine deliverance from hunger,yes, in a  
world where a man who has never set foot on this land can  
sit in a New York or London office and determine what I  
shall eat, read, think, do, only because he sits on a heap  
of billions taken from the world's poor, in such a world,  
we are all prostituted. (240)  
oooooooooooooooooooooooooooo

One detects a number of rhetorical devices in this sentence whose content is similar to that of General R.'s (A Grain of Wheat, 191-2) and Muturi's (Devil on the Cross, 208) speeches. Firstly, the sentence is cyclic, starting and ending with the same declarative clause: we are all prostitutes. ngugi may have used this pattern to achieve emphasis, to ensure that the reader does not miss the point that all the underprivileged are the same. This is the sort of emphasis one is likely to find in public speeches, in which the speaker, intent on driving his point home, tends to re-state the point he has made at the beginning of his speech. To make his message convincing, the speaker reaches into his repertoire of examples, drawing on as many of them as possible. This is precisely what we encounter between the two declarative clauses. Since there is so much expansion, anaphora - the phrase in a world appears five

times - is used to help the reader keep track of the argument. Anti-thesis, the pairing of contradictory units ( A vs B ), is used to show the 'inequality and injustice' mentioned in the preceding line. This is an old rhetorical device acknowledged by Aristotle as one of the best ways of presenting one's arguments as it often will compel the reader to reject one of the 'contraries.' As readers, our sympathies are likely to go to the underprivileged and, subsequently, agree with Ngugi that there is need to change this system which creates so much suffering for many and comfort for only a few.

The danger in using such a long sentence is that the reader may lose interest in the content before he gets to the end of the sentence. Ngugi seeks to sustain the reader's interest by using a periodic sentence<sup>7</sup> with a series of anticipatory constituents. These constituents arrest the reader's interest while allowing the author to expand on his argument. Although Ngugi's use of the periodic sentence is unconventional in that he gives us the main clause at the beginning, we do not know this( we can only suspect at best) until we get to the end and hence the anticipatory constituents produce the same effect as they would if the main clause came only at the end. The anaphoric in a world at the beginning of each subordinate clause creates an atmosphere of anticipation which heightens the suspense in the sentence. But we are disappointed when we discover that the main clause is nothing new. One wonders, too, whether there can be sufficient justification for the use of so many rhetorical devices in so many words just to tell us that there is inequality and injustice in the world of Petals of Blood and that the underprivileged shouldn't turn against one another. These

points could have been made without putting us through so much. If Ngugi is supposed to be teaching and preaching to us, sentences such as this create a contradiction: simple message presented in a very complicated way. Does such a contradiction spill-over into Ngugi's fifth novel, Devil on the Cross?

NOTES AND REFERENCES.

1. Before joining the Theng'eta Union Karega has not been involved in any union, let alone led one.
2. A writer may create an impression quite different from what he might have set out to do. Newton-de-Molina(1976) has interesting chapters on the intentional fallacy. Hirsch(1967) also offers some stimulating discussion on the place of the author in interpretation.
3. The popularity of the Kamiriithu production of I Will Marry When I Want suggests that the novel is not the most effective means of reaching the poor peasants and workers.
4. Munira's participation in the strike against Fraudsham's administration may give him the semblance of a potential revolutionary.
5. This is an expression used in Socialist Realism to denote a character in whom the author develops the best attributes. See Gorky(1972) for a description of the process of typification.
6. This German expression means 'the novel of development'. It is used here to refer to Karega's development.
7. This is a sentence consisting of a number of anticipatory constituents all of which precede the final independent clause. These anticipatory constituents add to the suspense of the sentence.

#### CHAPTER FOUR

In our definition in Chapter One (p.5) we identified two types of didacticism. The first upholds tradition by teaching what is already generally accepted. The second advocates change by preaching new approaches, new ways of looking at and of doing things. A novel that advocates change is a roman a these. Some romans a these make their points subtly, inviting various, sometimes conflicting interpretations; others wear their message on their sleeve. Devil on the Cross belongs to the latter kind. In this novel, it would seem, Ngugi is trying to iron out the contradictions we encountered in A Grain of Wheat and Petals of Blood. But how does Ngugi use plot to achieve this objective and to make his message more explicit and unequivocal?

The novel's central plot deals with the peasants and workers' struggle against oppression and exploitation at the hands of the bourgeoisie. The sub-plot traces Wariinga's struggles against the chauvinistic tyranny of men. Both plot and sub-plot begin with a crisis - Wangari has lost her land and cannot find a job; Wariinga is not only out of employment but is also without a home. These crises shock the beleaguered women out of their slumber, forcing them to critically examine their condition. This is an important first step. Like in medical practice where diagnosis always precedes treatment, the oppressed must first identify their problem and ascertain who and what factors are responsible for their suffering. After identifying the problem and ascertaining the causes the oppressed can now begin to search for solutions - accepting some and rejecting others. Finally, they can take the necessary action.

This is the basic pattern of both plot and sub-plot. Both the story of Wangari's ordeal in Nairobi, and the philosophic discussion that ensues, involving diverse issues ranging from the purely economic, such as land alienation, to the exclusively social, such as language and culture, constitute valuable lessons for Wariinga (and for the reader) but then they are only theoretical lessons. The drama in the cave complements the theory which Wariinga has assimilated from the 'seminar' in the matatu. In the cave Wariinga is presented with living examples of the agents of exploitation. Further explanations about the nature of capitalist exploitation and how it is operated are made available to Wariinga (and the reader) through the 'dream-cum-vision' that the heroine experiences on the golf-course. Between them, these three settings - the matatu, the cave and the golf-course - constitute the forums for Wariinga's self-examination and enlightenment which lead to her conscientization. Seen paradigmatically, Wariinga's conscientization could be interpreted as the conscientization of the workers and peasants (Ogunjimi, 1984:64).

The physical confrontation brought on by the action of the crowd from Njeruca occurs after the heroine has learned almost everything there is to learn about how the capitalist system functions. Through Wariinga's conscientization, the workers and peasants might be said to be no longer blind to the cause of their suffering and have decided on remedial action as Muturi later proclaims: 'Today we are taking a stand. Today, here, we refuse to go on being the pot that cooks but never tastes the food' (208). The attack on the thieves and robbers is a warning to the bourgeois classes that the workers and peasants will not accept their

suffering without fighting back. For the workers and peasants the fight at the cave is both encouragement and advice. Ngugi is telling them that they can organise themselves and strike at the agents and institutions of oppression and exploitation but they should not expect outright victory at the first attempt. This advice is re-stated paradigmatically through Wariinga, who after shooting Gitahi (The Rich Old Man from Ngorika) and maiming Gitutu wa Gataangaru and Kihaahu wa Gatheeca, we are told 'knew with all her heart that the hardest struggles of her life's journey lay ahead....'(254).

As in A Grain of Wheat and Petals of Blood, there is a web of relationships that links the main characters - Wariinga, Muturi, Gatuiria and Gitahi. Gitahi seduces the schoolgirl, Wariinga, but abandons her upon discovering that she is pregnant. In desperation, Wariinga twice attempts suicide but is saved on both occasions by Muturi. Several years later, she meets Muturi in the matatu. When they part (after the violent showdown between the crowd of workers and peasants from Njeruca and the competitors in the Robbers' Den), Muturi entrusts into her custody the gun he captures from Kihaahu wa Gatheeca - this is the gun with which she shoots Gitahi and wounds Kihaahu himself and Gitutu wa Gataanguru. Apart from Muturi, Wariinga also meets Gatuiria in the matatu. They later fall in love but when they go to meet Gatuiria's parents Wariinga discovers that Gatuiria's father is Gitahi (The Rich Old Man from Ngorika). She leaves Gatuiria after shooting Gitahi whose death ought to be a lesson to men who ruin the lives of young naive girls. By dramatically breaking Wariinga and Gatuiria's engagement, Ngugi avoids a romantic happy ending. As Wariinga's suffering is

metonymic<sup>1</sup> of the situation of the peasants and workers, such an ending would be inappropriate.

The question arises: if Ngugi's objective is to show, step by step, the way to a possible solution to the woes of the workers peasants, does his method of narration facilitate or encumber the reader's efforts to understand the novel's message?

Unlike in A Grain of Wheat and Petals of Blood, the omniscient narrator in Devil on the Cross introduces himself and announces the purpose of his present task in the way that an oral story-teller would before a live audience. He is, he tells us, going to tell Wariinga's story (in the course of which he will also bring in the story of the workers' struggle) with sincerity leaving out not a single detail that may be of importance. Before he starts, he entreats each member of the 'jury' to 'pass judgement only when he knows the whole truth.' Wariinga's experiences, therefore, are to be told in the most straightforward manner lest there be any misinterpretation. The narrative, quite understandably then, is, in the words of Cook and Okenimkpe(1983:122), 'less involved' than that of either A Grain of Wheat or Petals of Blood. The didactic intention is, likewise, much clearer than in those novels.

The narrative consists of two parts, the first of which spans the two days following Wariinga's discharge from the Champion Construction Company, while the second covers two days two years later. The narrator establishes his presence at the beginning of each part and in so doing is intimately linked with, on one hand, Wariinga and the characters of his narrative and, on the other, with the reader, whom he addresses directly as 'friend.' This type of opening strongly echoes the common style of the oral narrator who

enjoyed personal and social intimacy with all the members of his audience, and who testified, at times, to his own intimacy with the characters in his story. This technique is intended to give authenticity to Ngugi's narrative, by creating the semblance of an eye-witness account.

Ngugi allows his story to unfold smoothly and quickly. There are, therefore, fewer reminiscences or flashbacks and he avoids lengthy digressions except where these serve the purpose of immediate explication of some urgent event or situation. The first digression, for instance, is when Wariinga tells the imaginary story of Kareendi, a story which turns out to be Wariinga's. Another example of a useful digression from 'action-in-the-present' is the story of Wariinga's background, on pages 138-153. This digression comes at a time when Gaturia, whom Wariinga has just met, is very anxious to learn all he can about his new friend. For the reader, this account of Wariinga's earlier life complements the Kareendi story so that, taken together, they give a complete history of Wariinga's life. Apart from these two cases and a few others, both narration and conversation are sustained, enabling the narrative to unfold smoothly as the 'action-in-the-present' moves forward steadily. If the story is easy to follow, then we would expect that whatever message they might carry will be just as easy to follow. The easy narrative of Devil on the Cross serves the didactic purpose well. There are, in addition, other aspects of the narrative that serve the didactic purpose equally well, if not better.

One of these is the use of abundant detail. Where much detail is supplied there is bound to be little that will be left to the

imagination of the reader - issues are simplified and made so obvious that it is difficult to misunderstand them. For instance, when Wangari is casually prodded into explaining her melancholy, she does not plunge straight into a description of the 'unspeakable horrors she had experienced in Nairobi' but starts from the very beginning, bringing in the issues of land alienation and the dispossession of the peasants of even the little land they had somehow managed to hang on to. If she had answered Muturi's question: 'Tell us, what has Nairobi done to you to make your heart so heavy? ', she need not have gone into the land issue at all, but then, it would seem Ngugi wants the reader to relate cause to effect. Everything must be traced to the beginning - Wangari would not have been sad had she not gone to Nairobi; she would not have gone to Nairobi had she not been in need of a job; and she would not have needed a job had she not been dispossessed of her two acres of land. It is only when problems are traced back to their very origins that one understands the situation and its implications fully. This understanding is likely to make it easier to find solutions to the problem.

The testimonies in the cave are another source of abundant explanatory detail in the novel. Each testimony is so replete with such detail that one need not look twice to see the rot. The complete exposure of villainy is made imperative by the rules of the competition which require all the competing robbers to elaborate their activities fully. The details which rain on the spectators enable the reader to condemn these villains, for what could be more convincing than the culprit's own confession? Having characters condemn themselves out of their own mouths is a very old satirical device which



C

our stomachs growling through the night. / Look here. / We  
 A B  
 build schools; / other people's children find places in them; /  
 C  
 /ours go looking for food in the rubbish heaps and dustbins. /  
 (208)

Apart from the anaphoric we and others, the structural parallelism (marked A,B,C) based on antithesis is quite obvious and the point Muturi is making about exploitation is impossible to miss. Ngugi also uses these rhetorical devices in his critical works, as the following excerpt from Barrel of a Pen; Resistance to Repression in Neocolonial Kenya exemplifies.

A

/Those who fought/ against the colonizing nation /were  
 B A  
 depicted as/ villains or witches. /Those who collaborated/  
 B A  
 /were seen in terms/ of outstanding courage and intelligence.  
 A  
 /Those among the dominated and exploited who took/arms[sic] /  
 B A  
 against those dominating and exploiting /are written-off  
 A  
 as/ villains while/ those who put down/ people's uprisings /are  
 shown in/ heroic colours. (8)

In both fiction and non-fiction Ngugi sounds like a preacher talking down to his congregation from the pulpit. He can speak for long periods without interruption. Just as a preacher expects members of his congregation to simply take what he says as gospel truth, Ngugi does not expect his readers to challenge his teaching. To stem any possible arguments Ngugi resorts to rhetoric such as we encounter in the speeches given by Muturi, Karega and General R. But rhetoric is not the only device Ngugi uses to preach to the reader, to talk down to the masses.

Parables are another method of teaching Ngugi finds useful. They provide explanations through analogy. In Devil on the Cross

Ngugi uses three parables to explain, for the reader's benefit, the nature of the relationship between the exploited and the exploiter. In two of them exploitation is presumably eradicated when the exploited kill the exploiter. The obvious lesson, which we also encounter in Petals of Blood, is that workers and peasants can and should rise against the bourgeoisie, and for the exploiters, it is a warning: Change now or be crushed. The ending of these two parables also suggests a possible way of ending the third (The Parable of the Kingdom of Earthly Wiles) which is analogous with neocolonial exploitation. But it is in the satirical dramatization of the robbers' competition that Ngugi's attack on capitalism is most convincing.

Patterned, as they are, on the logic of 'a world turned upside-down' the dramatic scenes in the cave conform to what Bakhtin<sup>3</sup> calls 'carnavalesque misalliances.' Heroes become villains and villains turn into heroes; there are mock-crownings and mock-kings. All the members of the bourgeois classes are debunked. Ngugi is clearly poking fun at the bourgeoisie by 'debasement' and 'bringing' them 'down to earth' through characterisation.

Reviewing the functions of satire Ngugi(1972:55) wrote:

Satire takes for its province a whole society, and for its purpose, criticism. The satirist sets himself certain standards and criticizes society when and where it departs from these norms. He invites us to assume his standards and share the moral indignation which moves him to pour derision and ridicule on society's failings. He corrects through painful, sometimes malicious, laughter.

In Devil on the Cross Ngugi 'invites us to assume his standards and share his moral indignation' against the bourgeois classes. Through his satirical portrayal of the bourgeois characters in the novel Ngugi criticizes the capitalist system which thrives on the

economic exploitation and political oppression of workers and peasants. Members of the bourgeois classes are, without exception, satirized. They are portrayed without a single redeeming quality. The appearances of these caricatures are either grotesquely revolting, like the judge(p.43) and the seven masters from the International Organisation of Thieves and Robbers(p.91), or parts of their bodies are terribly disproportionate, like Gitutu's (p.99). Ngugi's use of hyperbole in the service of satire is unmistakable. Apart from making us laugh, the physical appearance reflects the inner personalities of the characters. Hyperbole is a centuries-old satirical device. For instance, in the fourteenth century, Langland (1379:105) used it in his description of Avarice.

He had beetling brows and thick puffy lips, and his eyes were as bleary as a blind old hag's. His baggy cheeks sagged down below his chin, flapping about like a leather wallet, and trembling old age.

In the nineteenth century, Dickens (1854:58) said of Bounderby:

A man with a great puffed head and forehead, swelled veins in his temples, and such a strained skin to his face that it seemed to hold his eyes open, and lift his eyebrows up.

Ngugi's (1982a:176) twentieth century description of Ndikita follows the tradition.

His head was huge, like a mountain. His belly hung over his belt, big and arrogant. His eyes were the size of two large electric bulbs, and it looked as if they had been placed on his face by a Creator impatient to get on with another job.

As we laugh with him, Ngugi's satire teaches us a few lessons.

Through each of the burlesque characters competing in the cave, Ngugi shows the reader that exploitation is rampant in all sectors of the economy - for example, politics(Kimeenderi), real estate (Gitutu), commerce(Ndikita) and education(Kihaahu). In all their comic absurdity, these characters 'represent a level of sensibility

which the novelist abhors'(Ogunjimi,1984:65).

Of all the characters in the novel, Wariinga is the most complex. She has a 'real past ' which blends into a present that is moving towards some 'real future.' We trace her development from a naive teenager into a young woman who has come to terms with her society, a society dominated by chauvinistic males and dictated by avaricious business interests. We witness, too, her political maturation - from an unpoliticised typist hired by Boss Kihara into a conscientized self-employed worker who commits herself to the peasants and workers' struggle against exploitation. This commitment comes in the wake of her conscientization in the matatu, the cave and during the 'dream-vision' exchange.

As a character, Wariinga is an exemplar - a model which all Kenyan and African women should emulate and for this reason Ngugi endows her with all the positive attributes: determination, beauty, courage, patriotism, sincerity, intelligence, compassion, et cetera. But like all humans, she falters and has to be helped by others. Wariinga is a realistically presented individual who stands in stark contrast to the stock types whose function is to 'express the viewpoint of a social class; articulate some moral, philosophical or religious concept; be a mouthpiece for the author's own views'(Boulton,1975:77). These characters belong to two categories: those who represent the kind he would gladly banish from this planet and those who stand for the kind of countrymen Ngugi would be happy to share Kenya with. Belonging to the latter category are Wangari and Muturi.

Wangari and Muturi are both imbued with social virtue and who, on behalf of the author, 'articulate a genuine sensibility pointing to a new spirit of change'(Ogunjimi,1984:65). Having lived under

both a white dominated colonial administration and an indigenous African regime, Wangari provides the link between the colonial past and the neocolonial present. But since she is a stock type little else of her background is revealed just as Muturi's background is limited to the mention of the various jobs he has held, the places he has been to and the fact that he is a delegate from a secret workers organisation in Nairobi. Muturi, as a leader, does not wait for the initiative to come from others - in the matatu he is the first to offer a contribution towards Wangari's fare, while he is at the forefront in the attack on the cave. In Wangari and Muturi Ngugi has created representatives of conscientized peasants and workers and shows them actively engaged in the struggle against oppression in a society devoid of political, economic and social justice. There is much in their character that is meant to be liked just as there is everything to abhor in the characters of the contestants in the cave. Muturi and Wangari's imprisonment adds a heroic dimension to their character.

Perched between, on the one hand, the peasant and worker characters and the bourgeois characters, on the other, is Gatuiria. He represents the dilemmas of the petty-bourgeois intellectuals who sometimes espouse the cause of the peasants and workers without completely severing their ties with the bourgeois classes. Like Munira, Gatuiria conforms to Ngugi's pessimism about the reliability of the petty-bourgeoisie as useful allies in the struggle against oppression and exploitation.

If the characters in Devil on the Cross are 'in the main less wayward, more predictable than formerly', it is because, as Boulton (1975:71) argues, 'character is less important in allegorical,

satirical or highly experimental novels.' Ngugi's novel is a bit of the last two. If flat characters can be, as Forster(1927:66-7) says, very useful when the novelist wants to 'strike with his full force at once', then Ngugi has chosen his method well for it suits a writer who aspires to be polemical and satirical.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. As a victim of oppression and exploitation, Wariinga is a paradigmatic figure whose experiences can be interpreted as representing those of the peasants and workers.
2. See, for instance, Petronius' The Satyricon, in which Menippean satire is cited as a possible origin of the device of characters condemning themselves out of their own mouths.
3. According to Bakhtin(1984:122-3) 'The laws, prohibitions, and restrictions that determine the structure and order of ordinary, that is non-carnival life, are suspended during carnival: what is suspended first of all is the hierarchical structure and all the forms of terror, reverence, pity, and etiquette connected with it - that is everything resulting from socio-hierarchical inequalities or any other form of inequality among people(including age)'.

## CONCLUSION

Ngugi's position among Kenyan writers is quite unique. Since the mid 1960s, he has been calling for a political revolution which would guarantee an equitable distribution of the nation's wealth. The most disadvantaged groups in the system - workers and peasants - ought to fight for the overthrow of the government that favours the privileged few and then establish a socialist system in the place of the capitalist one. As his political thought crystallized, Ngugi became more bold in his statements and his commitment to the cause of workers and peasants became increasingly noticeable in his writing. In A Grain of Wheat, the earliest of the three works we have been looking at, we detect caution and suggestive understatement. A direct attack on capitalism is explicitly stated only once - in President R.'s independence day speech. The expressions : capitalism, exploitation, neocolonialism, workers, peasants et cetera, seem to have been avoided. Some of this subtlety is lost when we move to Homecoming where workers and peasants are not only aware of their status but are doing something about it. There is almost no doubt about what Ngugi is trying to get the reader to understand in on the Cross in which leading industrialist capitalist families are mentioned by name. In Devil on the Cross we encounter a self-assured, assertive Ngugi who knows what his sole business is - to entertain the masses rather than to conscientize the workers and peasants. He is no longer interested in merely showing us the vulnerability and fallibility of human beings; that people are often responsible for the sorrow and misfortune of others and that their lives, too, are conditioned by the actions of others. This bourgeois humanism(which we

encounter in A Grain of Wheat) does not permit the author to portray his characters other than as individuals with tainted souls living together. A contradiction arises as Ngugi tries to combine bourgeois humanism with socialist humanism. The latter demands that every individual who puts his interests before those of the community, Mugo does, should never be forgiven. Bourgeois humanism, on the other hand preaches forgiveness since no one is infallible. Such a contradiction does not arise in Petals of Blood as by 1975 (the year this novel was completed) the influence of Christianity on Ngugi had ebbed considerably and Marxist thought had become dominant. Contradictions of other kinds arise instead. Although it was not meant for the semi-literate, we are yet to meet, among the highly educated, someone who has found Petals of Blood an easy read. The author preaches loudly enough for everyone to hear but some of his methods require a complex decoding process. A second contradiction arises from the optimism which alternates with pessimism. In one instance we are told workers will triumph finally, provided they fight as one, and in another we are told that workers, peasants have always fought but never won any major or lasting victories. They only manage to chase one oppressor away (Fraudsham is an example) only to find for another to come and take his place (as Chui does). A third contradiction relates to the pastoral nostalgia that pervades much of the novel, creating the impression that a return to the past is desirable. Through Karega Ngugi tells the reader that it is the organized workers who will lead the onslaught against the bourgeoisie. But these workers would not remain the progressive they are 'now' if they were to return to the pastoralism of Mnyua's childhood; they would not be in a position to change

and make their own history.

Devil on the Cross is not beset by contradictions like those in A Grain of Wheat and in Petals of Blood. Perhaps Ngugi did realise that bourgeois humanism and militant Marxism are incompatible. He might have realised, too, - especially after the Kamiriithu experience - that to communicate with the peasants and workers one has to adopt methods that are rather straightforward. The plot, narrative technique and characterization of Devil on the Cross are less involved than those of A Grain of Wheat and Petals of Blood. For instance, the 'simplified' characterization in Devil on the Cross allows the reader to learn with greater ease what the author wants him to learn than does the 'complex' characterization of either A Grain of Wheat or Petals of Blood. In all three novels, characterization seems to stand out as the most effective device in terms of didacticism. There is much to be learned from the conduct of the various characters, who pass judgement on each other before the reader, guided by the author, finally judges them. Some readers, particularly those who cherish art for its own sake, will find much that may be worthy of praise in the 'rounded' characters of A Grain of Wheat; others, especially those who adhere to socialist realism, will commend Ngugi's handling of character in Devil on the Cross.

Devil on the Cross is a roman a these, through which Ngugi is preaching the message of socialist revolution in Kenya. In the manner of a preacher and a lawyer, Ngugi strives to convert the willing reader to socialism and to convince the unwilling that exploitation and oppression are the twin evils perpetuated by capitalism and these evils can be reduced considerably if

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