

CHARACTER NAMES AND TYPES
IN NGUGI'S *DEVIL ON THE CROSS* ¹

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This paper concerns itself with character names and character types as mediators of theme in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's fiction. A cursory look at his fiction reveals that these two aspects become evident features of Ngugi's style in *Petals of Blood*,² and are used to maximum effect in *Devil on the Cross* and *Matigari*.³ For purposes of brevity, however, the discussion in this paper focuses on *Devil on the Cross*.

The character names and character types in Ngugi's fiction are devices through which the social reality that the author writes about is encapsulated and analyzed, and comprise a fresh way of understanding his novels. From this encapsulation, authorial partisanship and worldview are decipherable, the two devices helping the author to mediate his social reality.

The system of character naming in Ngugi's later fiction has received mixed reactions from the few critics who have been able to identify the author's deliberate choice of character names. Basing himself on an article by Cyril Treistar,⁴ Gordon Killam, though unaware of the correct meaning of some of the names he cites,⁵ has touched on the realizable semantic potential in the names, concluding that the names help to add depth of meaning to *Petals of Blood*.⁶ Lewis Nkosi has dismissed as unlikely such names as "Sir Swallow Bloodall" that Ngugi gives the leading capitalist in *Petals of Blood*.⁷ On this same issue, Peter Nazareth makes the observation that

the novelist must trust his tale and his reader. He need not hammer home his message, as when he gives characters names like "Cambridge Fraudsham," "Chui" (Leopard), and "Sir Swallow Bloodall."⁸

It is apparent that Nkosi and Nazareth dismiss offhand the character names without pointing out why they are unlikely or even explaining the qualities the names evoke, which qualifies them as negative means that Ngugi uses to hammer home the message, which in any case Nkosi and Nazareth do not state.

The criticism on the nature of the character names that we have cited regards *Petals of Blood*. The sensitive reader will have noticed that, *à la* Nkosi *et. al.*, the character names in *Devil on the Cross*

would appear even more unlikely. However, this paper attempts to demonstrate that, given the social reality Ngugi is depicting, the names he gives to his characters become foregrounded features which draw attention to the specific social traits that he describes. They aid him in the description and analysis of that reality. As such, they are interpretive signposts which allow the reader to see the characters as representative figures, as part of a larger framework. They act as the basis for the creation of the character types.

By acting as representative figures, the character names in *Devil on the Cross* become part of a symbolic structure. A symbol can be defined as something that stands for something else. Here, I adopt Geoffrey Leech's and Michael Short's definition of the symbol as an expression of the universal through the particular, as a means of specifying detail, as something standing beyond itself. Leech and Short see the message in literature as a code, a symbolic structure.⁹

Rene Wellek and Austin Warren write in *Theory of Literature* that symbolism in a work of art is something calculated and willed, "a deliberate mental translation of concepts into illustrative pedagogic terms."¹⁰ In *Devil on the Cross*, where a character belongs in the class structure, what s/he will do and how s/he views the world is already suggested by the name s/he is given so that in the course of the action, the character only reveals various aspects of his/her already suggested nature. The character names, therefore, become a deliberate translation of concepts into illustrative terms. They are a symbolic means of concretizing social forces, even telling us something of the writer's attitude towards a particular character and the class s/he represents.

The symbol in a broad sense can be taken as anything that signifies something else. X. J. Kennedy notes that in a symbol "the infinite is made to blend with the finite, to stand visible and as it were, attainable there."¹¹ He defines an object, an act, or a character as symbolic if "when we finish the story, we realise that it was that item . . . which led us to the author's theme, the essential meaning."¹²

The *Oxford Dictionary* describes the symbol as something that stands for, represents or denotes something else, not by exact resemblance but by vague suggestion or by some accidental or conventional relation, especially "a material object representing or taken to represent something immaterial or abstract, as a being, idea, quality or condition, a representative or typical figure."¹³ The symbol then can be seen as the representative or typical figure.

Characterization is a way of carrying theme, of carrying meaning, and in *Devil on the Cross*, understanding the way characters are symbolically named is a way of getting to the themes, to the meaning of the work under consideration. The symbolic names

suggest something larger than the persons to whom they refer. They concretize, blend the infinite and the finite by suggestion. This suggestion is not vague but is deliberate and willed.

Whereas the normal character name would appear to particularize a character, Ngugi's deliberate choice of semantically potent and socially loaded names helps to personify the social realities he portrays, helping to make the character a "this one," an individual and at the same time a type. This is the essence of typicality.

The character type has variously been described as the finite expression of the infinite, the derivative of social forces,¹⁴ "the specific figure which concentrates and intensifies a much more general reality,"¹⁵ a character who, according to Friederich Engels, "is simultaneously a type and a particular individual, a 'this one.'"¹⁶

The typical character represents the most important social, moral, and spiritual contradictions of his time. The individual is at the same time a type, given typical conditions which might have a certain individuality. Yet, the type is not the average man or the normal man, nor is he identifiable with a particular person. Georg Lukacs argues that "the more accurately a writer grasps his epoch and its major issues, the less he will create on the level of the common place."¹⁷ Robert Scholes and Kellogg assert that whenever we consider a character as a type, we are moving away from considering him as an individual towards considering him as part of some larger framework.¹⁸

The type is the finite expression of the infinite, the specific figure from which we can extrapolate, the figure that concretizes and intensifies a much more general reality. This concretization in Ngugi's later novels is enhanced through the character name which allows us to particularize a character and at the same time see him as part of some larger framework.

Marx and Engels assert that in a society with class contradictions, art is influenced by the class antagonisms and the politics and ideologies of a particular class.¹⁹ In such a society, characters in a work of art typify their particular class, a paraphrase of the materialist viewpoint that social being determines social consciousness, that one's material existence determines one's outlook. Hence, no character would be complete unless the influence social and human relations have on him is revealed.

The Marxian worldview and the materialist viewpoint just cited exert a telling influence on Ngugi's social outlook and more so in his characterization. On the basis of this we can arrive at a classificatory typology of *Devil on the Cross*.

The classes in *Devil on the Cross* are historically traceable to the onset of imperialism both in its colonial and neocolonial phases. In the colonial phase, imperialism is abetted by a pro-colonial type which

sees loyalty to colonialism as a vehicle to satiate individualism. Independence only Africanizes the former colonial institutions which remain subservient to imperialist interests. This results in a comprador bourgeoisie which is shown as a direct offshoot of the pro-colonial type. The comprador bourgeoisie becomes the dominant class and sets up reactionary regimes which minister to imperialist interests in the neocolonial phase. They enlist the help of the police, the clergy and the conservative elite which help to prop up the reactionary regime, becoming the reactionary type. A national bourgeoisie fails to take root, being stifled by the comprador bourgeoisie with the help of the reactionary forces. In this set-up, the intellectual reveals only an academic commitment to change, being held back by class loyalties hence the uncommitted intellectual. At the end of the spectrum is the revolutionary type comprising the workers and the peasants who oppose imperialism both in its colonial and neocolonial phases. The revolutionary type pursues the people's legitimate claim to the fruits of their labour and recognizes the need to free the country from exploitation whether foreign or local. It seeks to establish a social system that caters for the welfare of all, which entails the abolition of the class society and the establishment of a socialist state thus rooting out imperialism. The names given to the various types reflects the characters' class loyalties thereby becoming symbolic.

In *Devil on the Cross*, Muturi provides a key to the conception of the characters in the novel. For him, Heaven and Hell are illustrated in the very nature of class society. Muturi sees the two as different, our lives being "a battlefield on which is fought a continuous war between the forces that are pledged to confirm our humanity and those determined to dismantle it" (p. 53). The characters in the novel are grouped into the creators (the workers) and the destroyers of life (the bourgeoisie). Each man is seen either as apart of the forces for creating, building and making humanity grow and blossom or as part of the forces of destruction, of dismantling (p. 53). The various character names help to characterize these forces.

In their relations of production and reproduction, the two broad forces referred to above give birth to the four character types, viz: the pro-colonial type, the reactionary, the uncommitted intellectual and the revolutionary type. Authorial partisanship is identifiable with the revolutionary type, which seeks to make humanity grow and blossom.

As stated earlier, the isolating quality which delineates the pro-colonial type is a sympathy with imperialism, whether in its colonial or neocolonial phases.

A cursory glance at the names of the pro-colonial type characters reveals that the bearers are naturally predisposed to parasitism, selfishness, greed, sadistic violence and theft and points to the fact that the characters would be misfits in a social setting. These qualities also

reveal that the characters are naturally indisposed to collectivism, their individual desire for selfish possession, and their greed, taking the better of them. This explains why the characters supported colonialism with its bourgeois individualism, the very nature that these characters display. It is to be noted that as a carry-over from *Petals of Blood*, capitalism in the *Devil on the Cross* is shown as a jungle where only those with carnivorous tendencies survive. Colonialism, and later on neocolonialism, helps to satiate these characters' narrow and greedy appetites. A look at the characters of Kihaahu, Nditika, Kimendeeri, Mwaura and Gitutu will help in illustrating these qualities.

A man who refuses to take sides with the liberation struggle, Kihaahu argues for active support of neocolonialism, even deriding the efforts of the symbols of the liberation struggle like Kimathi. In him is revealed the individualism of the local bourgeoisie. He makes his fortune largely from breaking ranks and exploiting members of his own class. His activities are largely predatory and carnivorous, qualities which are hinted at by his names Kihaahu ("the one who scares") and Gatheeca ("the one who pierces"). Kihaahu might be derived from the Gikuyu name for the kingstock, a connection that Ngugi emphasizes by comparing Kihaahu's mouth to the beak of the kingstock (p. 108), a comparison that emphasizes Kihaahu's individualism, since as a Gikuyu proverb states, a bird that has a beak does not pick up grains for another.

With all his cunning and wealth, Kihaahu imagines that the height of his achievement would be in becoming a conveyor belt for international finance capital. In the novel, we are shown that without exemption, those who fought colonialism continue to fight off neocolonialism. Kihaahu's endorsement of neocolonialism is shown to underline his then implicit pro-colonial sympathies.

Whereas Kihaahu's pro-colonial sympathies may be a matter of conjecture, Nditika wa Nguunji's are more explicit. A homeguard during the emergency, Nditika promises the freedom fighters that he and his type would continue lording it over them even after freedom was acquired. His homeguard position enables him to acquire wealth and other people's lands.

The name Nditika refers to one who carries heavy burdens. Nguunji refers to one who folds. Combined, the two names point to an essentially indelicate and indiscriminate character who carries anything and everything, one who selfishly keeps to himself anything he acquires. Nditika is a character who easily recalls Plyushkin in Nikolai Gogol's *Dead Souls*, a character who acquires little bits and ends for their own sake. Nditika reveals this grasping, indiscriminating nature in his business concerns and his implied eating habits. In the novel, we are shown that physical ugliness is the defining characteristic of the pro-colonial type due to material well-being. Nditika's immense size

emphasizes his acquisitive nature and implies a tasteless avid eater. His business concerns are indiscriminately spread out over hoarding, smuggling, poaching, and export and import. Seen as a representative of his class, Nditika's longing for immortality can be seen as the expression of the longing to eternally hold onto what this class has acquired. Neocolonial patronage makes this possible.

A District Officer (D. O.) during the colonial times, Kimendeeri was an active and brutal enforcer of colonial laws. This accounts for the violence suggested in both the sound of his name and its meaning. Kimendeeri refers to "the one who smashes or grinds." The author provides the key to Kimendeeri's character when he tells us that Kimendeeri was given the name during the emergency "because of the way he used to grind workers and peasants to death" (p. 187). As a D. O., we are told, "he used to make men and women lie flat on the ground in a row, and then he would drive his landrover over their bodies" (p. 187).

In the neocolonial set-up Kimendeeri changes from the physical "smasher" or "grinder" of the emergency days to psychological grinder. To satisfy his foreign masters and to help in the continued exploitation of the workers and peasants, he proposes that his class and its overlords should use the law, religion, education, and the mass media to stifle the workers' consciousness and to effectively kill the possibility of their rising against the exploitative order. By working on the psychology of the exploited and showing them that their exploitation is God-ordained and unchangeable, Kimendeeri effectively grinds or smashes the workers' consciousness and dehumanizes them, therefore living up to his type and the meaning of his name.

Perhaps the character who best sums up the nature of the bourgeoisie in the neocolonial set-up is Gitutu wa Gataanguru. Gitutu refers to "a big jigger" while Gataanguru refers to a belly infested with tapeworms which produce a bloating effect. His physical form appears like the graphic illustration of the jigger:

Gitutu had a belly that protruded so far that it would have touched the ground had it not been supported by braces, that held up his trousers. It seemed as if his belly had absorbed all his limbs and all the other organs of his body. Gitutu had no neck, at least his neck was not visible. His arms and legs were short stumps. His head had shrunk to the size of a fist (p. 99).

Further, Gitutu reveals that his hands have almost disappeared because they have no work to do and his belly is becoming larger and larger because it is constantly overworked. This captures his essential traits: a jigger, a parasite, one who does not produce but lives off the best that others produce, as the description of his eating habits shows (p. 100).

Characteristic of his class, he eats more than he needs and most of what he eats is stored in his body as waste. This accounts for the shitland in his name, the right atmosphere for the existence of tapeworms. His size is a result of exploiting the people. In a figurative sense, therefore, Gitutu feeds on the people's ground flesh, an aspect which is captured in the ground flesh of his name. This explains Gitutu's plans of selling land in pots and tins to the poor, plans that are meant to take advantage of the people's quest for land. Like his type, he still needs foreign overlords in depriving his people of one of their basic necessities.

As an aspiring bourgeois, Mwaura reveals the dehumanizing philosophy that is required to make it in his class. His name means "the one who steals," and it implies one who would steal somebody's clothes off one's back. There is something casual and indifferent about Mwaura's approach to human life which emphasizes the Mwaura aspect. He kills, or has people who stand in his way to riches killed, quite casually, as if he were actually taking back a life that belonged to him. The examples from the emergency, when Mwaura was a homeguard, suffice to illustrate this.

It is significant that Mwaura is the one who arranges for Mwireri's death for a fee. As a member of the Devil's Angels, he is responsible for the murder of those who refuse to be robbed. He represents the pro-colonial type, sellouts during the colonial period, but people who in the neocolonial stage worship at the shrine of money, ready to commit any crime, "in loyal obedience to the molten god of money" (p. 32). These characters are shown as people who are devoid of any positive and humanistic outlook on life. Taking Mwaura as an example, we can take his principles (or lack of them) as representative.

Characteristically, Mwaura tells us: "As for me, *I would sell my own mother* if I thought she would fetch a good price (p. 32, emphasis mine). Further, he says: "Business is my temple and money is my God. I don't examine things too minutely. . . . Show me where money is and I'll take you there" (p. 56). This desire to make money excludes any moral scruples which we have seen is the defining characteristic of the bourgeoisie in this novel. It is due to this that they sold their Motherland to colonialism, and it is for this same reason that they continue to sell it into neocolonialism. All this is meant to ensure individual gain, the human, social costs notwithstanding. We have suggested that these characters are naturally indisposed to collectivism, their individual desire for selfish possession and their greed taking the better of them. This explains why the characters supported colonialism with its bourgeois individualism, the very nature the characters exhibit. Colonialism, and later neocolonialism, help to satiate the characters' narrow, selfish and greedy appetites, unlike the workers whose individual appetites are absorbed in the collective, finding inspiration in communal ideals. Rising to the dominant class which we are shown to

be oppressive, the characters become dehumanized by the desire to possess.

Opposed in one respect to the comprador bourgeoisie is the national bourgeoisie which, in *Devil on the Cross*, is represented by Mwireri. In a very limited sense, Mwireri is an example of the nationalist. Mwireri believes in national theft, "the theft and robbery of nationals of a given country, who steal from their own people and consume their plunder right there in the country itself" (p. 166), and argues against foreign domination in national theft. In this sense, he becomes the nationalist who seeks to build up a national capital stock for the development of his own country. This desire for "self-supporting theft" is captured in Mwireri's name, which means "the one who brings himself up."

Mwireri's idea of building a national capital stock by exploiting the local people has the net result that there is no substantial improvement in the people's material life. As such, it compares with that of the comprador bourgeoisie in terms of results. Significantly, the comprador bourgeoisie has Mwireri eliminated, underlining the fact that for the dominant class, what matters is not merely the exploitation of the citizenry. This exploitation has to be done in cahoots with, in fact largely for, the neocolonial forces.

The comprador bourgeoisie, themselves the police of the colonial regime, figuratively speaking, use the police force to safeguard their exploitative hold on the country. In Ngugi's later works, we are shown that the continued exploitation of the people is made possible by the support that the bourgeoisie receives from the police force. This is well illustrated through inspector Godfrey in *Petals of Blood* and superintendent Gakono in *Devil on the Cross*.

Gakono, derived from the Swahili word *mkono* for "hand" refers to a disabled or withered hand and connotes that of the beggar. In the novel, we are shown that the only order that the police help to maintain is the exploitation of the poor. Thinking that Wangari has information on the common "thieves" Gakono praises her, telling her that if all people were to volunteer information like her, "the whole country would be cleansed of theft, robbery, and similar crimes and those who had would be able to enjoy their wealth and sleep soundly without any worries" (p. 440, emphasis mine). When he interrupts the meeting of "thieves" at the cave and realizes his blunder, we are told that when he is criticized angrily by the master of ceremonies, "[he], springing to attention started offering apologies and *begging for forgiveness* in a trembling voice" (p. 179, emphasis mine). A law enforcement officer, Gakono, like a child caught in the wrong, mumbles his apologies in an unpunctuated, incoherent and jumbled sentence of about a hundred words. This is the trembling of the beggar in the presence of his provider. We are shown that Gakono and his force are

essentially withered, disabled, and unable to bring about any change in the status quo. They merely superintend and guard against any change from a system that implicitly benefits them, hence their reactionary nature.

In *Devil on the Cross*, there is the hope that Gatuiria would discover his side as being with those who seek change. This is the hope that is anticipated in the name Gatuiria, which means "the seeker," "the Quester." At the beginning Gatuiria is portrayed as a radical, a potential revolutionary who rejects his father's property to do the bidding of his heart. One would then suppose that after rejecting his class origins, after his studies, Gatuiria would live up to the meaning of his name and search for a way to light up the darkness into which his father's class was leading the country and subvert it.

In the novel, Muturi, as the representative of the oppressed, throws the challenge to Gatuiria, the representative of the intellectuals: "Bring your education to us and don't turn your backs on the people. That's the only way" (p. 205). However, Gatuiria does not take up the challenge, and though critical of the oppressive regime, his political commitment remains purely academic. He becomes an example of the uncommitted intellectual, swaying from learned expositions on the exploitative system, therefore apparently taking the side of the masses, to identify with his bourgeois roots. Significantly, Muturi entrusts his gun to Wariinga because Gatuiria cannot be trusted. The gun is supposed to be an invitation to the worker's feast to be held sometime in the future, a feast to which Gatuiria is not invited due to his non-commitment.

After the events at the cave, Gatuiria completes his oratorio which tells the story of his country. We are told that after two years of hard work, the music is complete and Gatuiria is so pleased with this work that he could

even visualize the audience surging out of the concert hall, angry at those who sold the soul of the nation to foreigners and babbling with joy at the deeds of those who rescued the soul of the nation from foreign slavery. Gatuiria hopes that above all, his music will inspire people with patriotic love for Kenya (p. 227).

Ironically, this piece of music which should be part of a national heritage is to be Gatuiria's engagement gift to Wariinga. Ironically, too, after completing this musical score which tells the story of those who sold the soul of the nation to foreigners, Gatuiria draws closer to his father, an example of those who now sell the nation into neocolonialism.

As fate would have it, Gatuiria's music is never performed. This limits it to a personal possession and disqualifies Gatuiria, with all his criticism of the status quo, as a contributor to the heightening of the national awareness of the past and present of sellouts, and in inspiring and channeling that patriotic life for Kenya into positive action meant to reward those who have always fought off the foreigners.

Gatuiria fails because he undertakes to write a revolutionary song as an academic pursuit without immersing himself in the lives of those he writes about and taking sides with them. Fashioned by Gatuiria alone, the oratorio becomes a purely academic venture, written for the oppressed, and not with the oppressed.

Even at the hour of trial when Gatuiria has a chance to show whose side he is on, he fails. When Wariinga has shot down his father, we are told: "Gatuiria did not know what to do, to deal with his father's body, to comfort his mother or to follow Wariinga. So he just stood in the middle of the courtyard, hearing in his mind music that led him nowhere" (p. 254). However dubious a carrier of the people's revolution Wariinga may be, if Gatuiria was to identify with the people for whom he composed the oratorio (which we are meant to believe is the song he hears in his mind), his logical place would be by Wariinga's side. But, like he had done at the cave, Gatuiria just stands there, unsure of what to do.

Gatuiria has searched and quested so far only to discover his lack of commitment to changing that which he found. As such, his criticism of the exploitative system remains only academic. This failure to take sides with the oppressed and the exploited is a criticism of intellectuals who, like Gatuiria, just search for the causes of the social ills, recommending only academic solutions with which they do not even identify. At the beginning, we had been led to believe that Gatuiria had cut his class ties and was searching for identification with the oppressed. His remains a purely academic search which consigns him to the uncommitted petty bourgeois intellectual. His lack of political commitment would, therefore, appear to be captured in his name—the questor, the seeker.

At the beginning of this paper, we mentioned the fact that a definite partisanship is apparent in the character name choices in Ngugi's later works. Our discussion so far has centered on characters for whom Ngugi obviously feels little sympathy, characters he does not identify with. The rest of the discussion dwells on the three characters in *Devil on the Cross*, whose ideals Ngugi clearly shares.

In the novel, Wangari exemplifies the conscientization of the peasants. Her name evokes two qualities, and in negating one of these, it points to the possibility of the transformation of society. It could be derived from the leopard (*ngari* in Gikuyu) thus conjuring up the image of a tenacious animal. Wangari reveals this tenacity in fighting for her

rights and in defense of these rights. Again, it could be derived from the Gikuyu tradition, referring to the Aangari clan who, according to legend, were both mean and steadfast in defense of their principles. This steadfastness reinforces the tenacity which has already been referred to. In the novel, Wangari displays both these qualities.

Though young during the emergency, Wangari carried bullets and guns to the freedom fighters in the forests. And though young, Wangari was aware of the movement's goals, to shed blood, as she says, "so that our children might eat until they were full, might wear clothes that kept out the cold, might sleep in beds free from bed bugs" (p. 40). In embracing the struggle with its motive of sharing communally, Wangari, then, transcends the limitations of meanness implied in her name. She also transcends the carnivorous and predatory nature that one associates with the leopard and which Chui in *Petals of Blood* embraces. By embracing the current struggle and displaying the ferociousness that one associates with the leopard, Wangari in fact attains a revolutionary stature, her only limitation being her lack of understanding of the workings of the forces the peasants are up against. Through her negation of the negative qualities evoked by her name, we are shown that all that is needed for the Gitutus to also be re-integrated into the society is for them to submerge their selfish instincts freeing their energy to be absorbed in the collective ideals which would then humanize them.

Traditionally, the Gikuyu woman wore copper ornaments around her neck and on the hands. These were called *miriinga*, which can be loosely seen as rings. *Wariinga of Devil on the Cross* refers to a woman who wears such rings as adornments, thus translating as "of the rings."

A cursory glance at the bourgeois characters' habits and presumptions in *Devil on the Cross* shows that the woman is regarded as a decoration, a flower to adorn men's lives. She is seen as a game to be played when a man is bored or old, rekindling a kind of vitality that the wives cannot by implication rekindle. She is an animal to be hunted. The woman, especially, the young woman is seen as a veal or the spring chicken for an old man's toothless gums. She is perfume to be applied when it is scented but to be discarded at will when it has lost its scent. She is the fruit to be picked at leisure, sucked juiceless and discarded, and is something that can be owned. She is the rings to be worn, an adornment to men. At another level, the woman is regarded as a being with only one organ.

It seems to be *Wariinga's* role in the novel to emphasize that women play more than a sexual role and should, in fact, be taken on an equal basis with men. As such, *Wariinga* emphasizes that the woman is not man's flower, an inanimate object, that ornament to be worn to decorate the man or the scented perfume that the man wears when going

to dance, discarding it once it loses its scent. The key to Wariinga's name and character then is what she is conceived of as a reaction against.

Given the traditional and chauvinistic view we have explored above, it is significant that Wariinga studies engineering at the polytechnic, a "male" subject, and she takes martial arts, both of which are meant to make her self-reliant. It is also significant that after her "mental metamorphosis," Wariinga meets Ghitahy, the man who almost ruined her life. Like all the other bourgeois characters, Ghitahy believes that the woman is a flower, an ornament that can be bought like property. Like the other characters, Ghitahy can only hope to get Wariinga by promising her gifts and not as man getting a woman.

Wariinga's refusal of Ghitahy's gifts is a refusal to become his fruit, his flower, or ornament, somebody else's property. Though acting out what appears to be a personal revenge, she kills Ghitahy "to save many other people, whose lives will not be ruined by words of honey and perfume" (p. 253). In killing Ghitahy, therefore, Wariinga at one level kills the destroyer of womanhood, the symbol of her debauchery, thus symbolically removing the obstacle to the realization of women's dreams. In this way, she points to the need to see the "humanness" behind the beauty, hence the recognition of women as apart from their beauty and their sex.

At another, less credible level, Wariinga eliminates a representative of the exploiting force, since Ghitahy means "the one who scoops," the scooping that is characteristic of the bourgeoisie. By agreeing to keep Muturi's gun for him earlier in the novel, Wariinga endorses the workers' call and accepts the invitation to the workers' feast that the gun symbolizes. At the confrontation with Ghitahy, we are told that Wariinga looks at him "like a judge at an unrepentant prisoner who is pleading for mercy" (p. 249), and when she shoots him, it is as "a jigger, a louse, a weevil, a flea, a bedbug . . . a parasite that lives on the trees of other people's lives" (p. 254). Underlying all these descriptions is an emphasis on Ghitahy's parasitic nature which we have seen is the defining characteristic of the dominating class. As a member of the producer class whose basic humanity is denied by the dominant class, Wariinga is a fit judge of the parasitic class. Her shooting of Ghitahy is shown as part of the larger struggle to root out such parasites from the society.

In *Detained*, Ngugi asserts that Wariinga was meant to be a fictional reflection of the resistance heroine in Kenyan history, conceived along the lines of Mau-Mau women cadres.²⁰ However, this reflection is unrealized in *Devil on the Cross*. While Wariinga appears a credible protagonist exemplifying the liberation of women, even going through a revolutionary change, she fails as a reflection of

the "resistance heroine of Kenyan history." She is a character who develops from passion to purpose instead of vice versa. At the end, her perception is still too clouded by too much passion.

If we disregard the unreality of, and the coincidental nature of Wariinga's action of killing Ghitahy, and concentrate on the action itself, it becomes clear that Wariinga is inadequate as a carrier of the people's revolution. We are told that after killing Ghitahy, Wariinga walks on without looking back but knowing that "the hardest struggles of her life's journey lay ahead" (p. 254). We are not given any indication what these struggles are, or that Wariinga has any plan of action to ensure the true liberation of the society. In this action, she is bound to be alone though Muturi's parting words earlier were that she would not be alone, since the workers and peasants would be behind her. But the workers as a conscious force shaping the future society are undeveloped. We saw glimpses of this force at the demonstration to chase out the "thieves" and "robbers" from the cave. Their consciousness, indeed their presence, is neglected in favor of Wariinga's metamorphosis into a mentally liberated woman, basically a feminist. While she is portrayed as the representative worker, Wariinga's intellectual physiognomy is more developed towards the women's liberation theme than to that of a carrier of the workers' and peasants' revolution. She remains an example of the much heralded strong Ngugi women characters, strong but nevertheless women who are all passion, with no clear cut programs for redeeming the society, characters who inevitably and invariably need men to conscientize them and to channel their passion towards positive change in society. Wanja in *Petals of Blood* and Guthera in *Matigari* are the same as Wariinga.

At the beginning of this paper, we mentioned the distinction that Ngugi makes in his characterization through the character of Muturi. In *Devil on the Cross*, Muturi himself best exemplifies the productive forces that seek to humanize the society. He is a worker who specializes in carpentry, stone working, and plumbing. He can, however, do anything that involves work with the hands. This contrasts with bourgeoisie as exemplified by Gitutu, whose hands are almost disappearing because they have no work to do. As a builder, Muturi is the representative worker. He is Muturi, "the builder," not merely "the Smith" of *Petals of Blood*.

There is a way in which Muturi's full name—Muturi wa Kahonia Maithori—can be seen as a sentence in itself, which, then, means "the builder or maker of that which heals the tears." In trying to organize the workers for higher pay in Boss Kihara's company, in helping to organize the Ilmorog workers to confront their oppressors, Muturi is helping to create the awareness, the force that will wipe away the tears of those who are exploited. Muturi, as the creator, the builder

and producer, and as the one who creates that which will heal the tears of the producers, is created to take away the power of destruction from the clan of parasites. Whereas in *Petals of Blood* we only see the productivity of the workers, the producers in their work activity, this activity in *Devil on the Cross* is effectively captured in Muturi's name, which enhances the dichotomy between the producers and the destroyers.

Muturi's significance in *Devil on the Cross* appears to be the fact that he is the one who links the workers in the various places. He has travelled widely in Kenya, doing all sorts of jobs. As he reveals, he is a delegate of a worker's secret organization in the capital and wherever he is, he is acting on their behalf. He shows that the confrontation of the workers and the owners of capital is part of an ideal to usher in a more just society. The gun he gives Wariinga indicates the imminence of the inter-class war. The suggestion here is that the gun will be used to confront the armed presence of the owners of capital in a bid to wipe away the tears of the exploited.

As the recruiting agent of the workers' organization, Muturi fans the awareness of those who are victims of exploitation. Through his efforts, the owners of capital are pitted against the owners of labor. By fanning the awareness of the workers as their representative, Muturi becomes the maker, the builder, the creator of that which will heal the workers tears. Given the abused humanity of the workers, Muturi's act of humanizing them is a revolutionary step. Added to that we are meant to see that Muturi is a champion of the workers' revolution which is invariably aimed at wrenching power from the dominant class and establishing the dictatorship of the proletariat, a social set-up where the products of labor go back to the producer. This enhances his revolutionary stature.

At another level, Muturi is the folkloric smith who has come back from the smithy to deliver his wife from the suffering inflicted upon her by the Ogre which capitalism is shown to be. His contribution to the raising of the workers' awareness is the sharpening of the swords that will be used to bring down the Ogre.

We have looked at a cross-section of the characters' names in *Devil on the Cross*. We have tried to show how the character names become expressive of the social reality that the characters live in. We have tried as fully as possible to discuss the social essence of the characters illustrating the fact that the individual's thoughts and deeds become representative of his/her class and concretize certain aspects of the larger society. We have shown that in the novel, the naming of characters is part of a symbolic structure, an expression of the universal through the particular, a concretization of the universal or the abstract, in essence a means of typifying characters.

The symbol is a blending of the infinite and the finite, an expression of the universal through the particular. The type is the specific figure from which we can reasonably extrapolate, that concentrates and intensifies a much more general reality. The two are, therefore, related in the quality of concretization. We have shown that Ngugi combines the two, with the symbolism in the name helping enhance the typicality of the character. We can now close our discussion with what appears to be a tautology. Given the foregoing observations, we cannot expect a Gitutu or a Nditika to comprise the revolutionary type. Conversely, we cannot expect a Muturi to comprise the reactionary type. As we have shown, certain qualities in the names of the characters decisively point to the character type. In the novel's structure, the character name acts as the springboard for the creation of the character type.

¹Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Devil on the Cross* (London: Heinemann, 1982). Further references to this novel shall be indicated within the body of the text.

²Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Petals of Blood* (Nairobi: Heinemann, 1977).

³Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Matigari*. Translated from the Gikuyu by Wangui Goro (Oxford: Heinemann, 1989).

⁴Killam cites as his source Cyril Triestar, "An Addition to the Genre of the Proletarian Novel: *Ngugi's Petals of Blood*," *Nairobi Times*, November 6, 1978.

⁵For example, Killam takes Nderi of *Petals of Blood* to refer to a vulture, whereas it refers to the eagle. He takes Muturi to mean "black," while the name actually refers to a "smith" or a "builder."

⁶Gordon Killam, *An Introduction to the Writings of Ngugi* (London: Heinemann, 1980), p. 106.

⁷Lewis Nkosi, *Tasks and Masks: Themes and Styles of African Literature* (Harlow, Essex: Longman, 1981), p. 73.

⁸George M. Gugelberger (ed.), *Marxism and African Literature* (New Jersey: African World Press, 1985), p. 127.

⁹Geoffrey Leech and Michael Short, *Style in Fiction* (New York: Longman, 1972), p. 155.

¹⁰Rene Wellek and Austin Warren, *Theory of Literature* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1949), p. 189.

¹¹X. J. Kennedy, *An Introduction to Fiction, Poetry and Drama* (Boston: Little Brown and Co., 1987), p. 615.

¹²*Ibid.*, p. 205.

¹³*Oxford English Dictionary, X*. (London: Oxford University Press, 1933).

¹⁴Boris Suchkov, *A History of Realism* (Moscow: Progress, 1973), p. 19.

¹⁵Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 101.

¹⁶Georg Lukacs, *Writer and Critic* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1974), p. 35.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, p. 58.

¹⁸Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg, *The Nature of Narrative* (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 204.

¹⁹Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *On Literature and Art* (Moscow: Progress, 1978 rpt.), p. 17.

²⁰Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary* (Nairobi: Heinemann, 1981), pp. 10-11.