# Towards an Authentic African Literary Tradition: Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o's Rewriting of *The Pilgrim's Progress* in *Devil on the Cross*

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**Abstract**

**When he made the decision to write his fictional works in Gĩkũyũ rather than in English in the late 1970s, Ngũgĩ's wa Thiong'o, Kenya's pioneering writer, was also one of the most prominent figures in African literature expressed in European languages. This article demonstrates that while Ngũgĩ has styled his linguistic shift as an attempt to find an aesthetic that would liberate African languages and literature from Europhonic notions of culture, it did not mean that he would henceforth cut links with the English tradition as a source of aesthetic inspiration. Taking the example of his first novel originally composed in Gĩkũyũ, Devil on the Cross, the article shows that while his choice of language did indeed gives him access to the aesthetic referents embedded in Gĩkũyũ language and oral tradition, Ngũgĩ's Gĩkũyũ writings have a rich intextextuality with English canonical texts and with the works of D.O. Fagunwa and Amos Tutuola who pioneered a literary tradition that attempted to imagine African post-colonial identity from the perspective of a pre-colonial gnosis based on the rich oral traditions on the continent.This article argues that although the aesthetic model pioneered by Fagunwa and Tutuola was supplanted by the "modernist aesthetic" as Africa emerged from colonialism,it has recently found converts among African writers, among them Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o. The article reads Devilon the Cross as the exemplifier of an authentic African literary tradition based on orature and African gnosis; a tradition that foregrounds African worldviews.**

**Key Words:** African Literature, Gnosis, Ngũgĩ's wa Thiong'o, Postcolonial, mythology

## Introduction

When John Bunyan's allegory of the Christian life, *The Pilgrim's Progress* was first published in 1678, it was quickly appropriated in seventeenth century England as an evangelical text. In the book, Christian, the pilgrim, traverses hill Difficulty through the Valley of the Shadow of Death and Vanity Fair on his

journey to the Celestial City of salvation. In the cause of the journey he meets characters such as Christiana, Hopeful, Mr. Worldly, Wiseman, Mercy, and the Giant Despair who lives in Doubting Castle – all of whom either aid or try to hinder Christian on his Journey. The book travelled to many parts of the postcolonial world where it was widely used an evangelical document by the Christian missionaries before being reclaimed in the last quarter of the nineteenth century as an icon of Englishness by the then emerging discipline of English literature (Hofmeyr, 2004: 218). One of the reasons Bunyan's book was able to reach many parts of the world was its portability. Writing at a time when literacy was not yet widespread, Bunyan presented his text in a simple linear and episodic plot. This meant that the text could be rendered serially as a sequence of freestanding episodes. The structure made the text easily translatable and adaptable to different media of dissemination including postcards, wallcharts, slides, sermons and choir services. *ThePilgrim's Progress* could therefore be easily grasped by para-literate publics both in England and, later, in other parts of the world. In addition, Bunyan depicts a "simple" moral world in which the divide between good and evil is clearly delineated.

In East Africa, *The Pilgrim's Progress* had been present in African languages since 1888 when the first Kiswahili version was published by the Religious Tract Society. A Gĩkũyũ version was published in 1931. Elsewhere, a Yoruba version had been present in Nigeria since 1868 (Hofmeyr, 2004). As with many other postcolonial writers,Ngũgĩ encountered the book either in the mission schools or in the curriculum of the colonial school system where was upheld as an iconic text of English literature. Because of its association with the missionary enterprise and with the English literary tradition, many postcolonial writers looking for alternative aesthetic modes free from Eurocentric references were inclined to dismiss *The Pilgrim's Progress* alongside the Bible as foreign texts. This raises important questions: can justifiably continue to be regarded the book as a Western text given its long presence in Africa?

This article starts from the premise that given its long residence in Africa, it is no longer logical to read *The Pilgrim's Progress* as Western or European text. This is because over the years since its arrival as an evangelical text, the book has been so thoroughly appropriated and re-interpreted by Africans through the prism of their own languages, cultures and experiences that it has lost allegiance to its Western provenance and become part of the popular oral tradition. This, as this article demonstrates, is evident in the way African writers interact with the book in their writings.

## African Gnosis and the Re-appropriation of *The Pilgrim's Progress* in the Writings of D.O. Fagunwa and Amos Tutuola

As noted above, the reason why *The Pilgrim's Progress* was able to easily move around the world was its portability. But when books travel, they are changed by the new intellectual formations into which they migrate. African writers have been at the forefront of reconfiguring *The Pilgrim's Progress* to mediate its new African contexts. The Yoruba writer D.O. Fagunwa in *Ogboju Ode Ninu Irunmale* (The Forest of a Thousand Daemons) (1938 / 1968), one of the first novels to be written in any African language, and in*Irinkerindo Ninu Igbo Elegbeje*first published in 1949and inEnglish as*Expedition to theMountain of Thought* (1954), Fagunwa presents picaresquetales of a Yoruba hunter encountering folklore elementssuch as magic, monsters, spirits, and gods. His works characteristically take the form of loosely constructed picaresque fairy tales containing many folklore elements: spirits, monsters, gods, magic, and witchcraft. His language is vivid: a sad man "hangs his face like a banana leaf," a liar "has blood in his belly but spits white saliva." Every event points to a moral, and this moral tone is reinforced by his use of Christian concepts and of traditional and invented proverbs. Fagunwa's imagery, humour, wordplay, and rhetoric reveal an extensive knowledge of classical Yoruba.

Apart from the Yoruba mythology, Fagunwa was also influenced by such "Western" works as John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress,* which were translated into Yoruba by missionaries. A case in point is his depiction of hell which resembles the House of the Interpreter in *The Pilgrim's Progress*. This is where Christian is shown various emblematic pictures and spectacles whose allegorical significance is then explained to him. For Bunyan, allegory is an effective technique that surpasses the expressive capacity of "mere words". It is a form of visual spectacle that appeals to the popular taste, consequently highly memorable, and which offers strategies for didactic writing. Fugunwa puts this didactic element in *The Pilgrim's Progress* to use in use in his own writing. What interests him is the idea of hell as a compelling theatre of instruction. Hence, "borrowing from Bunyan's House of the Interpreter, Fagunwa establishes hell as a site of moral teaching hell becomes a space of public educational theatre, where a series of didactic lessons is broadcast to an audience. Through this technique, Fagunwa opens up the possibility of imagining hell as a place of public performance in which audiences are convened to observe spectacles of various kinds" (2004: 198).

In translating Fagunwa's work into English, Soyinka is, however, keen to preserve the African worldview through which Fagunwa transacts and indigenises the Christian idiom of *The Pilgrim's Progress*. The translator firmly holds that the "beings who inhabit Fagunwa's world demand at all costs and by every conceivable translator's trick to be preserved from the common or

misleading associations which substitutes such as *demons*, *devils* or *gods* evoke in the reader's mind" (Soyinka, 1968: 3). The rejection of the Christian connotations implicit in such words compels Soyinka to retool the English language and to come up with such neologisms as "deamons" (demons), "ghommids" (spiritual beings), and "gnom" (menacing beings). Thus despite the heavy Bunyanesque overtones in Fagunwa's novel, Soyinka clearly intends for it to be understood in terms of the African gnosis.

The aesthetic that Fagunwa launches in his novels was to prove suggestive to later novelists. Amos Tutuola in *The Wild Hunter in the Bush of Ghosts* follows Fagunwa's example of Africanizing Bunyan. His reconfiguration of hell is strikingly similar to Fagunwa's: the route to heaven, like Bunyan's narrow way, is "a paved road which spread straight towards the road of heaven" (Soyinka, 1968: 95). But Tutuola also extends Fagunwa's experimentations by extending the symbolism of hell as a space of public spectacle and by picking up on "broader African readings of documents as both passes and passports to heaven" (Hofmeyr, 2004: 199). Derived from Bunyan, the idea of documents and passbooks valorise African understanding of heaven as a domain that sets stringent entry stipulations. In Tutuola's novel, *The Wild Hunter in the Bush of Ghosts*, entry to heaven is governed by documents issued to a person when he is first molded from clay by the angels of heaven. The documents are then sent to earth, where, depending on a person's moral conduct a decision is made on whether to send him either to heaven or hell.

Although now read as a literary curiosity, Amos Tutuola novel, *ThePalm Wine Drinkard* (1952) written in broken English is one of the earliest works in African literature. In the novel, Tutuoladeploys a multi-generic novelistic style and a folklore-based aesthetic. His fictional world as represented in the novel is a world that is familiar in African orature – a world of rituals, witches and wizards, magic and magicians. This is a representation that mostly Western critics have not been able to reconcile with their inherited notions of literature. Anthony West, for instance, posits that one catches in Tutuola's novels "a glimpse of the very beginning of literature, that moment when writing at last seizes and pins down the myths and legends of analphabetic culture [i.e. non-literate ]" (qtd. in Talib, 2002: 73). The implication here is that Tutuola captures a unique and unrepeatable moment in the development of African literature. This view is restated by Tobias who reads Tutuola's and Fagunwa's mix of references to their Yoruba oral heritage and "Western sources" such as *The Pilgrim's Progress* as evidence that the writers are transiting from "traditional" forms to "modern" literature; obviously a very desirable development in his view (1999).

However, a close look at African literature shows that Tutuola's recourse to the myths and legends of his culture was not a transitory moment in African literature. The mix of African oral and so-called "Western" sources that we also

see in Fagunwa's work has become the distinctive feature of the best in modern African literature. These writers as Obiechina notes of Tutuola are "no lineal descendant(s) of European writers" in Africa (1990: 21). They owe their allegiance to the African gnosis and experience through which they interpret even such supposedly "Western" texts as *The Pilgrim's Progress.*But their attempts to imagine African post-colonial identity from the perspective of a pre-colonial gnosis was marginalized and supplanted by a "modernist aesthetic" spearheaded by Chinua Achebewhose *Things Fall Apart*, came to be seen as a model and inspiration for other African writers to follow" (Lock, 2002: 1). Achebe's novel valorised an English aesthetic that remained well within the conventions of the modernist novel particularly in its adherence to the conventions of realism. Indeed, African writers and critics generally accepted the Achebean model as the only valid aesthetic for the African novel. The Achebean model became the reference point of African attempts to negotiate the culture of modernity. Thus *Things Fall Apart* enjoys the prestige of institutional primacy among works of African literature in English while its author is hailed as the father-inventor of the modern African novel.

Tutuola and Fagunwa modelledan aesthetic that was firmly grounded in African gnosis and ways of seeing the world. They are the true precursors of Africa's innovatory novels that seek to meld an African gnosis and aesthetic to the form of the modernist novel. This includes the novels of such pioneer writers as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and Ayi Kwei Armah. In the recent past, this aesthetic has found new exponents among a younger generation of writers such as Ben Okri in *The Famished Road*who uses Abiku as a cultural metaphor in his work thus exploiting a feature African worldview rooted in the pervasive belief in the existence of the spirit-child (Kamalu, 2014). Alongside writers like Tsitsi Dangarembaga in *Nervous Conditions*, Okri represents a growing list of African writers who are making deliberate attempts to "renew" the art of fiction by drawing from the folk narrative traditions. Apart from their use of orature, and notwithstanding the difference in their choice of linguistic medium, these writers have striking similarities. Aesthetically, their novels are innovative and exemplify the counter-hegemonic discourse in modern African literature.

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o is unique among these writers because unlike Okri and Dangarembga who go back to a Fagunwa-Tutuolan aesthetic through the English language, Ngũgĩ, "goes directly to the source by mastering the Gĩkũyũ language" (Balogun, 1997: ix). But Ngũgĩ always perceived *ThePilgrim's Progress* as an adverse influence on the history of literature in Africa because of its association with the missionary enterprise and the canon of English literature (Ngũgĩ, 1986: 69). Consequently, in his deployment of Bunyanesque tropes, Ngũgĩ set out to mitigate these perceived shortcomings by writing a secular and indeed political novel in Gĩkũyũ language. Nevertheless as Hofmeyr perceptively observes, his

re-appropriation of Bunyan owes something to "the wit of not only Amos Tutuola but also, through Tutuola, to Fagunwa" (2004: 203).

### Ngũgĩ's Subversion of Patriarchy: The Marxist Re-appropriation of *The Pilgrim's Progress* in *Devil on the Cross*

Ngũgĩ's *Devil on the Cross* exemplifies the apogee of the authentic African literary tradition pioneered by Fagunwa and Tutuola. In Ngũgĩ's novel, *The Pilgrim's Progress* is travestied and retooled as an allegorical critique of patriarchy and neo-colonialism in Kenya. The author's use of orature is is informed by Fanon's dictum that: "the oral tradition – stories, epics and songs of the people – which were formerly filed away as set pieces are now beginning to change". They are not ossified forms but are subjected to "modifications that are increasingly fundamental". These modifications involve bringing conflicts "up to date" and modernising "the kinds of struggle which the stories evoke, together with the names of heroes and types of weapons. The method of allusion is more and more widely used" (1968: 240). The re-appropriation of oral genres such the *gĩcaandi* enables Ngũgĩ to access an idiom that has been suppressed as a result of colonial and post-colonial marginalisation of oral forms of cultural representation.

Written texts such as Bunyan's *ThePilgrims Progress* whichwas initially part of the colonising evangelical ideology of missionary Christianity are reconfigured to mediate contemporary life and Ngũgĩ's secular ideology. Bunyan's book provided a perfect model for Ngũgĩ. Its episodic structure concurs with how story episodes behave in oral narrative traditions where stories are open-ended and episodes have no strictly preordained sequence. The arrangement of episodes depends on the moment of performance and the performer's assessment of the interests and composition of the audience. The text's loose structure combined with its oral nature was crucial to winning popular audiences. Such "folkloric elements" made it easy for Bunyan to be assimilated into the oral tradition (Hofmeyr, 2004: 30). Borrowing from Gĩkũyũ orature and Bunyan, Ngũgĩ's novel incorporates many of these features. Its plot, for instance, is a sequence of loosely connected episodes.

As the author conceived it, the content and form of his novel was going to be determined by "the Kenyan people's struggles against the neo-colonial form and stage of imperialism" (1981: 8). Described as "a startling new departure" (Cook and Okenimkpe, 1997: 115) from his previous novels in terms of style, *Devil on the Cross* examines the exploitation of the Kenyan people by a corrupt local bourgeoisie in collusion with the international entrepreneurial bourgeoisie. The narrative centres on the proletariasation of the peasantry after being alienated from their land. Going beyond the mere documentation of these social-economic and political problems, Ngũgĩ is keen to show through the experiences of his

principal characters – Warĩĩnga, Mũturi, Wangarĩ, and Gatuĩria representing the oppressed how such oppression may be countered.

While conscious that they are narrating contemporary life, Ngũgĩ's oral narrators are cognisant of the co-existence of modern and traditional aesthetic codes and utilise both to frame their stories. In the process, the novel is reconfigured as an oral narrative performance thus reconnecting it with the oral storytelling tradition that the author sees as the foundation of an authentic African literary tradition (Goro & Ilieva, 2014). The *gĩcaandĩ* narrator, for instance, opens the tale on a heightened poetic pitch that is characterised by the use of an arcane idiom that gets the audience keyed to the symbolic nature of the tale. This symbolic impulse is enhanced by the narrator's opening words: "The devil appeared to Warĩĩnga one day…" (*DOC*, 4). Ngũgĩ's deployment of Biblical discourse is highly subversive. The narrator's words signal the author's "mischievous intention to force Christian religion into a nontraditional role" (Balogun, 1997: 64). This is evident in the reversal that puts the devil on the Cross instead of Christ.

What is particularly interesting about Ngũgĩ's aesthetic strategy in the novel is the ways in which he travesties such Christian texts as Bunyan's *ThePilgrim's Progress*. Like Bunyan's text, *Devil on the Cross* is partly delivered under the "similitude" of a dream and features fantastic characters and shares Bunyan's strident moral tone. Like Bunyan who also wrote his work in prison, Ngũgĩ is a moralist who uses the techniques of suspense to create a narrative by withholding vital information. The identity of the devil, for instance, is only gradually revealed as the story unfolds. The first hint comes in the form of a note that is handed to Warĩĩnga by one of the thugs hired by her landlord to evict her from the rented room. In the note, the thugs identify themselves as "the Devils Angels: Private Businessmen" (*DOC*, 4). More revelations come in the narrator's account of a recurrent nightmare that has plagued Warĩĩnga since she was a young girl. In Warĩĩnga's nightmare, a crowd of people dressed in rags crucify the devil. The devil is a grotesque personage: dressed in a silk suit, he had seven horns and seven trumpets for sounding hymns in his own praise and glorification. On one level the devil is imagined as a rich man whose belly sagged as if about to give birth to all the evils of this world. On the other, the devil is cast in the image of the ogre. Like the ogre in Gĩkũyũ folktales, he has two mouths, one on the forehead and the other at the back of his neck. Although he pleads with the people not to crucify him and promises never again to build Hell for the People on Earth, the people crucify him all the same. But after three days, his followers come and lift him from the Cross. They pray him to give them some of his robes of cunning upon which their bellies begin to swell with all the evils of the world. They then walk towards Warĩĩnga stroking their bellies and laughing at her (*DOC*, 7-8).

The fantastical world of Warĩĩnga's nightmare is an unconscious extrapolation of the suppressed anxieties that haunt her life. One cannot fail to see the link between Warĩĩnga's oppression and the occurrence of the nightmares. That the devil who appears to her as a caricature of a rich man – fat, in a suit, and carrying a folded walking stick – reminds Warĩĩnga of the Rich Old Man who defiled her as a school girl. In the latest incident Warĩĩnga experiences the nightmare on her way home to Ilmorog after losing her secretarial job and being evicted from her house in Nairobi. The hired thugs who evict her give her a card that, as in Tutuola's *The Wild Hunter in the Bush of Ghosts*, is reproduced in the text. It says: "We Are the Devil's Angels: Private Businessmen"

The journey motif dominates the novel and controls the life of the heroine. On her way home Warĩĩnga is given one of two variants of an invitation card to a feast in IImorog. The first, which bears the inscription "Devil's Feast" is a fake printed by those opposed to the feast. The genuine card printed by the promoters of the feast has the inscription: "Big Feast". Mwĩreri wa Mũkiraai, one of the promoters explains that this is not a devil's feast as its detractors claim. The feast is, he explains, organised by a conglomeration Western capitalists. But his attempt to explain the feast confirms the link between oppression and the devils in Warĩĩnga's nightmare. Mũkiraai justifies robbery as a means of maintaining social inequality in terms of Biblical hierarchical representation of heaven. It is clear from his explanation that heaven and hell are seen as allegories of the real world (DOC, 73).

Accompanied by the people she meets in the *matatu* to IImorog, Warĩĩnga attends the feast where the identity of the devil is further revealed. *The Pilgrim's Progress* addresses itself to questions of social and religious inequality and takes up the case of the weak against the strong. Ngũgĩ's deployment of Bunyanesque allegory while mimicking *ThePilgrim's Progress* shows how African audiences were quick to recuperate this liberatory metatext in the book. In *Devil on the Cross*, Warĩĩnga is faced by a series of problems related to the oppression she has to bear on account of her class and gender identity. When we first meet her, she is so overburdened by the problems that she tries to end her life by throwing herself under a bus on the streets of Nairobi. In Bunyanesque idiom, these problems figured in terms of a "load" or "burden" includes her early and unwanted pregnancy, unemployment, sexual harassment, and gender discrimination. However, Ngũgĩ inverts the evangelical aspects of Bunyan. The Broad and Narrow Way become the false and the true roads: the first leads to capitalist damnation and the other to a workers' consciousness of their oppression and ultimately, to revolution.

In this context, Warĩĩnga's journey by matatu from Nairobi to IImorog is one of the most important episodes in the novel. It reifies Ngũgĩ's representation of the urban space as a site of alienation and the village as the idyllic "home" that

provides an antidote to the disorientation of the city. This is analogous with the depiction in many African folktales of the place "outside" home as potentially threatening. Although Bunyanesque allegory is carefully grafted into this African notion of place the journey is mediated through Ngũgĩ's Marxist ideology as a transition from "false" to "true" consciousness. The journey to IImorog is a movement not merely towards higher political consciousness but toward ameliorative political action as well. It is an allegorical journey in which Warĩĩnga meets "Evangelists" who assist in the process of her conscientisation. They include the student who saves her from a possible accident, Mũturi (worker), and the eldery Wangari (a peasant and ex Mau Mau cadre). The three "evangelists" constitute a "Holy Trinity", "the vanguard of enlightenment that set Warĩĩnga on the path to "true" consciousness" (Hofmeyr, 2004: 205). The deployment of the *matatu* though seemingly innocuous is ideologically and aesthetically significant. A popular form of transportation for the poor in Kenya, the matatu is figured as a domain in which counter-publics are constituted. Here, languages and discourses suppressed in the post-colonial public sphere are given ventilation. The *matatu* can therefore be read as a non-bourgeois public sphere where ordinary people meet as a "community" to share ideas on matters of public interest. The potency of the matatu as an alternative domain of public debate was brought to the fore at about the time Ngũgĩ wrote the novel when then President Moi threatened to ban matatus allegedly because they had become meeting grounds for political discussion and the distribution of seditious publications (Graebner, 1992). In the novel, the matatu plays a similar role as a site of contestation which poses the discourses of the people against those of the power elite.

Through the debates in the *matatu*, Warĩĩnga is exposed to all facets of political thought and ideology which lead her to join the workers in their struggle against oppression. As these discourses unfold, a conscientised political community is forged among the oppressed. This is an important prerequisite if the kind of radical social change Ngũgĩ envisions is to be realised. But even more important, from an aesthetic point of view, is that the *matatu* has evolved into a mode that epitomises trends in Kenyan popular culture including speech habits, oral lore, and popular. Hence, following his characters through the journey from Nairobi to IImorog enables Ngũgĩ to claim a place for these popular forms of representation in the post-colonial public sphere.

In a gesture that reifies Ngũgĩ's revolutionary politics in *Devil on the Cross*, the final step towards Warĩĩnga's conscientisation as she advances on the road to higher gender and revolutionary consciousnessoccurs when Mũturi, the worker, gives her a small gun. If in Tutuola novels documents serve as passports to either heaven or hell (Hofmeyr, 2004), Ngũgĩ is conscious that in a postcolonial context where one is dealing with an insidious oppressor class more is required. The gunsymbolically is an "invitation to the worker's feast to be held sometimes in

the future" (DOC, 211).In Ngũgĩ's politics, the gun is the ultimate tool of liberation.The gun fosters Warĩĩnga's self-confidence as she proceeds as she proceeds on the road towards greater gender and political consciousness. By the time she arrives in IImorog, Warĩĩnga – and the audience – have imbibed the central message of the novel that to enter the "heaven" of a workers state, one will have to travel the narrow way of revolutionary armed struggle.

The invitations to attend the devil's feast can be read as a summoning of audiences which is an important precondition for the actualisation of the feast as a near-theatrical performance. In a surreal way, this performance in which the forces of oppression clash with those of the oppressed workers is highly entertaining. But it is more than mere entertainment. The author inverts the evangelical aspects of Bunyan in a Marxist framework. In ideological terms, the spectacle at the Devil's Feast satirises the workings of international capitalism as the delegates dramatise their exploitative tendencies and demand rewards from the representatives of international capitalism for their expertise in modern theft and robbery. The episode which takes place at a cave in IImorog is central to the novel in that it shows what is wrong in the postcolony. Using the language of Biblical parables, Ngũgĩ depicts the devil's feast as a performance in which the local bourgeoisie "testify" to their loyalty in taking care of the property (talents) of theft and robbery bequeathed them by the departing colonial masters. The author appropriates the notion of "testimony" which is ingrained in African Christianity to expose the excesses of the local bourgeoisie as the local capitalists follow each other on stage to demonstrate their expertise in theft and robbery.

By dramatising the excesses of the capitalist bourgeois class, the spectacle can be seen "as a gloss on Fagunwa's insight into the stage-managed nature of public culture" (Hofmeyr, 2004: 207). The feast is turned into a site where the audience is instructed on the moral bankruptcy of the capitalist ideology. Nevertheless, Ngũgĩ is not content to merely satirise the exploiter class. He transcends satire by prescribing a Marxist solution to the problems of exploitation. The audience is expected to see through the façade and take the appropriate action to stem the kind of exploitation dramatised at the Feast. The call to action is figured in the attempt to disrupt the feast by a group of workers. These characters include Warĩĩnga, Wangarĩ, Mũturi, and Gatuĩria, who have travelled from Nairobi to IImorog to attend the Feast. The moral lessons these characters embody are meant to help the oppressed masses who are the real agents of change to propel history forward.

Women play a central role in the workers' attempt to reclaim a nation that has been hijacked by the capitalist exploiters. Ngũgĩ deploys orature, Bunyan's *ThePilgrim's Progress,* the Bible, Kenyan history, particularly the discourse of Mau Mau, contemporary political realities and Marxism to craft a multivoiced narrative that charts Warĩĩnga's transformation from a political neophyte to a

revolutionary. The author interrogates and critiques the gendered discourses of the colonial and post-colonial public spheres. Once again, Ngũgĩ's inversion of the evangelical aspect in *Pilgrim's Progress* is intertwined with the inversion of the text's gendered discourse. In place of Christian, the character whose quest for enlightenment forms the substance of Bunyan's text, Ngũgĩ writes Warĩĩnga as Christian's female equivalent. This enables the author to subvert the protestant masculinities of the mission – and colonial enterprises – as well as those of African culture in which the female is either demonised or idealised as the "repository of value in patriarchal societies" (Boehmer, 1992: 233). In countering this image of the woman, Ngũgĩ draws inspiration from the resilience of women in the struggle against oppression in Kenya's history (Ngũgĩ, 1981). In this sense, *Devil on the Cross* offered Ngũgĩ "something like a second chance" to re-think the historical role of women in the struggle against oppression (Williams, 1999). The result is that Warĩĩnga emerges as one of the most progressive depictions of a woman in African literature. She refuses to succumb to male oppression and becomes the embodiment of the people's resistance against oppression.

As an exemplar of the plight of the oppressed in the postcolony, Warĩĩnga's acceptance of feminist agency allegorises the revolutionary struggle against all forms of oppression which culminates in her shooting to death the Rich Old Man who ruined her life. In Bunyanesque idiom, Warĩĩnga's killing of the Rich Old Man symbolises her rejection of the "Broad Highway" and an affirmation of the "Narrow Way" of struggle against oppression. Her drastic transformation from a neophyte to a revolutionary is drawn in such heroic terms that whatever reprisals she might face for killing the old man can only be a momentary set back in the struggle which, despite the failure of the workers uprising at the cave, the novel strongly suggests, must eventually triumph.

## Conclusion

One noticeable aspects of *Devil on the Cross* is the simplicity of the moral world depicted in the novel. Just like in *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Ngũgĩ depicts a world in which the boundary between "good" and "bad" is unequivocal – a clear departure from his past works in which he presented a more complex sense of the colonial and postcolonial reality. Appropriated through the prism of African gnosis, 'western' texts such as the Bible and *The Pilgrim's Progress*yield an aesthetic of representation thatNgũgĩ believes can frame an aesthetic for an authentic African literature that puts African viewpoints at the fore and which, above all, is familiar and accessible to the author's putative audience. Departing from the model of themodernist novel, especially in English, with its complex moral texture which he felt excluded the majority who could not read English, Ngũgĩ, like Bunyan, saw himself as a teacher. The crucial difference between these two writers is that whereas Bunyan was an evangelical teacher concerned

with the teaching of scriptural truths, Ngũgĩ sought for a secular framework that would allow him to impart political lessonsto his audience.

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