

Ideology and the Image of Women: Kenyan Women in Njau and Ngugi

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ONE PROMINENT GROUP among the classes of oppressed peoples in the world — the women — has been the subject of much recent discussion. In literary criticism, this has been evident in recent years in the phenomenal number of image studies of the sexes.¹ Though some of these studies have rightly probed into the historical and other reasons for the oppression of and discrimination against women, and though most of the criticism calls for a more positive (one might even say honest) approach in the depiction of female characters, there seems to be the increasing danger of even well-intentioned and perceptive critics merely looking at the tyranny over women as mainly a battle between the sexes. According to such critics, it is primarily *men* who have always posed the major problem for *women*. Thus one critic, Mary Anne Ferguson, submits that women have been degraded in most fictional works (including even those by their female counterparts), largely because of the dominant control men have almost always had over literary traditions. In Ferguson's words:

We must remember in discussing the history of the images of women in Literature that they reflect the masculine vision; *masculine images have established our literary tradition and have controlled both male and female authors. Even among female authors — who have no distinctively feminine tradition — male attitudes persist . . .*

*Even such admittedly great writers as Emily Brontë and Emily Dickinson have been viewed condescendingly both by their contemporaries and by male critics today because they wrote like women.*² (Emphasis mine)

Similar views are expressed by two other critics, Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, in an even more recent study, where they

suggest that the female writer (and, by extension, her real life counterpart), must channel her energies in a new direction in the struggle for freedom. For these critics, the female writer's battle "is not against her (male) precursor's reading of the world but against his reading of *her*" and, therefore, "she can begin such a struggle only by seeking a *female* precursor who, far from representing a threatening force to be denied or killed, proves by example that a revolt against patriarchal literary authority is possible."³

Although it is an unfortunate truism that from Homer through the writers of the Bible, Chrétien, Chaucer, Shakespeare, Petrarch, Dante, Balzac, and on to African writers of the twentieth century, we have often seen negative images — even stereotypes — of women, it would be an oversimplification of literary history and, certainly, an affront to the female intellect to conclude, as some of these critics have done, that even female writers who create negative fictional women only do so because they have been blindly led to accept and depict things from the male viewpoint. The nineteenth-century British female novelist Mary Ann Evans, who had to publish under the male pseudonym "George Eliot," can be seen as an example of a female writer who, even during that relatively early period in the demand for the liberation of women, clearly saw the issue of feminine subjugation as being much more complex than simply a battle between the man and the woman. To illustrate this point, a brief explication of certain aspects of Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* is in order.

In *The Mill on the Floss* — which is neither a "political" novel nor even Eliot's best — we see that, among other things, Eliot takes a sociological look at the fictional society of St. Ogg's and also at the effects of this environment on the development of the two leading characters, the Tulliver children, Tom and Maggie. In the process, the novelist portrays the many problems confronting the bright and independent Maggie who grows up in a society that tries to smother her potential. The young girl comes into conflict not only with her mother's relatives but also with other members of the society at large because of her desire to be respected as an intelligent, sensitive human being. We are hardly in doubt that, for most of the time, Maggie Tulliver carries the

novelist's endorsement. It is, however, inaccurate to suggest that Eliot is merely adopting a "feminist" perspective by endowing Maggie with more positive qualities than any of the other major characters. Rather, one can safely say that throughout the novel, Eliot seems to be emphasizing that, depending on a writer's social vision (and regardless of his or her sex), male or female characters within a literary work can be portrayed as cold, mean and vindictive (as the female members of her mother's family, the Dodsons), as rash, irresponsible but sympathetic (as her father, Mr. Tulliver), or as discerning (as Maggie), and so forth.

It is with this example from one of the finest writers in the British literary tradition in mind that I wish to demonstrate how a writer's *ideology* (as it is implicitly revealed in the literary text), and not that writer's *sex*, helps determine the sexual images within the text. Looking at an author's ideological stance rather than at his or her biological identity as a clue to an understanding of that author's manner of characterization will not only help clarify *how* characters are described, but (perhaps more importantly), explain *why* they are shown in the way they are — the latter point being an issue often neglected by critics. The examples of Rebeka Njau's *Ripples in the Pool*,⁴ and Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Petals of Blood*⁵ serve as excellent cases to elucidate this point.

Before probing into the way the sexes are depicted, and before suggesting reasons for this portrayal in both novels, I wish to risk being labelled a male chauvinist by clearly stating that, structurally, at least, *Ripples in the Pool* is much inferior to *Petals of Blood*. Firstly, unlike Ngugi who is able to effectively demonstrate the exploitation and oppression of the Kenyan people from the colonial period to the present era of black neo-colonialism as a major theme, Njau lacks the artistry to present even one clearly defined theme. One is often in doubt about what Njau is trying to say in *Ripples in the Pool*, not because of the writer's complex, or even "obscure," way of saying it, but rather because of the poor manner in which characters and events are presented. The reader is never sure whether Njau is dealing with the mother-fixation theme, or whether she wants to call attention to the abandonment of traditional values or, finally, whether she is just

trying to make a comment on a general malaise in the society. There are elements of each of these themes in the text, but none of them is developed enough to form a thematic unit. Njau also demonstrates an astounding capacity for creating colourless and hazy characters: the heroine Selina's friend, Sophia, Kefa Munene, who is the local M.P., Munene's father-in-law, Maina, and the nurse in Munene's "home" for the disabled, Maria, are examples of characters who, in spite of snippets of conversation allotted to them, quickly vanish from the reader's mind. Finally, the depth of psychological penetration which characterizes Ngugi's *A Grain of Wheat*, and part of which we see in *Petals of Blood*, is, at best, only hinted at in *Ripples in the Pool*.

Some parallels in plot and theme nevertheless make an examination of Njau's and Ngugi's novels most significant in the context of the "woman question." The leading female protagonists in both novels — Selina in *Ripples in the Pool* and Wanja in *Petals of Blood* — go through identical experiences and, not surprisingly, arrive at the same conclusions. Both women as young girls had been the victims of the sexploitation which characterizes urban life. In one instance, after her husband, Gikere, has given her a brutal, cowardly beating, Selina explains to Gikere that, above all, she needs *love* — something she had lacked since early childhood. As a child, she had been chased out of the family home, for an alleged crime she did not commit, by her father who is said to have demonstrated an incredible lack of sensitivity to the special problems of adolescents. Wanja, on the other hand, had been seduced by a thoughtless, much older, man and had become pregnant during her adolescence and, again, like Selina, had been kicked out of the family fold. Both Selina and Wanja inevitably drift into the city and, in spite of their original high ideals, go into prostitution as a means of survival. These two highly intelligent women are both quite adept at their "craft." Selina speaks of her skill in exploiting men who try to take advantage of her, sexually, in these terms:

Although I'm free with them, they cannot cheat me. I know what I want from them. Have you ever met executives who behave like animals when they fall in love? They are pathetic. I call them bush creatures. They're ticks. They suck your blood, if you are a

fool and leave you dry. Always demanding more, in fact more than one can give. But they cannot treat *me* like that.

(*Ripples*, pp. 1-2)

Wanja echoes these ideas when she explains to both Munira and Karega how she operates as a prostitute:

As for me, it's a game . . . of money . . . you eat or you are eaten . . . they are proud to be seen with me . . . even for one night . . . and they pay for it . . . I have had to be hard . . . It is the only way . . . the only way . . . (*Petals*, pp. 293-94)

Selina is again similar to Wanja in her acceptance of a final partner after she gives up prostitution. Although Selina's "mother's boy" of a husband, Gikere, can in many ways *not* be compared with the high-spirited and more intelligent Karega who eventually becomes Wanja's lover, one cannot help seeing a certain common element in both men's rather naive hopes of improving the living standards of their respective peoples. Njau and Ngugi are also quite explicit in their exposure and denunciation of the "foreign rule policed by colonised blackskins" (*Petals*, p. 4), such as the Kefa Munenes, Chuis, Kimieras, Mzigos and Nderis who, after insinuating themselves skilfully into their people's minds, turn against them and collaborate with foreign capitalists in the exploitation of their country.

Now, despite these seemingly close links between *Ripples in the Pool* and *Petals of Blood*, a closer examination of the sexual images in both texts reveals a basic difference between the two writers. The difference between Ngugi and Njau is most obvious when one looks at their portrayal of women: whereas Ngugi continues his tradition of representing "brave, resilient, resourceful and determined women . . .,"⁶ Njau reduces even her leading women characters to the traditional stereotypes found in all literatures. A brief character analysis of the major women in *Ripples in the Pool* — Selina and her mother-in-law — and the primary ones in *Petals of Blood* — Wanja and the old Nyakinyua, "the mother of men" — will show the validity of this comment.

If one looks in isolation at some of the qualities Njau bestows upon Selina and some of her other female characters such as Tetu, the late wife of the unscrupulous Kefa Munene, one would

be tempted to believe that Njau fully appreciates the positive qualities of her female creations and that she is out to criticize those forces which contribute to her women's lower status in society. Tetu, who dies in rather mysterious circumstances, is said to have been an epitome of virtue :

Kargua . . . remembered the story of her modesty, generosity, and tender feelings towards everyone. He had heard people talk of her kind heart during the emergency. As a community Development officer, Tetu toured villages distributing milk to destitute children and aged women . . . Even when her father was arrested and detained in Manyani, Tetu did not give up her work . . . She was a friend to all those who suffered. In the end, the government suspected that she, too, was involved in mau mau, and she lost her job. (p. 29)

Selina is also portrayed at times as a kind, considerate woman who is ready to help, and because of her attempts to assist her sister-in-law Gaciru, we are informed that "Gaciru was happy to find someone [Selina] who was always ready to encourage her to learn new things and she did her best to please her brother's wife" (p. 60). Njau further induces the reader's sympathy for Selina when the novelist presents the various frustrating situations she finds herself in; for instance, when Gikere comes back from his trip to the village of Itukaura, we see that "when he got to his house he found Selina eagerly waiting for him. She gave him food to eat but he said he was not hungry" (p. 41) — he had obviously eaten at his mother's before coming home. The reader is also made aware of Selina's acumen; she rightly recognizes Gikere as a spineless and childish opportunist and, in fact, sees through him for most of the time, as is shown in the scene where Selina offers him the money he desperately needs for his clinic, but refuses to join him in his fight against Kefa Munene. The scene is worth quoting :

. . . her eyes went to the notes he was holding and back to his face again. Gikere gave her a kind of impersonal smile, then looked down immediately, as though afraid to let her read what was going on in his mind. *Early on in his marriage, he had desperately wanted to have her money, but she would not part with a single cent of it. A sense of guilt rushed through him when he recalled that he had married her because of her money. When he looked*

up, he felt hot all over his body, and when he touched his forehead, his hand felt wet.

"Your dream will come true now," Selina said, staring fixedly at him. "But remember, you must leave me alone."

"*I need you. I need you desperately,*" said Gikere, breathlessly. "I need Gaciru, too, to help me clear the land."

"*I have given you the money,*" she said. "*That is all you need.*"

"When the clinic is ready, I want you to help me run it."

"I have another job in the city," she said coolly.

"A job? What kind of job?" he asked, impatiently.

"Receptionist."

"Where?"

"At the Embassy."

"You, Selina?"

"Yes."

"When do you start?"

"In three months."

"Why didn't you tell me this before?"

"You have your life. I have mine. I have made a deal with you. Let us stick to it."

"How did you get the job?"

"Kefa Munene helped me."

"Kefa Munene!"

"Yes."

"But he is against us!"

"He is against *you*, not me. I know too much about him."

(pp. 66-67; emphasis mine)

Despite isolated occurrences such as these which show Njau as a writer who obviously demonstrates sympathy and understanding for people in general, and for women in particular, one is generally repulsed by her main female characters, especially when their attributes are viewed in full perspective and in context. Both Selina and her mother-in-law would certainly rank among the worst stereotyped women ever portrayed in the literatures of Africa. Selina comes out exhibiting the crudest type of neurosis imaginable.

The images of Selina as a "bitch" and of her mother-in-law as a witch are constantly hinted at or shown, but we see a perfect presentation of these images when Selina, during Gikere's trip to Itukaura, goes to her husband's shop, now being run by her mother-in-law, to collect her weekly provisions, as is her custom.

Gikere's mother picks an unnecessary quarrel with and launches an unjustifiable tirade against Selina, and true to the farcial situation she finds herself in, Selina gets into a comic struggle with the old woman before she finally grabs her provisions. Unlike a writer such as Elechi Amadi who, in *The Concubine*, tries to put the blame squarely on the people responsible when he treats the mother fixation theme, or again, unlike Ngugi who, in *A Grain of Wheat*, consciously transcends the traditional stereotyped image of the relationship between mothers and their children-in-law, Njau simply portrays Gikere's mother as a "typical" mother-in-law. She is extremely possessive and dissentious, and is easily one of the most despicable characters in the novel. With Selina, one is not only annoyed and depressed with her incredibly insane behaviour as when, with no aparent motivation whatsoever, she strangles Gaciru, or when she falls into her numerous childish tantrums, but also with the improbable half-grown manner in which she often acts.

Moreover, if Selina's actions, just as those of Maggie Tulliver, or of Emma Bovary, or of Mauriac's Thérèse Dêsqueyroux, were only *seemingly* incongrous with what goes on in her society, one would have concluded that, even after all her efforts, Selina has problems adjusting to a society that is basically averse to the existence of a highly astute woman. The character we get, however, is an extremely childish woman whose general conduct would repel even those sympathetic to her: one cannot find any justification for Selina's stealing of the title deeds to her mother-in-law's landed property. It would be the height of folly to agree with Selina that the "reason" for her stealing the title deeds is to assure her husband of at least some of his unpredictable mother's property. One suspects that Selina's real motives are based on some kind of silly revenge on her mother-in-law. In another episode, when Selina could have been used to successfully expose Gikere's mother as the interfering, old hag that she is, our heroine indulges in juvenile name calling which ultimately discredits what she says. She says of her mother-in-law:

I wish I had knocked out her rotten teeth! I wish I had broken her stupid skull! she provoked me beyond what one can bear! she

called me sterile and all sorts of other terrible things. I wish I had killed her! . . . She makes me sick . . . She gives me nightmares. That's why I can't keep a baby in my womb . . . She is not my flesh . . . I do not stink like cow dung like she does. . . . (p. 42)

Despite the nature of the rhetoric, one might have regarded Selina's outbursts here as those of a frustrated individual who is trying to be heard and understood in an environment where no one seems willing to listen. But Njau removes any element of sympathy when, in the very next scene, we see Selina, with unbelievable impulsiveness, rush at her newly-entered mother-in-law and shove her violently. This action, of course, gives Gikere a convenient excuse for beating up his wife.

And Njau just keeps enumerating the vices of her women characters; Selina is bossy, arrogant, vain, and in fact, insane. Her friend, Sophia, and Maria, the nurse employed by Kefa Munene, and other women, are all portrayed as being imperceptive and passive, and, as a result, nearly all of them are constantly exploited by the rich men folk.

If Njau's attitude towards her feminine characters has been shown to be negative, one can only say the exact opposite for that of her male colleague, Ngugi. In *Petals of Blood* it is the positive and attractive qualities of the women that are always stressed. This, of course, is not to suggest that the author creates unrealistic, fanciful female characters. The weaknesses as well as the strong points that go to make up Wanja's personality, for instance, are dramatically evoked for the reader. Even though Ngugi, above all, condemns the exploiters in society who drive Wanja into murdering her child during a desperate situation, he also makes the implicit suggestion that he does not subscribe to the rash way Wanja succumbs to pressure, tremendous as that may be.

The novelist's emphasis is, however, on the worthy side of his female characters' nature; Wanja's kindness and resourcefulness are either referred to or demonstrated again and again :

She was Nyakinyua's grand daughter, this we knew — she often helped the old woman in the daily chores about the house and in the fields — but she remained a mystery: how could a city woman

so dirty her hands? How could she strap a tin of water to a head beautifully crowned with a mass of shiny black hair? (p. 31)

Her high mental capacity is underscored when she decides to become a barmaid for Abdulla, hence giving the young Joseph a chance to go to school:

Throughout the afternoon Wanja arranged and rearranged things and parcels on the shelves. . . . It was a thorough cleaning-up operation. Wanja demanded that Abdulla repair a few of the shelves and also the table in one of the back rooms in the shop that served as the bar. . . . Outside the building she had put up a sign board: **SHOP & BAR CLOSED THIS AFTERNOON — STOCKTAKING**. But there was very little stock to take and customers, especially in an afternoon, were few and far between. Nevertheless Abdulla was pleased with Wanja's innovations and especially the professional seriousness with which she did her job. . . .

Toward the end of the afternoon she removed the stocktaking sign and put up another one: **SHOP NOW OPEN**. . . . But nobody came. She was up again. She put up another sign. **PERMANENT CLOSING DOWN SALE** and on an impulse drew sketches of a shop and people running toward it in a hurry. . . . Within a few hours the place was full of customers who soon found out the mistake of the children. But they liked the new-look shop and a few remained to gossip and sip beer. (pp. 55-56)

What is even more significant about the ingenuity of both Wanja and the old Nyakinyua, though, is that it helps them qualify for positions among that rare variety of women in literature — women with an unquestionable ability for genuine political leadership. Signs of this capability are first made evident when "Fat Stomach" and "Insect," the two representatives of the local parliamentarian, Nderi wa Riera, go to preach division, in the name of culture, among the people of Ilmorog. It is especially the women, led by Nyakinyua, who expose these unscrupulous political propagandists who, literally, have to flee to save their skin. From this point on, Ngugi steadily draws the reader's attention to the need for such quick-witted minds (regardless of sex), in the making of political decisions. Events leading to and taking place during the epic march from Ilmorog to the city verify the point. When, at the height of the drought, the Ilmorogans, led by Njuna, decide to maim and sacrifice Abdulla's donkey as a way of propitiating the gods (and hence as a way of ending the

drought), Karega rightly sees the sacrificing of the donkey as *no* solution to the problem. He, also correctly, makes a suggestion that a delegation be sent to their local M.P., who lives in the city, for much-needed help. But, because Karega does not articulate his brilliant ideas in a convincing manner, the conservative Njuna nearly persuades the people to accept their lot with resigned despair. It is, however, only after a passionate and memorable speech by the "mother of men" that the people are finally convinced of the necessity for such a march :

It is our turn to make things happen. There was a time when things happened the way we in Ilmorog wanted them to happen. We had power over the movement of our limbs. We made up our own words and sang them and we danced to them. . . . We must surround the city and demand our share. We must sing our tune and dance to it. Those out there can also, for a change, dance to the actions and words of us that sweat, of us that feel the pain of bearing. . . . But Ilmorog must go as one voice. (pp. 115-16)

During the arduous trek to the city, Nyakinyua is accurately said to be "the spirit that guided and held them [her fellow villagers] together . . ." (p. 123), because of the way the energetic, old woman lends moral, intellectual and physical support to her co-travellers. She keeps "up their spirits with stories of the past" and she does this so well that it looked "as if the rhythm of the historic rise and fall of Ilmorog flowed in her veins" (p. 123). As a matter of fact, Nyakinyua unobtrusively verbalizes what looks like Ngugi's position on male-female relations when, in an effort to end an unnecessary squabble between some of her fellow villagers, over the rather ambiguous sexual characteristics of a statue, she says :

A man cannot have a child without a woman. A woman cannot bear a child without a man. And was it not a man and a woman who fought to redeem this country? (p. 161)

The importance of Nyakinyua's statement here cannot be over-emphasized. In this fictional world (just as in real life), where exploitative political and other figures use all kinds of sexist, racist and other hideous tactics to divide the people, it is imperative that

they know that their enemies do not belong to any one sex or race.

As with some of her comrades in the struggle, Wanja's capacity for political and social guidance becomes more obvious during their "great trek." At least some of the people soon realize "how good, how fortunate [they are] that God had brought them Abdulla, *Wanja*, Munira and Karega"; and the presence of this dauntless bunch makes the villagers march on "with eyes fixed on a possibility of a different life in Ilmorog, if not for them, at least for their children" (p. 143). Wanja's general comportment during the journey makes her merit such commendations, but her particular sense of parental responsibility towards the children (especially towards Joseph, who falls ill on the way), further shows the essential good nature of this heroic woman. Given her selfless and noble qualities, it comes to us as no surprise that Wanja actually drives herself to poverty again by selling the new building she and Abdulla had laboriously invested in, to prevent the rich bankers from dispossessing her grandmother of the land old Nyakinyua cherished so much.

It is obvious, then, that both Njau and Ngugi are preoccupied with social problems affecting their community. What is even more striking, though, is each author's attitude towards the sexes. Whereas Ngugi is seen to invest his characters, particularly the females, with an objective balance of strength and weaknesses, Njau, even though a woman, follows the greater part of literary tradition by presenting us with the images of women we are all too familiar with — "bitches," witches, fools. Are we now to assume that Njau's vision has been clouded by so much male-dominated literary dogma that she is only capable of producing feminine stereotypes? This might have been the case if there were no indications within *Ripples in the Pool* that the writer is sensitive to the traumas, the dilemmas of her female characters, or if she blindly sanctioned the immoral and amoral acts of her male characters. But evidence abounds in the text to show the women and some men in *Ripples in the Pool* gets Njau's sympathy, as when Selina describes her escape from her monstrous father and her eventual sheltering by the old man, Muthee of Itukuara, or when

she narrates her agony in going through adolescence and young adulthood.

The question that arises then is "why does Njau, unlike her male compatriot, Ngugi, present such a negative view of women?" A probable answer is to be found, not only in the latter novels of Ngugi, where his distinctive Marxist bias is manifest, but also in the writings and movies of Sembene Ousmane, who advocates a similar ideology. Both Ngugi and Ousmane have shown in some of their best works that the problems of Africans (or, indeed, of mankind) do not necessarily have their roots in either the *sex* or the *colour* of people. These writers, therefore, tacitly suggest that, rather than fight for "feminine" liberation (which wrongly implies that all *men* are free), women, together with their male counterparts, should fight for the freedom of all. In conformity with *genuine* progressive ideology they also suggest that kind of action would, no doubt, lead to the dismantling of the whole social structure which pits one sex or race against the other for the sole purpose of exploitation.

My examination of the female characters within *Ripples in the Pool* and *Petals of Blood* will be incomplete if, once again, some reference is not made to the obvious difference in the artistic skills of the authors. It is necessary to do this because Ngugi, like Ousmane in *Les Bouts de bois de Dieu*, clearly negates the popularly-held misconception that "socialist" literature deals only in stereotypes. Unlike Njau's characters, who look like an array of symbolic female vices in a string of badly-connected episodes, Ngugi's women (and men), are shown to be well-drawn characters with whom the sensitive reader can empathize or sympathize.

In spite of my admiration of and preference for progressive, anti-bourgeois writings, it would be presumptuous for me to suggest that every writer needs to take up Marxist analysis or proletarian ideology in order for that writer to present admirable characters of either sex. What can be said, however, is that even an implicit *progressive* stance within the text would help an author create positive sexual images, for, as an authority on the language of fiction pointedly remarks:

When human actions are formed to make an art work, the form that is made can never be divorced from the human meanings,

including the moral judgements, that are implicit whenever human beings act.⁷

NOTES

- 1 In addition to the innumerable studies that have been done on women in literature, the following should be noted for our purposes:
 - (a) *Ba Shiru* 8, No. 2 (1977) — a volume devoted entirely to "African women and literature."
 - (b) G-C. M. Mutiso, *Socio-Political Thought in African Literature* (London: Macmillan, 1974), pp. 51-72.
 - (c) Beatrice Stegeman, "The Divorce Dilemma: The new woman in contemporary African novels," *Critique: Studies in Modern Fiction* 15, No. 3 (1974), 81-93.
 - (d) Lloyd Brown, "The African woman as writer," *Revue Canadienne des Etudes Africaines/Canadian Journal of African Studies* 9, No. 3 (1975), 493-501.
 - (e) Kenneth Little, "Women in African Literature," *West Africa* 3 September 1979, pp. 1598-1601.
Ibid. 10 September 1979, pp. 1650-651.
Ibid. 17 September 1979, pp. 1691-693.
- 2 Mary Anne Fergusson, *Images of Women in Literature* (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1973), pp. 11-12.
- 3 Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 1979), p. 49.
- 4 Rebeka Njau, *Ripples in the Pool* (London: Heinemann, 1975). All references are to this edition which shall be abbreviated as *Ripples*.
- 5 Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Petals of Blood* (London: Heinemann, 1977). All references are to this edition which shall be abbreviated as *Petals*.
- 6 Eustace Palmer, *The Growth of the African Novel* (London: Heinemann, 1979): according to Palmer, Wanja "belongs to that remarkable breed of Ngugi women — Mwihaki, Nyambura, Mumbi, Wambuku — all of them brave, resilient, resourceful and determined."
- 7 Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1961), p. 397.