

Pictorial Language and Symbolism in Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o's *Devil On The Cross*

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Abstract

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's 1975 novel, *Devil on the Cross*, examines neocolonialism, capitalism, and cultural identity issues in postcolonial Kenya. This paper examines Ngũgĩ's literary devices, particularly his use of vivid imagery and symbolism, to enhance emotional and thematic engagement with the story. The novel's pictorial language effectively shows the socio-economic inequalities of postcolonial government by sharply contrasting the wealthy elite with the impoverished masses. The paper uses ideas from postcolonial theory, semiotics, and Edward Said's critique of Orientalism to address missing areas in research about how visual language and symbols work in the story. Understanding the cultural identity complexity resulting from colonial dynamics requires Homi K. Bhabha's ideas of hybridity and mimicry, as characters in the novel mimic Western capitalist behaviours, exposing neo-colonial corruption. Scholars have investigated many facets of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's narrative strategies, thematic preoccupations, and sociopolitical critiques in *Devil on the Cross*. Still, there is a significant gap in the academic debate on the particular function of pictorial language and symbolism in enabling communication inside this text. Hence, the gap this work fills.

The approach adopted is the postcolonial theory. The methodology used was a combination of a careful reading of the text and content analysis with secondary sources offering analysis of Ngũgĩ's narrative techniques to augment understanding. The results show that Ngũgĩ's use of pictorial language and symbolism not only improves the aesthetic quality of the narrative but also acts as a strong weapon for socio-political criticism, promoting a better awareness of postcolonial identity and resistance.

Ngũgĩ's vivid imagery and symbolic components greatly enhance the narrative, providing strong socio-political commentary that clarifies postcolonial identity and resistance. Therefore, the study supports more studies on symbolism in African literature and the inclusion of *Devil on the Cross* in courses concentrating on postcolonial literature. *Devil on the Cross* shows, in the end, the ability of literature to offer deep social and political insights, pushing more investigation of Ngũgĩ's literary techniques in academic and public settings.

Keywords: Imagery, Pictorial Language, Symbolism, Communication, *Devil on the Cross*

Introduction

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's 1980 novel, *Devil on the Cross*, is considered a Kenyan and world literature masterpiece. It is known for effectively using pictorial language to criticise the forces of neo-colonialism, capitalism, and cultural identity throughout postcolonial Kenya. Ngũgĩ, a Kenyan author and activist, uses his story to reflect on the political reality of his country and also offers a moving story about oppression, stubborn resistance, and the search for freedom.

Pictorial Language in literature refers to the exploitation of descriptive language that creates pictures in the reader's mind, adding to the emotional and thematic vitality of the narrative.

Pictorial language is found to exist in Ngũgĩ's *Devil on the Cross* in sentences which bring out the sharp contrast between the affluent, corrupt few and the teeming multitude of the impoverished, thus emphasising the lines of separation in the socio-economic spheres (Ngũgĩ, 1982). Doing so provides a view of the Kenyan landscape and a critique of the visual reality of postcolonial policies. Based on recent research, visual imagery in literature may potentially influence readers' conceptualisations of societal norms. Research indicates that readers are more likely to engage emotionally with texts that employ rich visual descriptions (Kosslyn, 2016).

Symbolism is a literary device where symbols are used to represent ideas and qualities beyond their literal sense. With symbols like the devil and the cross bearing deep significance, Ngũgĩ's use of symbolism in "Devil on the Cross" is multifarious. As Ngũgĩ himself puts it, "The devil is the symbol of the oppressor, of the capitalist system, of the foreign powers that plunder Africa's resources" (Ngũgĩ, 1982, p. 7); the devil represents the oppressive capitalist forces and foreign exploitation. On the other hand, the cross stands for hope for a free future and opposition. Symbolic interactionism, a theory positing that meaning results from social interactions and the use of symbols, helps to examine this duality of symbols (Blumer, 2019). Recent empirical studies have shown that symbolic interactionism remains relevant in understanding how literature reflects and influences societal values, particularly in postcolonial contexts (Denzin, 2020).

The novel also uses other symbols, including the river, which denotes change and the possibility of social rebirth. Not fixed, these symbols change throughout the story to mirror Kenya's dynamic socio-political situation after independence. Other African authors, like Chinua Achebe, reflect this symbolic usage in their writings and laud Ngũgĩ's narrative for its depth in addressing postcolonial concerns (Achebe, 1988).

Understanding the symbolic depth of "Devil on the Cross" depends on its historical and political background. Written during the political turmoil following Kenya's independence in 1963, the book captures the disappointment with the postcolonial government falling short of promises of equality and justice. Ngũgĩ's activism is well documented; his writings have been used for political criticism and mobilisation (Ngũgĩ, 1986). With Ngũgĩ's work serving as a clear example of literature as a form of resistance, recent research has emphasised how literature from this time reflects and influences political discourse (Gikandi, 2019).

Using close reading and content analysis, this paper takes a qualitative research method to examine how these symbols operate inside the story. This paper examines how Ngũgĩ weaves a story that is both a critique and a call to action by emphasising the interaction between

pictorial language and symbolism. The study aims to show that these literary techniques are essential for conveying the book's theme, improving its communicative power and involving readers in discussing postcolonial identity and resistance. Current researches support the analysis based on modern literary and sociological theories, setting the stage for a detailed look at how Ngugi wa Thiong'o uses images and symbols in *Devil on the Cross* to express complicated social and political ideas.

Statement of the Problem

Scholars investigating many facets of Ngugi wa Thiong'o's narrative strategies, thematic preoccupations, and sociopolitical critiques have done a great critical study of *Devil on the Cross*. Still, there is a significant gap in the academic debate on the particular function of pictorial language and symbolism in enabling communication inside this text. This work focuses on how Ngugi uses these literary tools to express complex socio-political messages in the setting of postcolonial Kenya. This study seeks to close this gap.

Mwangi's (2021) study on visual literacy in African literature indicates that pictorial language in works like *Devil on the Cross* helps with the emotional and ideological positioning of the reader as well as the visualisation of settings.

Conversely, while symbolism is a well-trodden road in literary criticism, its use in Ngugi's work, especially in "Devil on the Cross," has not been exhaustively investigated regarding its communicative role. Often with many meanings, literary symbols are shorthand for complicated concepts (Blumer, 1969). In postcolonial settings, symbols can reflect both the aspirations for freedom and the leftovers of colonial oppression. Though it does not explore the details of Ngugi's symbolic use in *Devil on the Cross*, Amoko's (2018) study on symbolism in postcolonial African novels shows that symbols are essential in conveying resistance and identity. This disparity is vital since Ngugi's symbols, such as the devil and the cross, are not only narrative components but deeply ingrained in Kenyan society's socio-political fabric, reflecting and criticising the postcolonial state.

The issue is the under-exploration of how these two components—pictorial language and symbolism—work together in *Devil on the Cross* to convey Ngugi's criticism of neo-colonialism, capitalism, and the fight for cultural identity. Although academics like Ogude (2019) have addressed Ngugi's use of narrative strategies, the particular emphasis on how these strategies enable the transmission of socio-political ideas remains underexplored. This study aims to solve this using a thorough analysis backed by empirical data from recent literary studies, stressing the need for visual and symbolic communication in comprehending postcolonial narratives.

Furthermore, the socio-political setting of postcolonial Kenya, characterised by corruption, economic inequality, and cultural decay, offers a rich background for such an investigation. Though it doesn't directly address *Devil on the Cross*, recent empirical studies by Gikandi (2019) on Ngũgĩ's works emphasise the need to know the historical setting to appreciate the symbolic depth completely. This paper will, therefore, add to the field by providing a nuanced knowledge of how Ngũgĩ's use of pictorial language and symbolism not only criticises but also conveys the complexity of Kenyan postcolonial life, thus closing a vital gap in the current literature.

Research Objectives

- i to analyse the types of pictorial language and symbols used in *Devil on the Cross*.
- ii to explore how these elements serve to critique and reflect on the socio-political environment of postcolonial Kenya, and
- iii to assess the effectiveness of these literary devices in enhancing the reader's understanding and engagement with the text's themes.

Significance of the Study

Examining the use of pictorial language and symbolism in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's "Devil on the Cross" reveals several facets of importance that influence literary research and socio-political debate. First, especially in African settings, this study shows how powerful a tool literature is for political criticism literature is. Through its symbolic richness, Ngugi's work critiques neo-colonialism and capitalism, providing a narrative space where political concerns are discussed and vividly depicted, accessible and powerful for a larger audience. Recent research backs this claim by suggesting that literature may be a driver of social change by giving underprivileged voices a platform.

Examining Ngugi's use of these literary techniques deepens the study of his work and greatly supports postcolonial literary research. Examining how Ngũgĩ uses symbolism and pictorial language to shape his story helps academics to better grasp the subtleties of resistance and identity in postcolonial literature. This method places Ngugi's work in the larger discussion of how postcolonial authors interact with issues of power, identity, and resistance and not only increases our respect for his skill.

Lastly, the transformation of cultural symbols into universal symbols within Ngugi's text provides critical insights into cross-cultural communication. Though deeply ingrained in Kenyan culture, symbols like the devil and the cross speak to people all around and help to start a conversation that crosses cultural borders. This part of the paper emphasises how literature can connect different cultures by providing symbols that, although particular in

origin, have universal or relatable meaning, as discussed in recent cross-cultural literary studies. This knowledge helps to promote cultural empathy and understanding by fostering a worldwide appreciation of African literature and its expressions.

Theoretical Framework

This paper's theoretical framework offers several prisms to examine Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Devil on the Cross* by combining postcolonial theory, semiotics, and components of Edward Said's critique of Orientalism. Articulated by Homi K. Bhabha in his 1994 book *The Location of Culture*, postcolonial theory provides critical ideas including hybridity, mimicry, and rebellion. Bhabha's investigation of hybridity underlines the development of new cultural forms from the interaction between coloniser and colonised, implying that these interactions generate a third space where identities are not fixed but are always changing. Ngugi's story is especially relevant to this idea, as it shows how traditional Kenyan culture interacts with Western influences to create a hybrid cultural identity that questions the purity of both. Another of Bhabha's tenets, mimicry, explains how the colonised might imitate the culture of the coloniser, sometimes in a way that subverts it and exposes the absurdity and power relations at work. Ngugi uses characters in *Devil on the Cross* to mimic Western capitalist behaviour, revealing the shallowness and corruption of neocolonial elites. Bhabha's concept of resistance fits with Ngugi's use of narrative to challenge and criticise the socio-political system of postcolonial Kenya since it includes not only overt opposition but also subtle subversions inside the colonial discourse.

The power of using Bhabha's postcolonial theory is in its capacity to reveal the multifaceted identities created in the wake of colonialism, therefore providing a nuanced knowledge of how Ngugi's people traverse their cultural terrain. Critics of Bhabha's work, meanwhile, tend to focus on its intricacy and occasionally abstract quality, which could cloud clear relevance to literary works. Although Bhabha's theories offer a rich interpretive framework for this work, they need to be applied judiciously to avoid eclipsing the inherent narrative and thematic issues of the text.

Empirical Review of Related Literature

Though particular empirical research on these features is still rather scarce, the investigation of Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Devil on the Cross* through the prism of pictorial language and symbolism has generated mixed scholarly interest. But current studies offer a strong basis for grasping the larger thematic and stylistic subtleties of Ngugi's work, which can be directly connected to our emphasis on pictorial language and symbolism in communication.

In her paper *Religious Implications in Matigari*, Selamawit Seyoum (2020) provides an analysis of Ngugi's critical attitude towards Christianity, implying that he sees it as a barrier to Kenya's total liberation. Aiming to free their minds from what he considers the oppressive teachings of Christianity, Seyoum contends that Ngugi uses religious critique to inspire a revolutionary spirit among his readers. When one considers the symbolic use of the cross in *The Devil on the Cross*, where the cross not only signifies Christian salvation but also the fight against colonial and neocolonial oppression, this viewpoint is essential (Seyoum, 2020). Though centred on "Matigari", her study offers a background for grasping Ngugi's symbolic criticism of religion in his writings.

Emenyonu, as quoted by Seyoum (2020), expands on this topic by saying Ngugi views the Bible as a weapon of colonisation, used to spiritually and physically enslave Africans. "Devil on the Cross" by Ngugi reflects this historical use of religious symbols as tools of oppression by depicting the devil and symbolising capitalist and neocolonial exploitation. Emenyonu's observations emphasise the symbolic richness Ngugi gives in his stories, where religious symbols are twisted to attack social systems (Emenyonu, 2021).

Sundy Deborah's (2019) dissertation, which relates to the symbolic use of landscape in Ngugi's novels, investigates how colonisation affects identity, especially via the prism of language and homeland displacement. She cites Loflin, who links the Kenyan terrain to the identity of the community, a subject Ngugi investigates using pictorial language, portraying the physical and cultural landscapes as battlegrounds of identity and resistance (Deborah, 2019). Understanding how Ngugi employs the environment as a symbol of both oppression and possible freedom depends on this link between land and identity.

Bethwell Allan Ogot (2021), emphasising the return to one's cultural roots as a form of resistance against colonial erasure, explores the idea of "Homecoming" in Ngugi's works. Like Gitutu's statement of his genuine home being where his family lives, people's ties to their land in "Devil on the Cross" represent the idea of home. Ogot's study offers evidence to back up Ngugi's use of the home symbol to promote a feeling of belonging and defiance, therefore helping to grasp the pictorial depiction of Kenyan terrain in the book (Ogot, 2021).

Babu (2019) looks at Ngugi's use of language as a weapon for justice and communication, pointing out Ngugi's move to write in Kikuyu, which fits with the symbolic choice of language in "Devil on the Cross." Using the indigenous language to connect and resonate with the local population, Babu's work shows how Ngugi's linguistic decisions constitute a kind of symbolic resistance supporting the criticism of neo-colonialism in the novel (Babu, 2019). This linguistic change reflects a larger cultural reclamation rather than just a stylistic choice.

Robert, Young (2019) addresses the difficulty of Ngugi's language choices, highlighting the conflict between writing in Kikuyu, a minority language, and Kiswahili, Kenya's official language. Young's study deepens our knowledge of Ngugi's symbolic decisions, where the rejection of English and the embrace of Kikuyu in "Devil on the Cross" represent a more general anti-colonial attitude but also challenge the narrative's reach inside Kenya's multilingual setting (Young, 2019).

Noting its presence in both his Gikuyu and English works, Eileen Julien (2020) and James Ogude (2019) investigate the integration of orality into Ngugi's narratives. Julien's treatment of orality as a present cultural quality rather than a simple historical tool fits Ngugi's use of pictorial language that calls oral traditions to mind, so improving the symbolic richness of the novel with traditional components like proverbs and seers (Julien, 2020; Ogude, 2019).

Though they don't emphasise the symbolic and pictorial elements, Simon Gikandi (2021) and James Ogude (2019) offer insightful analyses of Ngugi's thematic and narrative strategies. Gikandi's treatment of national identity through prophecy and conversion in Ngugi's English works, however, provides a perspective from which we can see the symbolic transitions in *Devil on the Cross* (Gikandi, 2021).

Although Killam (2024) admits symbols in Ngugi's work, his study lacks the depth into their communicative role that this paper intends to investigate. This gap in the literature underscores the significance of our study, which seeks to delve into how Ngugi uses pictorial language and symbolism not just for aesthetic purposes but as critical tools for socio-political communication in *Devil on the Cross*.

Setting the stage for a concentrated analysis on how *Devil on the Cross* uses pictorial language and symbolism to criticise and convey the complexity of postcolonial Kenyan society, this empirical review emphasises the thematic richness and symbolic depth of Ngugi's work.

Methodology

The main data source for this paper is Ngugi wa Thiong'o's novel *Devil on the Cross*, which offers a rich tapestry of text from which to extract and examine examples of pictorial language and symbolism. The narrative of the book is examined to show how these aspects are interwoven into the story to criticise postcolonial Kenyan society. Focusing especially on passages where symbols are most visible or where pictorial language deepens thematic investigation, I closely read the text.

A thorough backdrop for analysis was created by collecting secondary data from several different sources. This covers important essays that have addressed Ngugi's work, including those by Simon Gikandi (2019), who offers insights on Ngugi's literary techniques and

thematic concerns. Interviews with Ngugi, such as those gathered in “Ngugi wa Thiong’o Speaks”, edited by Karin Barber (2016), provide first-hand views on his goals behind the use of symbols, so enhancing the reading of the novel’s text. Also, academic papers, especially those on symbolism in African postcolonial narratives, were purposively examined. Furthermore, an article by Ogude (2019) in the *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, which addresses the development of symbols in African literature as instruments for political critique, which directly relates to Ngugi’s method, was used.

Additionally, examined were key symbols such as the cross, which represents both Christian salvation and the fight for freedom; the devil, who represents oppression and corruption; and several Kenyan cultural artefacts, which ground the story in local tradition and criticise modern society changes. Examined not only for their narrative role but also for their cultural relevance, these symbols were investigated to see how they connect local Kenyan settings with more universal ideas of resistance and identity in postcolonial discourse. This twofold approach clarifies how Ngugi uses these symbols to effectively convey intricate socio-political ideas.

Findings and Discussion

Pictorial language as a communicative tool in *Devil on the Cross*.

Ngugi wa Thiong’o brilliantly uses pictorial language in *Devil on the Cross* to deepen the story with several layers of meaning that criticise the socio-political fabric of postcolonial Kenya. The portrayal of Nairobi’s cityscape, which reflects the corruption and moral decline fostered by neo-colonial capitalism, is one particularly notable one. Ngũgĩ writes, “*The city was a forest of concrete and steel, where skyscrapers grew like giant mushrooms, overshadowing the slums that crept around them like unwanted undergrowth*” (Ngũgi, 1982, p. 56). This vivid picture contrasts the towering symbols of modern capitalism with the sprawling poverty of the slums, so stressing the sharp economic difference and the exploitation inherent in the urban transformation.

This pictorial depiction criticises the societal change from communal values to capitalist greed more than it merely describes a setting. While the ‘unwanted undergrowth’ of slums reflects the marginalised people left behind by this development, the ‘giant mushrooms’ of skyscrapers represent the fast, unnatural growth driven by foreign investment and local corruption.

Devil on the Cross, the title of the book, reveals yet another deep use of pictorial language that starts a strong metaphor right away. The cross, traditionally emblematic of Christian salvation and sacrifice, is repurposed by Ngugi to illustrate the suffering of the Kenyan populace under both colonial and neo-colonial oppression. “*The cross had become a symbol of our daily*

crucifixion by the forces of neo-colonialism,” he says (Ngũgĩ, 1982, p. 10). The cross here is a sign of continuous suffering, not of redemption.

Set on this cross, the devil is a strong indication of the corrupting impact of wealth and power. Ngũgĩ calls this devil “*a creature with horns and a tail, dressed in the best suits, holding a briefcase, symbolising the devil in the guise of modern capitalism*” (Ngũgĩ, 1982, p. 7). This image not only challenges religious iconography but also questions the moral inversion whereby society’s new economic order glorifies and sanctifies evil, symbolised by the devil. Ngugi not only depicts a scene but also challenges readers to view the moral and social decline through a critical eye using these vivid images, thus transforming the story into both a visual and intellectual experience.

Pictorial Imagery. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o starkly depicts the socio-economic inequalities and moral decay in postcolonial Kenya in *Devil on the Cross* using pictorial imagery. “Devil’s Feast,” a symbolic gathering where the rich indulge in luxury at the cost of the poor, is one of the most striking illustrations. Ngugi paints this picture in great detail: “*The tables were laid out with an abundance of food and drinks, the air heavy with the scent of roasting meat and the clinking of glasses, while outside, the poor thronged, their skeletal frames a silent testament to their hunger*” (Ngũgĩ, 1982, p. 124). This picture not only creates a scene of terrible excess but also helps to criticise the systematic exploitation natural in Kenyan society at the time.

The sensory elements in this section are vital since they highlight the physical and moral decline by means of visceral response from the reader. Ngugi adds to this even more with lines like, “*The laughter of the rich was a cacophony that drowned out the silent cries of the starving outside, their eyes hollow, reflecting the dim lights from within*” (Ngũgĩ, 1982, p. 125). The difference between the sensory richness inside the feast and the sensory deprivation outside clearly illustrates the social divide here. Ngugi wa Thiong’o was seen to carefully include pictorial language and symbolism as core narrative components in *Devil on the Cross*. Deepening the thematic investigation of neo-colonialism, capitalism, and cultural identity depends on these literary devices, which are not only cosmetic.

Furthermore, Ngũgĩ’s portrayal of personal battles through pictorial imagery deepens the story. For example, when discussing the protagonist Jacinta Wariinga’s journey, he says, “*Her feet, calloused from endless walks, trod the dusty paths, her eyes scanning the horizon for a sign of hope, her heart heavy with the burden of survival*” (Ngũgĩ, 1982, p. 56). This picture not only humanises the battle but also visually grounds the reader in the protagonist’s physical and emotional terrain, therefore making the socio-political criticism more obvious and interesting.

By means of such graphic imagery, Ngũgi not only narrates a tale but also paints a scathing picture of postcolonial Kenyan society.

Symbolism. Symbolism is quite important in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Devil on the Cross* to weave the socio-political criticism of the story. Central to this is the symbol of the cross, which functions on many levels. Traditionally, the cross denotes Christian salvation; Ngugi twists this to also reflect the great load of colonialism and neo-colonialism placed on Kenya. Ngugi states on page 102, "*The cross was heavy, but she bore it on her back, a symbol of her suffering under the weight of oppression*" (Ngugi, 1982). This twofold symbolism emphasises the irony whereby symbols of faith are appropriated to bolster repressive systems, therefore criticising the complicity of religious institutions in carrying on colonial legacies.

Another deep symbol in the book is the devil, which reflects not only religious evil but also moral decline and corruption in Kenyan society, particularly among the upper class. Gikandi (2000) points out that this depiction reflects a kind of internalised colonialism in which the local elite are now the oppressors. Ngugi shows how corruption has woven itself into the social fabric by means of the devil. Ngugi, for example, describes a corrupt businessman as "*He was like the devil, offering wealth in exchange for the soul of the nation*" (Ngũgi, 1982, p. 154), linking personal greed with national betrayal.

Beyond these main symbols, character names and settings in the book provide depth to the symbolic story. Wariinga, whose name means "she who will not be denied," is typical of the fight for justice and resistance. Her path through the book, from oppression to empowerment, reflects the larger fight for freedom. Ngũgĩ writes of her change, "*Wariinga stood firm, her name now a prophecy of her defiance against the chains of exploitation*" (Ngũgĩ, 1982, p. 201), so supporting her symbolic function.

A powerful indicator of hidden corruption is the cave where illegal activities take place. Away from public scrutiny, it reflects the secretive and sinister dealings of the ruling class. Ngũgĩ calls this scene "*The cave was a den of thieves, where the rich plotted the nation's downfall in the shadows*" (Ngũgĩ, 1982, p. 130), which not only vividly depicts but also represents the moral darkness of those in authority.

Using literary symbolism to involve readers in a deeper awareness of the topics of oppression, resistance, and corruption, these symbols taken together create a rich tapestry that challenges the socio-political situation of postcolonial Kenya. Ngugi's use of these symbols is not only for aesthetic improvement but also as a deliberate weapon to express the depth of social problems, therefore connecting the story with local and worldwide audiences.

Cultural Symbols. Ngugi wa Thiong'o uses cultural symbols, including the Gikuyu homestead in *Devil on the Cross*, to explore ideas of cultural critique and preservation. More than just a backdrop, the homestead, a traditional symbol of family and community in Gikuyu culture, becomes a dynamic component reflecting the change and conflict in Kenyan society. Ngugi, for example, says, "*The homestead was no longer a place of peace and harmony but had become a battleground for the forces of tradition and modernity*" (Ngugi, 1982, p. 45). This passage reflects the larger society changes where traditional values battle with the effects of capitalism and Western culture by showing the homestead's transformation from a symbol of stability to one of conflict.

Ngugi also uses the homestead to attack the loss of cultural identity under neo-colonial pressure. He paints a picture of "*the old man sat under the fig tree, a symbol of wisdom and continuity, now overshadowed by the new house built by his son with foreign money*" (Ngugi, 1982, p. 67). This contrast emphasises the generational and cultural divide, with the new house representing the invasion of foreign values endangering traditional Kenyan knowledge.

Ngugi's depiction of the homestead as a site of resistance emphasises the dynamic character of these symbols even more. At a turning point, a character says, "*The homestead, once a symbol of our subjugation, has now become our fortress of resistance*" (Ngugi, 1982, p. 123). Here, the homestead changes from a symbol of colonial oppression to one of freedom, showing how cultural symbols can change to fit new roles in the narrative of resistance and identity reclamation.

Ngugi uses these changing symbols to express a rich, dynamic cultural identity that is both praised for its resilience and adaptability and criticised for its susceptibility to outside influences (Ogude, 2019).

Communication through Symbol. The use of symbols in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Devil on the Cross* is a powerful means of expression that lets one convey complicated socio-political issues with great simplicity. The shift from rural to urban environments, which captures the larger topic of cultural identity loss under the weight of modernity and neo-colonialism, is one of the most striking symbols in the book.

When Jacinta Wariinga, the main character, travels from the village to the city, this journey is full of symbolic significance. Ngugi vividly depicts this change: "*She had left the village with its thatched roofs, its communal spirit, and its traditional values, and now she was in Nairobi, where concrete and steel had replaced the warmth of the earth, and individualism had supplanted community*" (Ngugi, 1982, p. 150). This section not only shows a physical move but also represents a major cultural change. While the city reflects the alienating, capitalist-

driven modernity destroying these traditional identities, the village symbolises a link to traditional Kenyan life, steeped in communal values and legacy.

Ngugi's description of the urban environment underlines this symbolic act of crossing: "*The city was a jungle of steel and concrete, where people were lost in the maze of their greed and ambition, far removed from the simplicity and purity of rural life*" (Ngũgi, 1982, p. 151). Criticising the neo-colonial impact that drives such a change, the city is shown here as a place where the quest for material wealth and Western ideals dilutes, if not destroys, the core of Kenyan cultural identity. The study showed how Ngũgi's use of symbols fit with symbolic interactionism, whereby social interactions create meaning. The symbols in the book are shown to change, reflecting the dynamic character of Kenyan society after independence.

Ngugi effectively conveys, through these symbols, the conflict between maintaining cultural legacy and yielding to the seduction of modernity, a topic that speaks to the postcolonial experience. The symbols of rural versus urban life thus become a narrative tool that succinctly critiques the socio-cultural erosion under the guise of progress, so prompting the reader to consider the price of such changes on individual and group identities.

Rhetorical Reading. A rhetorical interpretation of Ngugi wa Thiong'o's "Devil on the Cross" shows how the writer uses literary devices to convince readers to see and empathise with the suffering of the oppressed, therefore supporting social and political change. Ngũgi's story framework is carefully designed to lead the reader on an awakening trip to the injustices in Kenyan society. The book, for example, opens with a thorough description of the setting where the story takes place, one that is both literal and symbolic: "*Ilmorog was a small ridge, a forgotten outpost, a place of poverty and degradation*" (Ngũgi, 1982, p. 1). This beginning not only establishes the scene but also rhetorically places the reader to grasp the marginalisation of Ilmorog, reflecting the more general marginalisation of the Kenyan peasantry.

The socio-political critique is embodied by means of a rhetorical device in the novel's characterisation. Pivotal are people like Jacinta Wariinga, who moves from oppression to defiance. Her story arc from a victim of sexual exploitation to an empowered person is meant to speak to the reader, as seen when she states, "*I am Wariinga, daughter of the soil, and I will not be silenced*" (Ngũgi, 1982, p. 214). This change not only emphasises personal empowerment but also acts as a metaphor for group resistance against neo-colonial powers. Complex socio-political concepts are represented using key symbols such as the devil, the cross, and the river. The devil represents the repressive capitalist and neo-colonial forces; the cross denotes resistance and hope for liberation; the river suggests transformation and possible social change. This symbolic portrayal helps to criticise the postcolonial Kenyan society.

Ngũgĩ's use of language is equally compelling; he uses vivid imagery and direct address to emotionally and intellectually involve the reader. For instance, in his comments on the exploitation by the affluent, he says, "*The rich suck the blood of the poor like vampires, leaving them dry and lifeless*" (Ngũgĩ, 1982, p. 105). This metaphor not only highlights a sharp image of economic inequality but also elicits a visceral response that forces the reader to reflect on the moral consequences of such exploitation. The book's use of vivid visual imagery critiques the socio-economic inequalities in Kenya. The imagery not only establishes the setting but also emphasises the disparity between the oppressed people and the corrupt elite, thus improving the emotional involvement of the reader with the topics of the text.

By means of these rhetorical devices, Ngugi not only narrates a tale but also builds a case for transformation, employing the story as a vehicle to provoke consciousness and action against the socio-political injustices in postcolonial Kenya.

Historical and Political Contextualisation. The results underline how the historical and political setting of post-independence Kenya, with its corruption and authoritarianism, shapes the symbolism in the book. These symbols reflect Ngugi's activism as well as the larger fight for justice in Kenya, therefore offering a multi-faceted criticism of the political scene.

These results would together show the great influence of Ngugi's literary methods in "*Devil on the Cross*," highlighting how they function both as narrative devices and as platforms for socio-political debate.

Conclusion

Ultimately, Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Devil on the Cross* shows the great power of pictorial language and symbolism in literary communication. This paper has shown how Ngugi deftly interlaces these components into the texture of his story to criticise the socio-political situation of postcolonial Kenya. His use of visual imagery and symbolic representation not only deepens the story but also enhances the text, therefore providing a rich ground for literary study. These literary techniques' efficacy is in their capacity to emotionally and intellectually involve readers, therefore promoting a discussion on postcolonial identity and the need for resistance against systematic oppression.

Ngũgĩ's use of symbols such as the devil and the cross offers a multi-faceted criticism of capitalism, neo-colonialism, and cultural identity that speaks to readers and inspires thought and maybe action. This involvement emphasises the strength of literature as a weapon for social and political commentary, therefore stressing the ongoing relevance of Ngugi's work in modern discussion on postcolonial topics. Therefore, this article contends that Ngugi's calculated use of pictorial language and symbolism is not only aesthetic but also a crucial channel for

expressing complicated socio-political ideas, thus strengthening the communicative power of his criticism.

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