

## OBJECTS AS CHARACTER EMBLEMS IN SELECTED NOVELS OF MEJA MWANGI

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### **Abstract**

*In most modern fictions, object and character as formal entities on the same plane tend to impress themselves with an equality of insistence on the consciousness of the viewer or a reader. In both the film form and the modern novel of concretized form, the new "democratized" structural situation produces essentially the same results: a new kind of equality between a seen character and the seen object especially that employed by the character in carrying out his day to day function and , in certain instances, a merging or cross breeding between the two. Thus for both film and the novel, things become increasingly important and attain conspicuous and compelling presence in the narrative action. No longer mere props, things are activated into the drama, in fact, become actors as they embody in themselves aspects of the character's psychology and life-style and enact the drama, as it were, in place of the character. This is the background on which we shall study Mwangi's novels selected for this work: Kill Me Quick (1973), Carcase for Hounds (1974), and Going Down River Road (1976) : Why is Razor's flick knife so prominent in the character of Razor in Kill Me Quick? Why is the truck driven by Onesmus so terrifying to the construction workers in Going Down River Road? And why is Haraka's gun so powerful that it equalizes, if not surpasses, Haraka in the narrative in Carcase for Hounds? Why do things increase in symbolic value as they stand equal to man, representing him in the world of the narrative made resonant and animate by his living presence in them? These are the issues we shall explicate in this study. The authors conclude by asserting that things, in Mwangi's fiction, stand as character emblems that define the personality of given characters.*

**Keywords:** Things, character, emblem, Mwangi, Fiction

## Introduction

Many critics including Luckacs, Lessing and Spiegel agree that since Homer, Flaubert and Joyce, that things have come to increase in symbolic value in the works of modern authors. Luckacs (1964) argues that the real epic poet does not describe objects but exposes their function in the mesh of human destinies. That objects come to life poetically only to the extent they are related to men's life hence the epic poet exposes their function by introducing things only as they play a part in the destinies, actions and passions of men.

Spiegel (1976) tells us that in both the film form and the modern novel of concretized form, objects become increasingly important and attain conspicuous and compelling presence, in the narrative action; that *things* have become part of the drama in a narrative fiction as they equal and even surpass man in their struggle to maintain an autotelic existence.

The modern novelist while depicting individuals also depict individual objects only through their participation in action - in the drama of the novel, so to say. In Joycean and post Joycean fiction, things have come to express themselves as those things they are and no other. In *Ulysses* (1961) for example Bloom discovers the integrity and individuality of things as he watches the men setting type in the offices of the Freeman's Journal:

*Sllt* the nethermost deck of the first machine jogged toward its flyboard with *Sllt* the first batch of quire folded papers. *Sllt*. Almost human in the way it *Sllt* to call attention. Doing its level best to speak. The door too *Sllt* creaking asking to be shut. Everything speaks in its own way. *Sllt* (p121). (Italics mine).

Joyce, in *Ulysses* (1961), sets the tone of the speaking object in modern fiction. The most succinct and definitive statement here is the attitude Joyce has toward the inanimate object, each "doing its level best to speak," each speaking, "in its own way, each almost human" in the way it calls attention to itself.

Mwangi read Joyce, Dos Passos, Faulkner and a host of other post Joycean novelists. We see traces of influence of these authors in the novels of Mwangi especially in *Kill Me Quick* (1973) *Carcase for Hounds* (1974) and *Going Down River Road* (1976). Part of the burden of this paper is therefore the unraveling of the mysterious nature of things in Mwangi's fiction. In so doing, special attention shall be given to Razor's flick knife in *Kill Me Quick*, Haraka's gun in *Carcase for Hounds* and Onesmus truck in *Going Down River Road*. Mention shall also be made of other objects ancillary to the definition of a given character's

psychology and personality and how they cross breed or mesh in the overall design of the works used in this study.

## DEFINITION OF OPERATIVE TERMS

- a. Things: A thing is an object that is not alive in the way that people and plants are. "Things" is the plural form of the word, thing. Examples of things include guns, cars, knives, etc. A thing has an opaque surface as well as a symbolic value. When a thing is not in use, it is that thing which it is and no other; but when applied in the drama of human existence, a thing might assume a personality larger than even the user in modern fiction. We shall take a look at such things as flick knife, gun, motor vehicle as they are applied in the drama of human existence in the novels we have chosen for this work.
- b. Character: A character in a work of fiction is any imaginary person or persons a writer creates in a work of fiction. The character might be a flat character that is simple and remains the same in a work of fiction. On the other hand, the character might be a round one who is prone to changes depending on situations of the novel. Our concern in this paper is not on whether a character is rounded or flat. We shall look at a character holistically in the context of the novels we use for this study.
- c. Emblem: Simply put, an emblem is something that represents a perfect example or principle of another. How things have been employed in the drama of the fiction of Mwangi especially in *Kill Me Quick*, *Carcase for Hounds* and *Going Down River Road* is the focus of this study.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Mwangi has had a series of literary achievements attached to his name. In 1978, he won the Lotus Literary Prize in literature. His *Kill Me Quick* won the Kenyatta Prize for fiction in 1973 and so did his *Carcase for Hounds* in 1974. Mwangi has a considerable experience in film and television. He had a stint with the French Broadcasting Corporation in Nairoboi and has turned *Carcase* into an adventure film called "*Cry Freedom*".

At present, Mwangi has many books to his credit. They are in order of publication: *Kill Me Quick* (1973), *Taste of Death* (1974), *Carcase for Hounds* (1974), *Going Down River Road* (1976). and *The Bush Trackers* (1979). Others are: *The Cockroach Dance* (1979) *Bread of Sorrow* (1987), *Weapon of Hunger* (1989), *The*

*Return of Shaka (1990), striving for the Wind (1990) The Last Plague (2000), and The Big Chiefs (2008).* There are also children's books written by Mwangi. They include: *The Hunters Dream (1993), The Nzunga Boy (2005) and The Boy Gift (2006).*

*Carcase and Taste of Death* explore the trying period of the Mau-Mau struggle for independence in Kenya and offer reasons why it takes the colonial forces so much time to defeat the independence struggle. The author, in these works, writes from the angle of a film producer and this gives the books their cinematographic nature.

*Carcase* centre's on the Mau-Mau struggle for independence during the colonial period in Kenya. The author explores the relationship between Haraka - the books' protagonist - and his trusted lieutenant Kimamo, and how they were able to stand against the colonial forces with their intimidating army. One major motif of the author in this book is that loyalty is necessary for any undertaking to succeed and that sabotage is evil. These values were carefully analyzed in the work. However, the spectrum of events that is covered in the book is limited.

In *Carcase*, the author explores the exploits of General Haraka - a onetime Chief of Pinewood and an ex homeguard to the Whiteman. Haraka is not a man to be molested by any man including the colonial misanthrope Captain Kingsley. This is the reason he retaliates when Kingsley molests him by giving him a slap. Having retaliated, Haraka abandons his position and runs into the jungle to later be the god ruling in the Mau-Mau Kingdom. To him, the Whiteman is a land grabber, misanthrope, liar, mindless exploiter - all rolled into one. Given the foregoing, the Whiteman as well as anybody that supports him is an enemy of the Mau-Mau. Therefore, Haraka's childhood friend and fearful Chief Simba, now a collaborator, must also die. Haraka has this obsessional tic to kill Chief Simba until his death.

*Taste of Death* is also about the period of emergency to independence in Kenya in 1963. The central focus of the author's depiction is Kariuki the freedom fighter that could not budge or bend even under torture. His iron will have an effect on Kitango, another freedom fighter. Such as Haraka is pitted against Captain Kingsley, Kariuki and Kitango are pitched against Dewis the colonial officer. Kariuki's iron will finally leads to the granting of independence to Kenya in 1963.

*Kill Me Quick*, as well as *Going Down River Road*, is set in Nairobi, Kenya and the book explores the dehumanization of the African by the exploitative white colonialist. Meja and Maina with respectable certificates finally turn out to

become the scum of society. While Meja finally languishes in cell number 999, the authorities are going to hang Maina for a crime he did not commit.

*Going Down River Road*, explores the relationship between Ben Wadchira – a one-time army lieutenant (now cashiered) – and Ochalla a construction hand finally turned crane operator. The exploitation of the African hands at the construction site is the major crux of this book. Of special mention is one murderer called Onesmus whose intention was to kill Ben whom he reasons, is the cause of his misfortune in the army. But love of one's buddy finally propels Ocholla, Ben's friend, to murder the serial murderer, Ocholla.

*The Bush Trackers* narrates the story of two rangers in a game reserve. These rangers try all they can to avert the designs of a mafia-organized team of poachers and extortionists. The novel is designed in the thriller tradition thereby recommending it to the popular market.

*Bread of Sorrow* (1987), *Weapon of Hunger*, *The Return of Shaka* (1989) *Striving for the Wind* (1990), *The Last Plague* (2000) and *The Big Chiefs* (2008) all have vivid naturalistic narrative pattern. They are all mainly protest books but hilarity abounds in them.

Palmer (1979) argues that the characters in *Carcase*, especially the Mau-Mau members have a hardened nature that is reinforced by the setting of the book. That the movement of Haraka and his band through such queer space is facilitated by their having adapted to the hard environment they live in.

Of *Kill Me Quick*, Palmer (1979) argues that Mwangi presents the book with great pathos and commendable realism; that the fortunes of two adolescents – Meja and Maina – were presented and that their hopes and aspirations were finally dashed as a result of the exploitative Kenya society filled with political, economic and social malaise.

Knight (1983) is of the view that through the use of imagery, that Mwangi was able to depict the grotesque nature of the characters in *Kill Me Quick* especially those of Meja and Maina, that the hard physical nature of the quarry where the duo worked turned them into grotesque muscle men.

Palmer (1978) in a review article argues that in *Going Down River Road*, Mwangi presents the sordid conditions under which Ben lives and works. That, as opposed to the squalor under which the construction workers work, that the

Development House they are constructing symbolizes the corruption of the politicians, the police and the system's irregularities.

Little (1980) in a sociological study of urban women's image in African literature concludes that in *Going Down River Road*, prostitutes, mothers good time girls as well as courtesans proliferate: that the mother is a prostitute as well as only in her teens.

Eko (1986) examines the relationship between Haraka and Kimamo in *Carcase for Hounds* and frowns at Kimamo's obedience to Haraka unto death. For *Kill Me Quick*, she examines a situation in a relationship between a man and a woman, where the man is a scum of society and the woman is beautiful (as in the case of Delilah and Maina) and concludes that given the power situation of the man, such, relationship can never lead to marriage between the two.

In *Going Down River Road*, Eko (1986) examines the relationship between Ben, (unmarried yet has a child in his custody) and Ocholla (married with wives and children). In conclusion, she decries Ben's attitude towards Ocholla's wives and children whom Ben do not wish to live in the same hut with yet allows the boy, Baby, in his custody to live in the same hut with them and also sends him to school.

Gakwandi (1983) concludes, after his study of *Going Down River Road and Kill Me Quick* which violence, loneliness, and despair are the central issues that Mwangi writes about in the novels.

Nnolim (1982) had earlier called the two books *Going Down River Road and Kill Me Quick* pejorative as a result of his argument that the two books' language is bathetic and do not look forward to the growth of the characters.

Nwulu (2013), in a study of *Carcase* and *Kill Me Quick* argues that Mwangi writes these books from the angle of a cinematographer. She concludes that given the way Mwangi writes, he could be placed along such writers as Joyce, Faulkner, and Nabokov and this makes Mwangi an avant-garde African writer.

Of all the reviews and criticisms highlighted, no critic has taken the pains to study the place of things in the chosen novels for study. It is the burden of this paper to show how the author, Mwangi, has equalized his characters and their instruments; how he has made a cross-breeding between character and thing and how things emerge in vigorous relief from the characters to assume a life of their own.

### **Things As Character Emblems: The Mwangi Way**

In *Kill Me Quick*, after the supermarket episode, the backstreet urchins Meja and Maina separates while Meja decides to go home, Maina roams the street until he finally joins Razor's gang of bandits. The body geometry of Razor does not recommend him for the leadership of a bad gang yet he is:

He (Maina) looked at the Razor again, slight build, cheap clothes and cheap plastic shoes worn without any socks. Wavy hair and ragged face. He did not look like the type of person to form any good-willed gang..... Yet Maina did not know what to do. He was not sure where he was going and the chase from the supermarket was now far behind him (p.48).

On conviction Maina follows Razor to his den. Members of the gang are opposed to Maina joining them. There is a stir in the gang - an opposition to Maina joining them. Sweeper, Crasher, Professor - all are opposed to Maina joining the gang so as not to meet the same fate that made them lose a substantial number of the gang members;

"But we don't even want to know you" the Sweeper said standing. "What"? the Razor shot from the bed. The sweeper looked the Razor up and down, a puny little creature to his own bulk. Then he threw his far agar to the ground and ground his hoofs on it (p.53).

The opposition continues until Sara informs Razor that the group had a meeting in his absence;

The Razor reached into his pocket and pulled out a dangerous looking flick knife. Its razor shone dimly, long and sharp like the tongue of a venomous snake. Everybody in the hut except Maina froze in their places. Sara's word froze in her mouth and her face looked pale and scared. The Crusher choked on his cigar's smoke... even the big sweeper it seemed was afraid of the smallish knife. The Razor looked round at the frightened people with satisfaction. (p.55).

Razor's flick knife acts as Razor's totemic double. It enters the narrative as an epithet-noun. Its entrance, to some degree, entails an enumerative rendering of the object in terms of its parts, and such rendering, by its very existence becomes a kind of testimonial to the object's incorrigible presence, a validation of the object as no other thing except that which it is - a command and control

thing; it is the weapon that has life and death residing in it depending on the way it is used by its possessor. Authorial intrusion tells us that the flick knife is “dangerous looking”, its razor shines “dimly, long and sharp like the tongue of a venomous snake”. From this description, Razors flick knife has contour, weight and fixed posture, an implacable corporeality.

By so doing, Mwangi makes this object seem to stand apart from the total visual fields in starting, hand-edged relief. He can also see this object as one object like no other as he makes our eyes press remarkably near its surface to experience its corporeality, thereby etching the character as well as his object into our consciousness. Our vision of the knife is a vision with focus; we experience the act of perception with a concentrated engagement of the object perceived. The general effect of these circumstances is of participation in a protracted drama of the self’s concentration to its object of focus, of the perceiver forever close to the wonder and mystery of the object and its effect on the audience in Razors world. “Sara’s word froze in her mouth and her face looked pale and scared”: the other characters are not left out: “The Crusher checked on his cigar’s smoke... Even the big Sweeper.... was afraid of the smallish knife”. The entire audience is frightened and Razor looked at them “with satisfaction” (p.55).

Maina is admitted into the gang and he cannot tell the gang that he does not know Razor in any school, that Razor is a liar and did not attend any school with him. The thought of the knife appearing again, this time for him, weighs him down. He admits Razor’s lie as truth:

“Maina here is a classmate of mine and he is to join the gang, he concluded. Sara broke the spell. “You mean you went to school”? She asked excitedly. “I wouldn’t lie to you, now would I”? The Razor said relaxing too. “Ask Maina if you don’t believe me. I was a good scholar too.... Tell them Maina,” the Razor ordered.... And the thought of the little dangerous knife reappearing this time for him, was very unpleasant. ‘Yes’ Maina said desperately (p.55)

Without the knife, the Razor is nothing, but with the knife, Razor is everything - a gang leader, overlord, commander, truth teller, etc. But there are times some gang members feel hurt and would like to challenge Razor’s authority.

As the days go by, food becomes scarce for the gang and Maina who has been under training is asked to practice what he has learnt. He has to bring food to the gang for he has fed from what others stole. The day is set and Razor orders Sweeper to go with him (Maina).



'Sweeper' the Razor called "Go with him'. The other flew to his feet, the grin disappearing. What? He bellowed. 'You heard me,' the leader told him. The Sweeper was nearly exploding with fury and hate. He seemed to have suddenly grown very tall and vey gigantic. "But ... but this is against the rules,' he raved.' A new member has to prove his worth even before he is trained....".....That is right Sweeper, the Razor told him. I made the rules and I still do (p.60).

Sweeper approached the Razor with seething anger, 'with closed fists';

It happened like by magic. One minute it was not there, the next minute the dangerous little knife materialized in the Razor's bony hand. That checked the Sweeper's movement. He stopped and stared at the little thing, his mouth producing a trickle of saliva that ran down his chin on to his bare hairy chest. 'Go on try it' the Razor said, smiling with savage pleasure. 'Come I will cut your face into beautiful ribbons for you.' (p.60).

That does it. Sweeper froze in his tracks. The knife, that symbol of life and death in the hand of the Razor has a symbolic value. It speaks of Razor as a no-nonsense gang leader who must wield authority as he deems fit and this authority must brook no opposition, no disobedience, for Razor is the law, the law-giver and law executor par excellence.

The author's delineation of a thing - the knife - as approximate to the character of Razor reveals again and again Razor's fundamental awareness that this object has a life apart from him, is living that life exists. That to control his group, there must be a cross breeding between him and his object. While in this knowledge, he (The Razor) knows as Mwangi knows, that the Razor comes to the conviction that he also has a life apart from his object and is living that life, that he also exists and whatever adventitious process defines his objects' existence also defines his own. This is the reason he does not wait to put his knife into its infernal use when occasion demands.

'Go out, one," he counted. "Go out, two. Go out three"... The Sweeper remembered the countless other gangsters he had seen walk out of this same hut with their faces bleeding and in tatters; he grunted defeatedly and headed for the door. (p.61).

He finally leaves with Maina for the operation which turns out successful; the operation that brings so much food to the gang. However, the government

finally burns Shanty Land down. The Razor could not finally cope and hangs himself. His end signals the end of his infernal knife.

Spiegel (1976) argues that in Post Joycian fiction:

...that things become increasingly important and attains conspicuous and compelling presence in the narrative action. No longer mere props, things are activated into the drama...In this near role, things diminish in utility as they are neither subordinate to man nor serve him in his attempts to realize the significant social and moral acts of his life. *At the same time things also increase in symbolic value as they stand equal to man, representing him in the world of the narrative, made resonant and animate by his living presence in them* (p.135). (Italics Mine).

In *Carcase*, Haraka's gun stands out as the most special thing that expresses the ideas espoused by Spiegel (1976). Right from the beginning of the novel, Mwangi imbues in the gun a Spiegellian character and this character follows the gun until the inevitable happens; the gun now more powerful than Haraka, detaches itself and assumes an autotelic existence.

The gun, Haraka's patchett, looks as sinister as the man who wields it. The gun is introduced as 'a dark sinister British Patchett (p.1). Just like the gun, Haraka is also British made. The British made him the chief of Pinewood Forest before he runs afoul of their law by retaliating the slap made against him by Captain Kingsley the then District Commissioner. This leads him into abandoning his office and running into the jungle to lead the Mau-Mau.

The possessor of this gun has always been careful in the way he carries himself and the gun. Over the streams and rivers, we finally watch as Haraka attends to this gun:

He walked over to the steel cases unslinging the submachine-gun from his shoulders. He sat on one of the steel cases and laid the gun on his lap. From the other case he got out an oily rag and a can of gun oil. He laid them by the case, closed it and placed his foot on it, he next yanked off the magazine and proceeded to dismantle the Patchett slowly and methodically. His movement was smooth, experienced. (p.18).

This cinematic razzle-dazzle is necessary for the author slows down the action of cleaning the gun to tell us that this gun is not ordinary for the life inherent in it is commensurate with, if not more than that inherent in the possessor. The gun is

the messenger of death and Haraka is the sender of such message. There is therefore a union between man and his thing.

Haraka's gang is in need of more arms and munitions. He takes some of his men and raids Timau Police Post. Haraka brings the gun to its infernal use:

"The guns?" General Haraka asked, the constable who looked like throwing up moved. He came closer, slowly, menacingly. "The guns, where are they?" The policeman had his back to the wall. The General jabbed him with the patchett. He pointed into an inner room too scared to speak. Haraka pushed the man into the inner office (p.36).

The very sight of the gun strikes the police constable dumb and fearful. He obeys all that he is ordered to do. Haraka is inside the armory when the frightened constable takes to his heels. But his escape means danger for Haraka and company:

The desk clerk (the constable) was scrambling towards the gate. The gate light was still on and he was clearly visible. Haraka let him have it. He fairly flew into the air, and then crash-landed in a mess of flesh and blood (p.37).

The Patchett, or do I say Haraka? , carries along with it destruction wherever it goes. Different other guns were used during this raid but how does Brigadier Thames see what happened? He says to Captain Kingsley:

While you were out chasing after God-knows who, Haraka was twenty miles away at Timau Police Post. The place is in a shambles, from the report I got. Killing, burning, and looting. The telephone was cut and the radio smashed up by Patchett fire (p.45).

The gun, as can be seen, is employed by Mwangi to express an aspect of Haraka's psychology: The expressiveness of the gun, its killing, is therefore the link that binds the human to it, the link that equalizes one with the other. In this relationship, however, we can still perceive the separatist strivings of the gun, for as Haraka associates himself with it, he relinquishes that much of his power to act, gives it over to the gun which proceeds to function, as it were, on his behalf.

The gun, apart from Kimamo, has always been the Deus-ex-machina savior of Haraka. On the night of the administration of oath of Allegiance to the villagers at old Mwaniki's hut, it is the Patchett that saves Haraka from the hands of government home-guards led by Chief Simba. The ambush fire into the hut and

wounds a woman: "General Haraka unslung his Patchett from the wall-nail where it hung, slipped off the safety-catch and cocked it (p.180).

With a series of fire from the gun, the General escapes capture and death but is seriously wounded. Captain Kingsley hears of the rat-tat-tat of the Patchett and takes his soldiers to confront the devil called Haraka:

Captain Kingsley led the soldier up the dark muddy road, leaving the lieutenant standing in the rain alone. The rain grew heavier... And up at the village the crack-crack of the Italian rifles were punctuated by the murderous racket of the damned patchett. (p.82).

The "murderous racket of the damned" patchett its epiphany, the showing forth, the outward sign of its struggle to realize itself as that thing which it is and no other. The gun itself has become as mysterious cunning, enigmatic and aloof as its possessor. Even when Haraka lies in the cave smarting from his wounds and Kimamo takes the gun out for a raid, to kill Chief Simba, the government forces do not know that its possessor is no longer Haraka: "Then he (Captain Kingsley) heard it and his heart leaped. The gun, Haraka's Patchett" (p.131). Then Peters had to exclaim: "Haraka!" Lieutenant Peters breathlessly broke the spell" (p.131).

The gun is most memorable because its constant possessor has been General Haraka until the last raid by Kimamo. The gun has been employed by Mwangi in the narrative in an Eisensteinian manner, "pars pro toto" (p.132); that is the actor is replaced by his object; a part - a part of the hero (the gun) - is used to represent the whole (the hero himself). The gun is therefore a kind of emblem, the material signature of the hero himself. The gun enters the narrative as a "pars pro toto" effect but as Haraka's days go by, the gun achieves a significance as we watch the possessor clean it reassuringly, takes it along with him in all his raids until the inevitable happens - the gun, now more powerful than its owner, detaches itself from the character and assumes a life of its own.

None of the objects used throughout the two books, *Kill Me Quick and Carcase* achieves a realization comparable to the epiphany of the gun. The Razors knife, Maina's overalls, Kingsley's gun, the aircrafts, none can compare with the gun's animation. The shooting of the gun (the patchett) represents the logical extension and conclusion of its animation, that autotelic condition toward which all other objects in the books under discussion seem to strive, but rarely attain. With the gun, we enter the world of dreams - for Haraka dreams a lot - and demonology - Haraka seem not to be human again, the world where inanimate things do seem to represent the locks and keys of deeper, darker forces just beneath their

surfaces. As the Razor dies, he dies with his knife but the patchett outlives Haraka.

In *Going Down River Road* many things (objects) clutter the work? But our special attention shall focus on Onesmus's truck (tipper).

Mwangi introduces the tipper driven by Onesmus amid a welter of construction site bric-a-brac. The construction site is situated at Haile Selassie Avenue; the project is the construction of the Development House in Nairobi, Kenya's Capital. "Trucks and tippers tripped in and out of the fenced site laden with sand, gravel, building materials and rubble" Ben, the cashiered army lieutenant now turned construction hand, is waiting to talk to the site foreman Yussuf when, all of a sudden:

Another tipper approaches from the direction of the site. It stops fifty yards ahead of him. Ben drifts closer. Then all of a sudden the truck snorts into gear and charges him. He dodges to the left. It steers for him. He dives back to the right, holds his breadth for the impact. The lorry skids in thick dust and burrows into the site wall tearing off wood and metal. (p.32).

The killer tipper belongs to the killer hands of Sergeant Onesmus also cashiered from the army along with Ben;

Ben stands frozen in the dust, his legs rocking his heart racing wildly. The dust slowly settles. He opens his eyes as the truck reverses from the wrecked wall. But for the smashed left light the machine is undamaged. The driver leans out of the cab, his fat face smiling itself ugly. "Hi lieutenant?. Ben's heart takes a throw. His mind goes completely blank with shock (p.32).

The bringing into focus, of Onesmus, is a surreal fantasy for as Ben thinks of what next his former army commanding officer would do against him, after he let him lose his insurance company work at the Pan African Insurance Office, Mwangi introduces the devil called Onesmus and his instrument of liquidation, the tipping truck. To etch this truck into our psyche, the author calls it by different names - tipper, lorry, truck, machine, cab. The essence of this plethora of synonyms or near synonyms is to make the tipper unforgettable in our minds. As the ugly mechanics of Onesmus body geometry clings to our memory, so does Onesmus infernal machine, the tipper.

Onesmus is angry at Ben for, as he thinks, it is Ben that made him lose his military service his grouse against Ben but he cannot even up against Ben by using his fist. The truck will do the job for him, he reasons;

“These things can be rough driving, don’t you think? Ben’s brain crawls into forward. The face draws into focus and holds. His mouth feels sticky and sour. The tongue seems frozen, kind of choking him. The dust-covered tipper driver smiles, exposing an ugly cavern where the upper front teeth ought to be. The remaining teeth are stained deep brown from chewing curd tobacco. His fat cheeks, the rough bearded face and dust-covered pate do not figure in Ben’s mind. “You have a short memory lieutenant”, the man laughs. Ben clears his throat. “Who the devil are you?...” “The name is Onesmus?” (p.32)

Yes, Onesmus, Sergeant Major Onesmus of the army B Company. The same company with Ben back then. Ben is not afraid of this apparition but what about his tipper – the machine with which this apparition intends to even up scores with Ben?.

Yussaf is mad at Onesmus for bashing the company’s wall and did not hide it from Onesmus: “You drive over everybody and everything and I keep pay for this, he points at the ruined wall.” (p.33) Finally he confides in Ben, “Onesmus is a killer....killed three people last year. He does t for money too. He drinks, smokes bhang and kills (p.34)

Ocholla, Ben’s greatest buddy on site, corroborates what Yusuf says, “Watch at Ben,” Ocholla warns. “He is dangerous. He killed three guys on the National Bank Site. Just like that. An argument, an accident. He is dangerous. You don’t want to cross him” (p.34)

In Ocholla’s report to Ben, there is a merging or cross-breeding between character and objects one is in counterpoint with the other, as well one meshes into the other at the same time. Onesmus is dangerous, Yes; but the actual killing of the “three guys is done by no other than Onesmus’ tipper, hence, an accident. The life of one yields into the life of the other. The passage is a great achievement in Mwangi’s verbal concision.

Onesmus is not done yet on his attempt to murder Ben with his tipper. Ben is in a reverie on site dreaming about Wini and their on - coming child;

...He dreams a short bright dream. It is about Wini and their child. The body relaxes further. The mind lets go too and he falls into the deep dark of a tired man's sleep.

Suddenly the world splits apart. He breaks loose and tumbles down, gushing fury, crushing his body, his (sic) lungs everything in choking hot dust. In the blasting din someone screams: "Ben! Then darkness, pain-ridden dark, where every breath, every heartbeat, everything is an electrifying painful shock. After what seems like an eternity.... Ben looks up into Ocholla's grave face. He joits up chokes and coughs. At the gravel heap where he was sleeping just a moment ago the tipper's door swings in and out producing a brain-rocking banging sound (p.93).

That is quintessential Onesmus with his war - machine. The intention is to bury Ben in a heap of gravel on site: that could have been another "accident". The tipper takes on an implacable corporeality as we watch the swinging in and out of its door that produces, "a brain-rocking banging sound" (p.93). It is difficult here for the reader to determine whether the frenzy that invigorates the description of this scene belongs to the mind of Ben or the author. Mwangi discharges this fury of observation to keep pace with the restless mind of Ben in his reverie. The climax of this description could finally be found in the rocking of the tipper's door. Mwangi is not so much interested in what goes on in Ben's reverie but in what this reverie finally yields into: the attempt of Onesmus to bury Ben with his tipper: for then as Ben is drawn out of the gravel heap, the tipper takes over the space.

As Onesmus is unyielding in his liquidation of Ben, so does the tipper; and as he grins out of the cockpit of the tipper he tells Ben: "A man has got to do a job, lieutenant.... A guy has got to do his job; the tipper's raised back clangs down. The truck clatters out of site for more crushed rock. Ocholla looks from the receding machine to Ben". (p.94).

The roaring of the tipper is its epiphany; for when the tipper is in motion, it could be anything but a tipper - a liquidation machine, a maniac, a beast - so also is Onesmus when he is set on carrying out his devilish assignment. Man and machine cross-breed and merge into one: the thing is the character and vice versa.

As Ben moves over to the concrete mixer he operates, "His frame shivers (p.94). He is visibly jolted by Onesmus' attempt (the second one) to kill and bury him. It

is now break time and Ben moves “through construction debris towards the duty office” (p.95). Again all of a sudden:

The truck charges out of nowhere. For a fleeting second he (Ben) stands rooted to the dust, scared motionless. Then he shifts mechanically fast. He springs to one side, hits the dust and rolls. The tipper screeches to a halt a few feet away, Ben flounders in the dust raised, choking and coughing. His head throbs, his heart races.... The dust clears. The truck stands clear to the left...Onesmus leans on the door of his bruised tipper chewing monotonously on his tobacco. He blows out his massive chest, glances from the other hands to Ben and burst out laughing (p.95).

Ben could take it no more. He “explodes in red hot rage “(p.95) and charges the elephantine figure called Onesmus. A fight ensues and the construction hands finally separate the fighters.

Ochalla, Ben’s greatest friend, now secretly decides that this tipper and its driver must be stopped before they kill his buddy. His crane bucket will do the job for him: “ A white topped tipper, Onesmus brand new death machine reverses to the mixer to empty another load of sand’ (p.145); this is the opportunity Ochalla is looking for; “Ocholla’s hauling bucket sighs on its way down, the thick greasy cables quivering with tons of strain” (p.145) and then the catastrophe:

....Ocholla’s crane bucket screams free line through the hot air, the thick steel cable swishes dangerously as the heavy bucket plummets to earth. Workers scatter out of the way. The bucket crushes into a truck, smashing the steel cock pit into scrap metal.... The white-topped tipper has been converted to useless shell. Blood spills in a steady trickle from within the wreckage. Onesmus squashed body lies trapped within in a large mass of minced flesh and bones (p.148).

Onesmus is dead so also is Onesmus tripper that “has been converted to useless shell (p.148) The wreckage of the tipper is an ideational schema of artistic necessity meant to mark the death of its operator for the thing (the tipper) and the character (Onesmus) have become one and should be dead and buried conjointedly.

From our discussion, it can be seen that Mwangi renders an object – a thing so to say - in terms of texture and tactility for all the objects used in our analyses have texture and are therefore tactile – The Razor’s flick knife; Haraka’s Patchett and Onesmus tipper all possess this quality; the objects also have



volume and density like the objects found in Flaubert's and Joyce's novels. Mwangi works in this way throughout *Kill Me Quick, Carcase, and Going Down River Road* because to him a character is not divorced from the thing he operates with. Things stand as character emblems for him for the psychology of a given character in the works analyzed is projected into the thing the character operates with. For this, things have symbolic value in Mwangi's works. Thus Mwangi validates his objects and gives them their psychic tenor through his enumeration rendering of the object in terms of its pasts; such rendering, by its very existence becomes a kind of testimonial to the object's incorrigible presence. The object in turn meshes into and or sometimes cross-breed with the character to become one and the same thing.

## Conclusion

As can be seen from our analyses, Mwangi's things (objects) are usually and actually put to use by his characters either at the moment they are being introduced or at any other moment; and they do interact or unite with the ongoing dynamic lives of his characters or the continuous forward movement of the novel's plots horizontal action.

These objects are vital aspects of an artistic design and reflect vertically, as it were, to the dramatically necessary resonances of meaning in the mind of the author. They are emblems and they function symbolically by gathering up, intensifying, and deepening the dramatic action in the novels. Thus the symbol in Mwangi's narrative fiction often functions essentially as a reinforcing device. Mwangi's descriptive tactics renders his objects and setting (and people too) in the photographic manner as they appear under the sway of time and mutability.

The nightmare of history, human and otherwise, has worked on these objects, lending them a kind of broken melancholy that simultaneously stirs in us a corresponding sense of the fragility and sheer perishability of the life of things in time - The Razor's flick knife died with the Razor; Haraka's gun surpasses Haraka as he lies dead in the cave but is finally rendered inoperable by the death of both Haraka and Kimamo, and Onesmus tipper dies' with Onesmus.

Everywhere in Mwangi's three novels used here, we confront the attempt to unite the dramatic compatibility between a thing's adventitious appearance and its meaningful depths, between the opaque surface of things and their symbolic value. Most times, there is a union between the two. Mwangi's reader must therefore not only accustom himself to read words that refer continually to

things that he can see, but he must now make an added effort, just as he would in life, to grasp the meaning expressed by the things themselves.

Mwangi's efforts here have been to remove man from his privileged position in a world of things and to merge the humanly central with the materially peripheral. In this effort, man enters "democratically" into a world of things and both man and thing occupy an equal position under the overriding rubric of existence. This situation is what we find in most French fiction- in Satre, Butor, Robbe Grillet, Le Clezio.

In Mwangi's heterogeneous cosmos, each phase of human and material existence, strives to distinguish itself. Mysterious, cunning, enigmatic, aloof - indeed, it seems as if each dumb thing has been energized and animated with the character of its possessor. The object is made memorable when it is permanently associated with a specific human being -the Razor's thick knife, Haraka's Patchett and Onesmus tipper-all the things mentioned are the character emblems of their possessors.

Just as important as the animated object is the externalized character, the later is the counterpart of the former and the fiction, especially cinematized fiction, that includes one will include the others having read Joyce, Faulkner, Doss Passos and Flambert, Mwangi knows this so he could afford to write the way he does.

Both the Razor and Onesmus are urban grotesque while the Razor looks famished, Onesmus has the body geometry of an urban gangster, and he is one - a bhang addict, murderer, bully and a thief. Haraka is a ragamuffin. All of them have their obsessional tisc, - murdering, and first degree murdering. Given this situation in Mwangi's fiction therefore, things stand as character emblems as each thing speaks in "its own way", and almost human in the way it calls attention to itself.

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