

# Rupkatha Journal

## On Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities

An Online Open Access Journal  
ISSN 0975-2935  
[www.rupkatha.com](http://www.rupkatha.com)

---

Volume IV, Number 2, 2012

### Chief Editor

*Tirtha Prasad mukhopadhyay*

### Editor

*Tarun Tapas Mukherjee*

---

### Indexing and abstracting

Rupkatha Journal is an international journal recognized by a number of organizations and institutions. It is archived permanently by [www.archive-it.org](http://www.archive-it.org) and indexed by **EBSCO**, **Elsevier**, **MLA International Directory**, **Ulrichs Web**, **DOAJ**, **Google Scholar**, **J-Gate**, **JournalSeek**, **ResearchGate** and other organisations and included in many university libraries

---

### **Additional services and information for *Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities* can be found at:**

About Us: [www.rupkatha.com/about.php](http://www.rupkatha.com/about.php)  
Editorial Board: [www.rupkatha.com/editorialboard.php](http://www.rupkatha.com/editorialboard.php)  
Archive: [www.rupkatha.com/archive.php](http://www.rupkatha.com/archive.php)  
Submission Guidelines: [www.rupkatha.com/submissionguidelines.php](http://www.rupkatha.com/submissionguidelines.php)  
Call for Papers: [www.rupkatha.com/callforpapers.php](http://www.rupkatha.com/callforpapers.php)  
Email Alerts: [www.rupkatha.com/freesubscription.php](http://www.rupkatha.com/freesubscription.php)  
Contact Us: [www.rupkatha.com/contactus.php](http://www.rupkatha.com/contactus.php)

---

© *Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities*

# Modes of Resistance in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Wizard of the Crow*

Amitayu Chakraborty

Visva-Bharati university, Santiniketan, India

---

## Abstract

This article concerns itself with an African novel in English, *Wizard of the Crow* (2006), written by Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1938-), an eminent contemporary Kenyan postcolonialist writer. It studies the ways in which two of the characters in Ngugi's novel—Kamiti and Nyawira—discursively resist the hegemony of the nation-state of Aburiria, a fictitious African/Kenyan nation. In so doing, it contends that Ngugi draws upon the African-American mythic-trickster aesthetic paradigm, Schechner's theorisation of socio-dramatic/ritualistic performance, and Bakhtin's concept of the carnivalesque and grotesque to form certain modes of resistance in the novel. The aim of this article is to argue that Nyawira and Kamiti, through their mock-wizardry and dance performances, somewhat correspond to the trickster paradigm, and evoke the carnivalesque and grotesque, and thereby, resist the domination of the nation-state represented by the Ruler.

**[Keywords:** *Wizard of the Crow*; Ngugi wa Thiong'o, hegemony, socio-dramatic/ritualistic performance; Bakhtin, carnivalesque, nation-state, Aburiria.]

Ngugi wa Thiong'o's latest novel *Wizard of the Crow* (2006) is a complex satire against the repressive regime(s)/state(s) in Africa/Kenya. The mythic-trickster tradition, Schechner's theorisation of socio-dramatic/ritualistic performance, and Bakhtin's concept of the carnivalesque and grotesque facilitate us in understanding the politically subversive elements in *Wizard of the Crow*. The text which I shall study is an English translation (by Ngugi himself) of the author's Gikuyu novel, *Muruugi wa Kagoogo* (2004). The setting of the novel, the Free Republic of Aburiria, may represent any state in Africa. Aburirian people are under the dictatorship of the Ruler, "a combination of Idi Amin, Mobutu Sese Seko, [Daniel Arap Moi,] and Pere Ubu" (Maxwell 226). Sycophancy, corruption and plans for the absurd project "Marching to Heaven" along with whimsicality of the Ruler take their toll on Aburiria. The country is fraught with manifold economic crises. The only counterpoint to this narrative of abject subjugation and predicament is the Movement for the Voice of the People. To this dialectical struggle, Ngugi ingeniously introduces, Kamiti and Nyawira, whose tricky, carnivalesque and grotesque activities ranging from assuming beggarly appearances, to mock wizardry, to vulgar dance performances, challenge the authoritative measures taken by the Ruler and his men. I shall try to show how Kamiti and Nyawira somewhat resemble the trickster figures found in African-American myths. In so doing, I would try to study a few resistive gestures that they make.

However, before dealing with Kamiti and Nyawira in detail, I shall highlight the connection—pertinent to the concern of this article—between them and the eponymous hero of Ngugi's previous Gikuyu venture, *Matigari ma Njiruungi* (1986). As Simon Gikandi argues,

If novels such as *Petals of Blood* and *Devil on the Cross* were concerned with ways in which European conventions of realistic representation might be applied to a postcolonial setting, *Matigari* was a novel that sought to reconceptualize the relation between art and reality; its major success as a novel would come to depend on its capacity not merely to represent reality but to create it. It was by problematizing the nature of reality, by turning the "real" into a shifting and subjective category, that Ngugi

was able to dramatize the textual economy through which the state established its political and cultural hegemony and the discursive mechanisms through which deterritorialized sectors in society, such as the urban poor, were making sense of the contested politics of everyday life. (226)

The point I want to make is that, like *Matigari*, *Wizard of the Crow* can be read as an outcome of the change which took place in Ngugi's conceptualisation of the relation between art/literature and reality/politics.

Unlike the realist novels which Ngugi wrote earlier—*Weep Not, Child* (1964), *The River Between* (1965), *A Grain of Wheat* (1967), *Petals of Blood* (1976) and *Devil on the Cross* (1982)—*Matigari* is a multi-generic “oral narrative performance” (Balogun). Targeted at the “Reader/listener,” *Matigari* attempts at synthesising the African oral tradition and the European written tradition (Thiong'o, *Matigari* ix).<sup>1</sup> Aptly complemented by the generic hybridity of the novel, there is the ontological fluidity of *Matigari*. Gossips about *Matigari*'s identity continuously increase the degree of indeterminacy regarding his identity. The enigma of *Matigari*'s identity perpetuated by various confabulations is particularly evident in the following torrent of questions:

But at the same time all wondered: who really was *Matigari ma Njiruungi*? A patriot? Angel Gabriel? Jesus Christ? Was he a human being or a spirit? A true or false prophet? A saviour or simply a lunatic? Was *Matigari* a man or was he a woman? A child or an adult? Or was he only an idea, an image, in people's minds? Who Was He? (158)

That his full name, “*Matigari ma Njiruungi*” literally means “‘the patriots who survived the bullets’—the patriots who survived the liberation war, and their political offspring” attests the fluidity inherent in his identity: *Matigari* can be any patriot (20). Besides, one must consider that one of the reasons why Ngugi named his protagonist *Matigari* was, when Jomo Kenyatta came to power in 1963-64, the word “*Matigari*” “became the signifier for the unmentionable Mau Mau, and gained currency as a word that referred to the revolutionaries or the Mau Mau freedom fighters who survived in the forest” (Raghavan 154). Gradually, with the consolidation of the neocolonial nation-state, the word “*Matigari*” gained a mythic status, and the hope that one day, *Matigari*, the messianic hero, would “return to set things right” emerged as a popular lore (154). When the Gikuyu novel *Matigari ma Njiruungi* had been published in Kenya, during Daniel Arap Moi's rule in 1986, the state mistook *Matigari* for a real Mau Mau warrior and tried to arrest him (Thiong'o, *Matigari* viii). Later, realising their mistake, they banned the novel. Thus *Matigari* became a threat to the hegemonic nation-state of Kenya.

It is to be noted that having such a degree of indeterminacy, *Matigari* somewhat corresponds to the African-American mythic trickster paradigm because indeterminacy is one of the fundamental characteristics of the trickster. A trickster of African-American myths and folklores is a mediator between disparate elements, and his “mediations are tricks” (Gates 6). According to Henry Louis Gates Jr., “A partial list of” the features of “*Esu or Esu-Elegbara*,” the trickster belonging to the myths and folklores which germinated “among certain black cultures in West Africa, South America, the Caribbean, and the United States,” includes “indeterminacy, open-endedness, ambiguity, ... chance, uncertainty, disruption...” (6). Moreover, Jeanne Rosier Smith defines tricksters as “ubiquitous shape-shifters who dwell on borders, at crossroads, and between worlds” (1). As she argues,

In virtually all cultures, tricksters are both folk heroes and wanderers on the edges of the community, at once marginal and central to the culture. Tricksters challenge the status quo and disrupt perceived boundaries. Whether foolishly, arrogantly, or bravely, tricksters face the monstrous, transforming the chaotic to create new worlds and new cultures. In doing so, they offer appealing strategies to women writers of color who,

historically subjugated because of both their race and their sex, often combine a feminist concern for challenging patriarchy with a cultural interest in breaking racial stereotypes and exploring a mixed cultural heritage. (2)

Echoing Smith, I maintain that in “doing so,” the tricksters have offered Ngugi useful means to create characters, like Matigari, Kamiti and Nyawira, who present a discursive challenge to the hegemony of the neocolonial African/Kenyan state(s).<sup>2</sup>

For Ngugi, art comes into being by countering “the state’s terror and paranoia” (Thiong’o, *Penpoints* 2). As he defines, the “state in a class society is an instrument of control in the hands of whatever is the dominant social force;” whereas art, “in its beginnings was always an ally of the human search for freedom from hostile nature and nurture” (*Penpoints* 28). His predicament in the Kamiriithu project and his subsequent exile due to his artistic activities which were subversive to the Moi regime in Kenya are well known today. According to Ngugi, the ground reality fraught with power struggle cannot be denied; and therefore, what the writer “can choose is one or the other side in the battle field: the side of the people, or the side of those social forces and classes that try to keep the people down. What he or she cannot do is to remain neutral. Every writer is a writer in politics” (*Writers in Politics* Preface). However, in *Matigari* and *Wizard of the Crow*, Ngugi aptly shows that “choosing sides” does not necessitate the adoption of “socialist realism.”

What interests me most, vis-à-vis this article, is the elusive nature of Kamiti and Nyawira, their ability to elude the normative, the official—hence their correspondence to Matigari, and the trickster aesthetics. In fact, Kamiti’s first appearance—his body is found in the garbage dump on the fringes of the city Eldares—is indicative of his being a pariah (Thiong’o, *Wizard* 38). The reader is acquainted with a trick of Kamiti: he “abandon[s] his human form and remain[s] a bird, floating effortlessly in the sky;” but he has to repossess his body (39-40). However, this renunciation-repossession act might be symbolic of a cautionary Marxist remark which Ngugi makes in *Writers in Politics*: “literature cannot escape from the class power structures that shape our everyday life” (Preface). The debate between Nyawira and Kamiti which takes place after their first escape from the state police has a similar concern (Thiong’o, *Wizard* 86-88). Nyawira says, “The water I drink, the food I eat, the clothes I wear, the bed I sleep on, are all determined by politics, good or bad. Politics is about power and how it is used. Politics involves choosing sides in the struggle for power” (86-87).

Smith’s definition of the trickster as “ubiquitous shape-shifters who dwell on borders, at crossroads” is pertinent to my understanding of Kamiti’s following rumination:

Yesterday morning I was a job hunter. Midday I was a corpse, a piece of garbage about to be buried among other garbage. In the afternoon I was an object of Tajirika’s self-amusement. In the evening I was a beggar among beggars outside the gates of Paradise. Last night I was on the run, pursued by His Mighty’s police force. This morning I was the Wizard of the Crow, divining for one of His Mighty’s police officers. And tonight I am a watchman in the house of a mysterious woman whom I met only yesterday. (125)

Moreover, it is to be noted that Kamiti does not become a “shape-shifter” by choice. He is caught in a vortex of drastically changing historical situations which compels him to play different roles at different times: “I did not choose to be there...I was blinded with anger and hunger. I went there where they led me. What happens in life is fate” (87). This, in fact, bolsters the argument that Kamiti has a close correspondence to the trickster paradigm: as Paul Radin argues, the trickster “dupes others” and “is always duped himself. He wills nothing consciously. At all times he is constrained to behave as he does from impulses over which he has no control” (ix).

What once was a childhood prank helps Kamiti and Nyawira dupe and escape the policeman chasing them:

The other beggar[, Kamiti,] tied the bones and the rags together. He then took a felt pen from his bag and wrote on the cardboard in big letters: WARNING! THIS PROPERTY BELONGS TO A WIZARD WHOSE POWER BRINGS DOWN HAWKS AND CROWS FROM THE SKY. TOUCH HIS HOUSE AT YOUR PERIL....

[W]hen the officer saw the bundle of rags and bones, he took a step back.... [W]hen he saw the leg of a frog and the tail of a lizard...he was petrified. On reading what was written on the cardboard, he...took to his heels.... (77)

Gradually, Kamiti's escape trick gains seriousness, and he has to assume the role of a diviner, a sorcerer, who heals every one by virtue of his "wizardry." Every time a patient comes to the Wizard, Kamiti—sometimes together with Nyawira—has to put up a performance rather using wisdom than wizardry. As a result, Constable Arigaigai Gatherer ("A.G.") gets promoted, Tajirika is cured of his "white-ache," even the Ruler is able to break his silence (113-119, 179-180, 491-492). That the Wizard heals irrespective of his patients' moral standpoints apparently indicates that his wizardry is amoral. However, I would like to read it as a resistive gesture set off against the Ruler's dominance.

Two things which matter most in the rise of the Wizard are Kamiti's performances as a wizard, and the rumours about them (A.G. is mostly responsible for their dispersion). One may consider Kamiti's "wizardry" as performance keeping in mind that the connection between performing arts and shamanism has been well recognised (Mason 13-15; Pendzik 81-92; Kirby 140).<sup>3</sup> Moreover, it can be argued that Kamiti's "sorcery" or healing might be considered to be a socio-dramatic/ritualistic performance of "transportation" and "transformation" (Schechner 130). As Richard Schechner argues in *Between Theater and Anthropology*, an initiation ceremony in Papua New Guinea, for instance, is a performance of transportation for the Gahuku men, the "experienced performers" who act as "trainers, guides and coperformers;" but it is a performance of transformation for the Asemo boys who are initiated to Gahuku manhood through the rites and ritual (127-131).<sup>4</sup> Drawing upon Schechner's argument, it might be said that whenever Kamiti attempts at healing someone, he enters the performance and seems to assume a role (not being transformed but transported to a state); but as soon as the performance is over, he re-enters "ordinary life approximately where... [he] left it" (Schechner 130). On the other hand, Kamiti's patient who believes in Kamiti's wizardry, his healing power, is transformed (to a greater extent) in some way or the other. As Schechner says, "if any change among... [the Gahuku men] occurs, it is subtle," Kamiti's change—if any—is also subtle. That is why when "his clients left, the Wizard of the Crow felt relief, only to sink into depression at being all alone. He went into the living room, hoping that Nyawira was there so that he could unburden himself of his amazement at what had just transpired" (Thiong'o, *Wizard* 188).

Given that Kamiti himself engages in a performance of transportation rather than that of transformation (he plays the role of a wizard), it can be said that Kamiti is not a wizard; and that, at the same time, he is not not-a-wizard (Schechner 123). He is like an actor who recurrently plays a single role. Such an actor engages in a performance of transportation not that of transformation; and therefore, the character he plays can neither be completely equated to him nor be dissociated from him. Like the actor, Kamiti "performs in a field between a negative [—not—] and a double negative [—not not-a-wizard—] a field of limitless potential, free as it is from both the person and the... [wizard] impersonated" (Schechner 123). As Schechner contends, all "effective performances share this 'not-not not' quality," and "in this sense, performing is a paradigm of liminality" (123).

Besides, the Wizard of Crow is not Kamiti alone. Nyawira, at times, performs as the Wizard in absence of Kamiti (Thiong'o, *Wizard* 428-431, 463-465). This further problematizes the notion about the identity of the Wizard. One of A.G.'s confabulations not only registers this ambiguity but also exaggerates it to supernatural proportions:

Ask yourselves: Who was the Wizard of the Crow? Was he a man or a woman? Personally I knew that he possessed the ability to change himself into a man or a woman or into anything else. He is a whirlwind. He is lightning. He is a thunderstorm. He is the sun and the rain. He is the moon and the stars. How can you draw the likeness of air, breath, soul? The Wizard of the Crow is the being that animated everything, and how can you draw a picture of that? (569)

By dint of its sheer indeterminacy (which echoes the questions about Matigari's identity quoted earlier), the "wizardry" of the Wizard seems attuned to the trickster paradigm exploring the field of performance, a "paradigm of liminality," of "multiple realities," which "reveals both the glory and abyss of human freedom" (Schechner 123). Such a politically neutral field of immense potential (neutral because it can reveal both "the glory and abyss of human freedom") cannot remain neutral in the hands of a writer like Ngugi wa Thiong'o. Hence, the rise of the Wizard of the Crow in Aburiria disrupts the hegemony of the state. The lopsided equation of power between the Ruler and the people is unsettled by the rising Wizard, as people gain a new source of power and prosperity. Before the advent of the Wizard, the power lay with the Ruler as only close sycophantic proximity with the Ruler could ensure prosperity and authority. Thus, like a trickster, the Wizard of the Crow challenges the status quo in Aburiria.

However, it must be noted that the rumour-mongers of Aburiria (especially A.G.) who spread stories about the occult power of the Wizard become a vehicle of this resistive movement. The recurrent "True, *Haki ya Mungu*" through A.G.'s confabulations becomes a catch phrase to ensure the dissemination of rumours about the Wizard and his wizardry. A.G.'s narratives provide the hopeless Aburirians with a "resilient hope:" "no matter how intolerable things seemed, a change for the better was always possible. For if a mere mortal like the Wizard of the Crow could change himself into any form of being, nothing could resist the human will to change" (Thiong'o, *Wizard* 96).

In his insightful article "Arresting Time, Resisting Arrest: Narrative Time and the African Dictator in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Wizard of the Crow*," Robert Colson discusses how the rumours in Aburiria, especially, A.G.'s curious narrations along with the unreliable narrator's, discursively resist the hegemony of the Ruler. He writes, "Rumor, in this case, is not simply a contradiction of the official versions of stories foisted on the people, but instead is a vibrant discourse and site for debate as multiple versions are debated in the climate of a free exchange of ideas that is completely at odds with the aims of the State" (140). I argue that the source of this "free exchange" is the performance enacted by the Wizard. Engaging himself in a performance of transportation, the Wizard serves the purpose of a positive catalyst: he activates the performance of transformation—the change in the patient—while himself ends up being unchanged. Interestingly, he does this by instigating the patients to speak about themselves. In case of Tajirika, for instance, Kamiti helps him get rid of the "*If! If only*" disease, the "white-ache" in the following manner:

"Vomit the words, the good and the bad!"

"If..." Tajirika said, and paused.

"Now," urged the Wizard of the Crow.

"My..." Tajirika added, and then got stuck.

“More.”

“Skin...”

“Keep going.”

“Were not...”

“Good, good...”

“Black.”

...

“Complete the thought. The good and the bad ...”

“If only...”

“Yes!”

“My skin...”

“Don’t stop now!”

“Were... white... like a... white man’s... skin...” Tajirika said...

“There! You have voiced the treacherous thought!” the Wizard of the Crow said in congratulation... (178-179)

It is evident here that the Wizard (Kamiti) provides Tajirika with the necessary leverage for voicing his thoughts, both the “good and the bad.” The stichomythia can be considered as a mark of the pluralistic and democratic nature of the Wizard’s “wizardry.” The Wizard shows a commitment to pluralism and democracy by instigating his patient to voice his thoughts (the “good and the bad”) instead of prescribing him any remedies. Had Kamiti been a prescriptive wizard, he would have somewhat robbed the patient off his voice. Instead, Kamiti provides the patient with an apt atmosphere in which the patient expresses his thoughts. This becomes extremely significant when we consider that he helps the people of Aburiria, the ones who have no right to voice their thoughts freely. The Ruler, and later on, Tajirika (who succeeds him) hinder the pluralistic and democratic spirit which the Wizard enacts through his performance. In this way, the Wizard’s performance becomes politically subversive, and thereby, symptomatic of the form of the novel, which Colson considers “as the opponent to the dictator in the struggle” (150).<sup>5</sup>

The other trickster-like figure in the novel, Nyawira, is aptly described by Kamiti as “chameleon-like:” “One moment she was a faithful secretary [of Tajirika working at his construction office], then a player in the politics of poverty [dissembling as a beggar], and even a singing religious fanatic” (Thiong’o, *Wizard* 87). Nyawira not only works for the Movement for the Voice of the People but also leads it—a secret which is withheld from everyone, including Kamiti and the reader of the novel, till Kamiti willingly joins the rebellious group. Unlike Kamiti, she assumes the role of a beggar in order to voice a collective protest against the doomed project, *Marching to Heaven*, in front of international media and foreign delegates (74). It appears that under the leadership of Nyawira, the protesters gather in the guises of beggars in front of one of the biggest hotels in Aburiria, “Paradise, where Machokali[, one of the main ministers of the state,] was hosting a welcome dinner for the visiting mission from the Global Bank” (72). The grand panorama of abject poverty is a show—a “theater of politics,” Nyawira will aptly call later—which aims at drawing the attention of the media and the delegates present there (86). The real intention of the “beggars” is revealed when they start “shouting slogans beyond the decorum of begging:” “*Marching to Heaven Is Marching to Hell. Your Strings of*

Loans Are Chains of Slavery. Your Loans Are the Cause of Begging. We Beggars Beg the End of Begging" (74). I consider this significant because Nyawira and her group put up a unique show of resistance: they resort to the "margin" in order to unsettle the "centre." Generally, beggars are to be located on the fringes of society. Economically, they are to be situated at the lowest level of social structure. The members of the Movement for the Voice of the People use the guise of beggar as a means to express and disseminate, both nationally and internationally, their voice of protest against the centre, the state. This becomes all the more interesting when we consider that the unique resistive performance is held at a place which is marked by the relics of the hegemonic state—seven statues of the Ruler are situated at the place which is known as Ruler's Square (72). As Ngugi maintains,

The nation-state sees the entire territory as its performance area [where it can perform its power]; it organizes the space as a huge enclosure, with definite places of entrance and exit. These exits and entrances are manned by companies of workers they call immigration officials. The borders are manned by armed guards to keep away invaders. But they are also there to confine the population within a certain territory. The nation-state performs its own being relentlessly, through its daily exercise of power over the exits and entrances, by means of passports, visas, and flags. ("Enactments of Power" 21)

In *Wizard of the Crow*, the place near Paradise thus becomes a battleground in which "the power of performance" used by the "beggars," and "the performance of power" put up by the state clash with each other (12).

Moreover, the members of the anti-state group put up another performance to rebuff the Marching-to-Heaven project. This time women, under the leadership of Nyawira of course, perform in front of the foreign diplomats, the members of the Global Bank (representing the IMF), and the Ruler with his cabinet ministers. The performers deviate from the planned programme—they were supposed to please the august audience by their dance—so much so that "the Ruler ... [is]... solemn... [unable to decide whether he should] walk away or stay," and "Machokali ... [feels] like crying" (250-251). As Nyawira tells Kamiti later on,

then, just as planned,...all of us in the arena suddenly faced the people, our backs turned to the platform [where the Ruler and other dignitaries were sitting]. All together we lifted our skirts and exposed our butts to those on the platform, and squatted as if about to shit en masse in the arena. Those of us in the crowd started swearing: MARCHING TO HEAVEN IS A PILE OF SHIT! MARCHING TO HEAVEN IS A MOUNTAIN OF SHIT! And the crowd took this up. There were two or three women who forgot that this was only a simulation of what our female ancestors used to do as a last resort when they had reached a point where they could no longer take shit from a despot; they urinated and farted loudly. Maybe need or fear overcame them, or both. (250)

The performance thus resorts to the abusive, the bodily, and the scatological. The show put by the women of Aburiria does not merely challenge the authority of the Ruler, the state. More importantly, it upholds a possibility for a better future—perhaps a future without the despotic Ruler—by exploring the regenerative aspects of the abusive, the bodily and the scatological. In *Rabelais and His World*, Mikhail Bakhtin argues that abuse or the language of the market contributes "to the creation of the free carnival atmosphere, to the second, droll aspect of the world" because it "is grammatically and semantically isolated from context and is regarded as a complete unit, something like a proverb" (17, 16). Moreover, according to Bakhtin, reference to the lower parts of the body, such as "the genital organs, the belly, and the buttocks," is a characteristic feature of "grotesque realism" in which

To degrade also means to concern oneself with the lower stratum of the body, the life of the belly and the reproductive organs; it therefore relates to acts of defecation and copulation, conception, pregnancy, and birth. Degradation digs a bodily grave for a new birth; it has not only a destructive, negative aspect, but also a regenerating one. To degrade an object does not imply merely hurling it into the void of nonexistence, into absolute destruction, but to hurl it down to the reproductive lower stratum, the zone in which conception and a new birth take place. Grotesque realism knows no other lower level; it is the fruitful earth and the womb. It is always conceiving. (21)

Collective abuse, exposure of derriere, urination and expulsion of intestinal gas in public are all the more subversive when they are done by women, whom patriarchy deems fit for being a seat of shy civility. Hence the performance put up by the women of Aburiria is a performance of carnivalesque topsy-turvydom. Thus, like tricksters, Nyawira and her colleagues “challenge the status quo and disrupt perceived boundaries. Whether foolishly, arrogantly, or bravely, [they] face the monstrous [Ruler], transforming the chaotic to create new worlds...” (Smith 2). At the same time, the abusive and the scatological seem to call for a collective metaphorical defecation through which Aburiria can get rid of the Ruler and his doomed projects, and thereby, procure hope for a new Aburiria.

In conclusion, it must be said that in Ngugi’s *Wizard of the Crow*, Kamiti and Nyawira adopt several strategies of resistance. In this article, I have tried to point out a few of them. The subversive gestures are interesting because of the diversity of their sources ranging from trickster myths, to certain aspects of social drama/performance, to the Bakhtinian carnivalesque and grotesque. The ways in which Ngugi dramatises the power struggle between the oppressive nation-state and the oppressed people of a nation in *Wizard of the Crow*, urge us to regard the novel as a milestone in Ngugi’s prolonged struggle against the oppressive nation-state(s).

## Notes

1. In “*Matigari: An African Novel as Oral Narrative Performance*,” Odun Balogun shows how *Matigari* is a hybrid of the European/written and the African/oral.
2. In an interview concerning *Wizard of the Crow*, “Ngugi says he is very influenced by the ‘trickster’ tradition” (“Ngugi wa Thiong’o Interviewed”).
3. As Bim Mason maintains, “The origins of the artist and the entertainer ultimately have the same root in the figure of the shaman,” and “Watching some of Grotowski’s work was not unlike the witnessing of the trance state of the shaman” (13).
4. Schechner terms the performance of those Gahuku men as that of “transportation” because they deliberately get temporarily transported to a state during the ritual in order to guide the “uninitiated,” only to end up being unchanged—or changed negligibly (130).
5. In “Arresting Time, Resisting Arrest: Narrative Time and the African Dictator in Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s *Wizard of the Crow*,” Colson argues that the form of the novel stupendously resists the Ruler’s attempt to rob Aburiria off its democracy and pluralism, and that this resistance is evident in “the narrator’s willingness to allow multiple voices to speak alongside his own” (150).

## Works Cited

- Bakhtin, Mikhail Mikhailovich. *Rabelais and His World*. Trans. Hélène Iswolsky. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1984. Print.
- Balogun, F. Odun. “*Matigari: An African Novel as Oral Narrative Performance*.” *Oral Tradition* 10.1 (1995): 129-65. Web. 11 Sept. 2011.

- Colson, Robert L. "Arresting Time, Resisting Arrest: Narrative Time and the African Dictator in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Wizard of the Crow*." *Research in African Literatures* 42.1 (2011): 133-53. *Project Muse*. Web. 9 Mar. 2011.
- Gates, Henry Louis, Jr. *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism*. New York: Oxford UP, 1889. Print.
- Gikandi, Simon. *Ngugi wa Thiong'o*. New York: Cambridge UP, 2002. Print.
- Kirby, Ernest Theodore. "The Shamanic Origins of Popular Entertainments." *Ritual, Play and Performance: Readings in the Social Sciences/Theatre*. Eds. Richard Schechner, and Mady Schuman. New York: The Seabury P, 1976. 139-49. Print.
- Mason, Bim. *Street Theatre and Other Outdoor Performance*. London: Routledge, 1992. Print.
- Maxwell, Ugwanyi 'Dele. "Postcolonialism and the Politics of Resistance: Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Wizard of the Crow*." *The Journal of Pan African Studies* 4.5 (2011): 218-47. Web. 3 Aug. 2012.
- "Ngugi wa Thiong'o Interviewed on His New Novel, *Wizard of the Crow*." *Socialist Worker Online*. Socialist Worker Online, 2006. Web. 1 Aug. 2012.
- Radin, Paul. *The Trickster: A Study in American Indian Mythology*. London: Taylor & Francis, 1956. Print.
- Raghavan, Padma Malini S. "Myths Crafted and Myths Created: The Use of Myth and History in *Matigari*." *Ngugi wa Thiong'o: An Anthology of Recent Criticism*. Ed. Mala Pandurang. New Delhi: Pencraft. 2007. 153-63. Print.
- Schechner, Richard. *Between Theater and Anthropology*. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1985. Print.
- Smith, Jeanne Rosier. *Writing Tricksters: Mythic Gambols in American Ethnic Fiction*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1997. Print.
- Thiong'o, Ngugi wa. "Enactments of Power: The Politics of Performance Space." *TDR (1988-)* 41.3 (1997): 11-30. *JSTOR*. Web. 2 Sept. 2011.
- . *Matigari*. Trans. Wangui wa Goro. Ibadan: Heinemann, 1990. Print.
- . *Penpoints, Gunpoints, and Dreams: Towards a Critical Theory of the Arts and the State in Africa*. Oxford: Claredon, 1998. Print.
- . *Wizard of the Crow*. London: Vintage, 2007. Print.
- . *Writers in Politics: Essays*. London: Heinemann, 1981. Print.

---

*Amitayu Chakraborty is a research scholar at Visva-Bharati university, Santiniketan, pursuing Ph.D. under the supervision of Dr. Saurav Dasthakur. His research is concerned with Ngugi wa Thiong'o's creative writings.*

---