In the very early years of modern East African literature, David Rubadiri made an important comment, which is of immense relevance to the discussion of the characteristic temper of Jared Angira’s poetry and contemporary poetry from the region in general, when he noted its concern with immediate socio-political issues coupled with its lack of sympathy for the romantic vision of Negritude. He remarked: “I think Negritude is very dangerous because its final result is to press down the creative spirit, to tie it sometimes so tight that a work of art becomes meaningless.” Angira and the new generation of East African poets have, undoubtedly, taken to heart this characterization and, on the one hand, have learnt to avoid the snares of the cult of Negritude and, on the other, they have cultivated an acute sense of meaning in their poetry. As a result of this, Angira’s poems are not preoccupied with the ‘cultural’ aspects of his society in the sense in which culture provided a subterfuge for Negritude’s backward-looking interests. This poetry is clearly focused on a living social reality. It presents various facets of this reality, especially the social lapses and the results of these defects on the overall social order. The poet proceeds in his depiction of his society through a sympathetic handling

1 The poems of Angira which I have chosen to designate as his “early poetry” are in the following volumes: *Juices* (1970), *Silent Voices* (1972), *Soft Corals* (1973). After this early phase he published *Cascades* (1979) and *The Years Go By* (1980).

of themes and ideas which expose and comment on such ills of the society as economic disparity, social and political corruption, sexual immorality, deculturalization, and the paradox of political independence. There is no doubt that by this type of focus, the poet strongly believes that he is writing a poetry which, in keeping with the tradition of poetry in his traditional society as the expression of a collective reality, plight, and aspiration, is different from that kind which George Boas had in mind when he stated that “the ideas in poetry are usually stale and often false and no one older than sixteen would find it worth its while to read poetry for what it says.” Obviously, if one ignores what Angira’s poetry says, one would be left with very little in terms of his total achievement.

Angira, more unequivocally than the most radical of other African poets, sees himself, first and foremost, as a Marxist and then as a poet—that is, a believer in Karl Marx’s social and economic ideas who, coincidentally, operates through the medium of poetry. In the Preface to his first volume of poems titled *Juices* (1970) and “dedicated to the common man,” he declared his ideological foothold by identifying his beliefs with those of Marx. In his tussle with the shortcomings of his social environment, the poet seems to regard his only source of inspiration as Marxist dialectics. This is why he claims: “Yet the shadow of Karl Marx seems to give my trembling self some consolation.” But it is elsewhere that he is quoted in a more enthusiastic identification with Karl Marx and Marxism. Here, he declares: “Karl Marx is my teacher; Pablo Neruda my class prefect (when I am in a classroom) and my captain (when I am on the battlefield). Although I am no longer at ease here, I have been cautioned to contain my malady without bitterness.”

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3 Quoted in René Wellek and Austin Warren, *OP. CIT.*, p. 110.