

A CRITIQUE OF NGUGI WA THIONG'O'S THE RIVER BETWEEN

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Abstract: Most novels written by Africans are reflections of their various societies or communities. In *The River Between*, Ngugi, in a similar manner, brings out vividly the life and tradition of his rural Kenyan society. The novel is set in Central Kenya in pre-independent days, dating as far back as the 1930's when Kenya was under colonial rule. The themes of the novel – a struggle for leadership and the influence of European culture and religion on the African – are very realistically delineated. The novel, one may say, could be set in any other African country; for the incidents of power struggle, cultural and religious clashes are common characteristics of the coming of Europeans to Africa.

The main reason for choosing to critique Ngugi's work for study is to critically look at it, analyze and assess its values and contribution to the world of literature. Writers and critics of African writing hold different views as to what African Literature really is. It is for this reason that most African writers strive to find suitable definitions for the terms "African Literature".

One renowned Nigerian novelist, Cyprian Ekwensi, for instance, holds the view that:

"African Literature is literature based on African characters and psychology. This means that the main theme may be anthropological, traditional or modern, but the traits, temperaments, and reactions of the characters will be peculiarly African due to influence by tribe, culture and history".

This definition, as rightly put by Ekwensi, is his own definition. This means other writers may hold their own definitions. The researcher, however, holds the opinion Ekwensi's definition is quite adequate for his purpose of critiquing Ngugi's novel, *The River Between*.

The researcher's treatment of this novel is strictly research based. He has therefore, tried to cover topics of interest with the hope that will help both teachers and students to appreciate and be interested in teaching and learning literature and for that matter, African Literature. Areas covered in this research include: i. The background of the author ii. The general background of the novel. iii. The African novel and themes. iv. The plot and setting of the novel. v. The themes and their relevance to the reader. vi. Characterization (only key characters). vii. Literary techniques and how they help to reveal the author's artistic expression.

The researcher concluded the work by offering useful suggestions and a methodology to aid students and teachers respectfully in teaching and learning literature, especially in secondary school forms one and two.

Keywords: traditional, pre-independence, characteristics, literature, psychological, anthropological, temperaments.

1. THE AFRICAN NOVEL AND THEMES

In treating this chapter, the researcher feels that it is necessary to try to have some working definition of what African Literature is. It is generally difficult to confine the subject Literature to any rigid definition because it aims at providing a living account of the world in the circumstance and conditions of its time. By this definition, literature is an integral part of a people's culture and life. It is an art that deals with the use of words artistically. It develops from the oral stage (stories, songs, folktales, dirges and so on) to the written stage so that in this way literature is a true reflection of life. If literature is then a general reflection of a people's culture, then African Literature may be defined as:

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“Any work or art in which an African setting is authentically handled or to which experiences which originate from Africa are integral.”

This definition was agreed upon at a seminar of African Literature and the Universities, in Freetown, Sierra Leone, in 1963.

One significant achievement African Literature had during the last thirty-five (35) years has been the production of a large body of what has been termed 'African Literature'. It is a term which though has proved difficult to define adequately without falling into all kinds of pitfalls, is considered to be the literary creativity of writers who are essentially African and who have lived with and perhaps still live with that may be called African experience in its broadest perspective.

With regards to the above definition and explanation of what African Literature is, one can rightly put it that the African Novel is a story about Africans and their culture. The emergence of the African Novel came as a result of experiences of the African grappling with the totality of his environment, which has been shaped by certain distinctive cultural, political and social factors, such as slavery, colonialism and at present neo-colonialism and post-independence disillusionment.

In treating the African Novel, one can conveniently categorize it in the following ways:

1. The group that writes on the culture of the African before they came into direct contact with the Whiteman. These writers address themselves to the pre-colonial era and their major aim is to show the world that Africans did have a culture it could boast of. Things Fall Apart. Chinua Achebe's novel, provides a vivid picture of traditional African life-religious rites, recreational and economic activities – with a perfusion of African proverbs fall within this group. Camara Laye's The African Child, which is a good portrayal of African life as beautiful, peaceful and harmonious, also comes under this group.

i. A second group of the African writers concerns itself with the fatal conflict between Africans and Europeans. They show the subsequent loss of image and cultural values of the African. This theme seems a dominant and favorite one among African writers of the 1930s. Writers such as T.M. Aluko in his novel One Man One Matchet, Mango Beti, in Poor Christ of Bomba, Achebe, in Things Fall Apart and Ngugi, in The River Between, all illustrate the theme of conflict of culture in their respective communities.

ii. The Post-Independence era is also quite an exciting period during which time many African states had succeeded in throwing off board and direct manifestation of colonial domination. This is also the period when the colonial masters gave way to Africans to manage the affairs of their own nation.

This period, however, is ironically one of neocolonialism and it has witnessed the frustration of the people's hopes and aspirations of independence. Events during this period clearly showed that in the fight for independence the African has only succeeded in throwing off the white yoke for a black one. The few educated elite known as the bourgeois or petty-bourgeois class who were leaders in the anti-colonial struggle became traitors to their people's cause and sacrificed Africa on the altar of their own middle class comfort. Writers notable of this period are Ayi Kwei Armah in his novel, The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born. Chinua Achebe in his A Man of the People. Amu Djolette in his Money Galore, T.M. Aluko in his Chief the Honorable Minister and Ngugi Wa Thiong'o in his Petals of Blood.

A critical examination of the past thirty-five (35) years will reveal a dominant pre-occupation of the African writer with the political, social, economic and cultural factors of the pre-colonial era. It should however, be noted that some African writers are still occupied with the evils of the Whiteman's domination and the struggle of the people to overthrow this domination. These stages are important landmarks on the historical map of African.

Some readers and critics are of the opinion that the works of African writers are mere propaganda against Western culture and rule. For any student of African Literature, such criticisms pose several pertinent questions such as:

- i. Do these works of African writers contain no artistic features?
- ii. Do the writers relegate all artistic features to the background?

iii. Do they dispense with them completely and thus produce mere materials of propaganda in the form of sociological and political works?

It is with these questions in mind that one examines Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 'The River Between.

2. THE BACKGROUND OF THE AUTHOR

The background of an author has much influence on the material he chooses to write on. Several African authors choose their material from their immediate environment. It is therefore necessary to know the background of an author so as to be able to understand what the author has in stock for his readers.

Ama Ata Aidoo, a prominent Ghanaian dramatist, writing in A Readers Guide To African Literature edited by H. Zell and Silver, has the following for readers of African writing:

“If you are writing from a certain background, it’s only the
people from that background who can tell the world
whether this is good or bad.”

Ngugi was born in a village call Limuru on the 5th of January 1978 in Kenya. He is Gikuyu by tribe. He was christened James Ngugi, until March 1970 when he changed to his original traditional Gikuyu name Ngugi Wa Thiong’o. Ngugi began his elementary education in 1947 at Gukuyu Karun’a School, Kamundura, Limuru and in 1954 entered Alliance High School, Gikugu. He proceeded to persue a first degree course in English Literature in Makerere University Collage in Kampale, Uganda from 1959 to 1964. He later left for Leeds University in the United Kingdom to persue a graduate-work in 1964. Ngugi was later appointed lecturer in the Department of English at the University College of Nairobi, Kenya, in 1968. He resigned his lectureship in 1969 in protest against government interference with Academic Freedom in the University. After his resignation, Ngugi left for overseas again, but this time Northwestern University, U.S.A.; where he taught, studied and worked at writing his fourth novel Petals of Blood. In 1970, he returned to Nairobi as a lecturer in the Department of Literature in the University of Nairobi. He was appointed Acting Head of the Literature Department of the University of Nairobi. On December, 31st 1977, Ngugi was placed in detention by the Kenya police, but was released on December 12th 1978.

His Works:

Ngugi comes from a complex society. He comes from mixed racial community, made up of Europeans, Asians and Africans.

Thus, the geographical and racial situation pose a problem to the East African writer, who has to be very objective in writing about any of the existing people in the country. In an interview with Abdullah in African Writers Talking, Ngugi says:

“Now the problem with the African writer in Kenya is surely
one of being able to stand a little bit detached; and see
the problem, the human relationship in its proper perspective.”

What Ngugi suggested here is very fair minded since there is the likelihood that one can present false facts when writing about or against an opponent. Writers such as Peter Abrahams, Dennis Brutus and Alex La Guma, all South African writers, face such problems critically and write about them in a clinically detached manner. Any author is likely to be branded as prejudiced if he is not perceived to be very objective in his judgment. Ngugi is fully aware of these problems and his novels reflect his objective. He spares neither the white man nor his fellow black man in any situation.

Like every African writer, Ngugi collects his material from his background. The River Between which the study focus on was published in 1965 under its original tittle The Black Messiah. In this novel, Ngugi explores the clash between the Gikuyu’s and the missionaries in the 1930s. He exploits the political situation which existed before and after independence in Kenya and uses that as material for two of his novels. His first novel to be published in 1964 was Weep Not Child which explores the situation during the Mau Mau wars. He goes further to lead his readers into the political

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scene in Kenya after the Mau Mau wars into the struggle for independence, the state of emergency and the time of attaining independence. These form the main subject matter of his third novel *A Grain of Wheat*, published in 1967.

Ngugi not only focused his attention on fiction alone, but involved himself actively in play writing. His first play, *The Black Hermit* was published in 1962, followed by his second play, *This Time Tomorrow*, published in 1970.

He also wrote other plays such as *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*, *Ngaahika Ndeenda*, translated in English as *I Will Marry When I Choose*, which was banned and responsible for landing Ngugi in jail, and *Caithaani Mutharaba – Ini* all published in 1976 and 1980 respectively. His books *Homecoming* and *Petals of Blood* were also published in 1972 and 1977 respectively.

Despite the fact that Ngugi owes much to his background for his choice of material, he confesses that other writers had much influence on him. The group of writers that influenced him greatly are R.L. Stevenson, D.H. Lawrence and Joseph Conrad. In an interview with Dennis Duerden, Ngugi agrees that it was from D.H. Lawrence:

“He learned to enter ‘into the soul of the people and not the people but even of the land, of the country side of things like plants, of the atmosphere.”

He even goes further to say:

“When I am reading D.H. Lawrence, I feel the spirituality of things very near to me as if I am touching the very spirit of things.”

Ngugi also acknowledges Joseph Conrad’s influence by saying that he was impressed with his (Conrad’s) style.

He says this about Conrad:

“He questions things, re-questions things like action, the morality of action for instance... Reading Conrad one feels struck by man’s capacity for bearing suffering, but much more than this he questions what I call the morality of action’ what is ‘Success’ for instance? What we normally call success? What is ‘action’? is failure to make a decision, a moral action or not? so you find that some characters in Conrad fail to do something, but their failures to do something has impressed me a lot, because of Conrad I have felt, I have come into contact with another whose question to me is much more important than the answer which he gives.”

Ngugi’s special interest however lies more with Joseph Conrad. One tends to agree with Ama

Ata Aidoo’s concession that one would understand a writer’s work better if one comes from that background. A foreigner, be he from the Congo or Britain needs to have a brief background information of the society from which a writer comes before he can understand, criticize and judge his work appropriately.

3. A GENERAL BACKGROUND OF THE NOVEL

The River Between is set in Kenya. The narrative is based on the Gikuyu society in the early 1930s. That is around the period when colonialism had become deeply rooted in Kenya, the Gikuyu society on which this novel is based was in the region of the ridges in Kenya known as Kamemo and Makuyu. There was a split between these two ridges because of religious differences. While Makuyu was a stronghold of Christianity, Kamemo was a home of traditional cultural values, famous for its faithfulness to African Traditional Religion, now given the convenient name of Africa in Ghana.

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A careful study into the social life of the people in *The River Between* reveals that the people live in compact villages. Each family occupies a large compound scattered with several huts of the man and his wives and children. The man's hut which is the largest in the compound is referred to as a "Thingira". Gikuyu society hold polygamy in high esteem and inheritance in patrilineal system as with the case of most African societies.

Because of the importance attached to livestock in Gikuyu society, cattle is given as bride price. Gikuyu society practices circumcision for boys and clitoridectomy for girls as a sign of manhood and womanhood respectively. It is this practice which brings about the clash between the Gikuyu and the Christian missionaries in Kenya and it is in this that the theme of the novel is derived.

In Gikuyu society men are held in high esteem as is prevalent in most African societies. A man's wealth depends, therefore, upon the number of children, especially the number of sons, he has; the size of his compound, farm and livestock and the number of titles he has taken. The Gikuyu cling to certain customs and traditions which form the bedrock of their belief system. The Gikuyus attach much significance to circumcision. It is performed when boys and girls are about to enter adulthood. Many rituals accompany this all important ceremony. On the banks of the Honia River which separates the two ridges, the candidates for circumcision are initiated into the ways of the tribe. After circumcision, they emerge fully adult members of the tribe.

The protagonist in *The River Between*, Muthoni, a Christian ran away from Mukuyu to Kameno to be circumcised because she believed that to be a woman she must be fully initiated into the ways of the tribe. She did not see why circumcision could prevent her from being a Christian once the father and mother had done it and they were still Christians.

That is why she asks her sisters:

“Why! Are we fools? She shook Nyambura. Father and Mother are circumcised. Are they not Christians? Circumcision did not prevent them from being Christians. I too have embraced the white man's faith. However, I know it is beautiful, oh so beautiful, to be initiated into womanhood.”

The unfortunate death of Muthoni after her circumcision led to the clash of the Gikuyus and the missionaries which marked the beginning of the political movement in Kenya and Gikuyu independence schools.

In Gikuyu land the people of Makuyu fully embraced Christianity and this brought about the split between them. It is upon this question of circumcision that Ngugi tries to portray the influence of Western culture on the African culture by basing his novel in the ridges of rural Kenya. The novel would not have had the effect as it has now, if the story had been set in Nairobi; since people in the rural areas are much more conscious of their customs and traditions than those living in urban areas. Majority of urbanized Africans through western contact tend to abandon their tribal ways and customs. Thus it can be seen without doubt that the setting of the novel in the ridges and the choice of a people whose very lives are interwoven with their immediate surroundings and customs make *The River Between* a novel which truly reflects the Kenya struggle towards the establishment of Gikuyu independent schools which eventually led to the beginning of the political struggle in Kenya.

4. THE PLOT AND SETTING OF THE NOVEL

The Plot:

The novel, when critically studied, has a very simple structure dependent upon Gikuyu creation myth and legend and image patterns which Centre around the theme of culture clash and struggle for leadership in the novel. The first paragraph of the novel is a microcosm of the structure of the novel:

The two ridges lay side by side, one was Kameno, the other was Makuyu. Between them was a valley. It was the valley of life.

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behind Kameno and Makuyu were many more valleys and ridges lying without any discernible plan. They were like many sleeping lions which never woke. They just slept, the big deep sleep of their creator.

The description of geographical features is simply to give the reader an insight of how peaceful Kenya and for that matter, Gikuyu land was before the coming of the Europeans.

A struggle for leadership existed between the two ridges, Kameno and Makuyu. The people of these two ridges were of the same origin. Coupled with the rivalry between the two ridges for leadership was the arrival of the Whiteman who had come to settle among the people and to bring missionary work and later to colonize them. Some of the Gikuyus became converts to the new faith, Christianity and made Makuyu their stronghold, while those who opted to remain with their native culture kept Kamene as their point.

The novel is opened with two young shepherds fighting in the fields. One of them was from Kameno and the other from Makuyu. They are separated by a fellow shepherd, Waiyaki the protagonist, who reminds them of the oath they had taken to be comrades;

“Please stop this, Kamau, Didn’t we swear
that we of the hills were comrades?”

Soon afterwards, Waiyaki has undergone his second birth and his father, Chege, took him to the sacred grove where he revealed to him the prophecy of the great Gikuyu prophet, Mugo wa Kibiro, about the promise of a saviour:

“Salvation shall come from the hills. From the blood that flows
in me, I say from the same tree, a son shall rise. And his duty
shall be to lead and save the people!”

Chege later sent Waiyaki to Siriana Mission School to be educated by the missionaries. But he is warned not to abandon the ways of the tribe. This became the crucial element to the fulfillment of the prophecy:

Arise. Heed the prophecy. Go to the mission place, Learn all
the wisdom and all the secrets of the whiteman. But do not
follow his vices. Be true to your people and the ancient rites.

Waiyaki visited home during one of the school holidays to join his colleagues – boys and girls – to be circumcised. Mathoni, daughter of Joshua, the pastor of the church in Makuyu ran away from her Christian home to Kameno to be circumcised too. She dies in the process. The rivalry between Christian converts and traditionist was intensified and as a result, all who were noted to still adhere to the tribal customs were expelled from Siriana school.

With the help of Waiyaki as teacher, mushroom schools sprung up in the land for the education and development of the people of the ridges. This marked the beginning of Gikuyu independent schools. While Waiyaki was earnestly working towards the education of the ridges, Kabonyi and a few others who had also denounced the new faith returned to the ridges to form the Kiama, for the protection and upkeep of the purity of their culture.

Waiyaki rose to become a man of fame and gained himself praises from the people. Ngugi describes his fame as that which spread like bush fire:

So his fame grew from ridge up to ridge
and spread like fire in a dry bush.

However, Kabonyi, who is the only one who also knew of the ancient prophecy of a saviour, observed the fame of Waiyaki and felt if something was not done then he would be the loser. He therefore, antagonized Waiyaki, and as Ngugi puts it:

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A young man who rises to leadership is always a target of jealousy for his equals, for those elders than himself and for those who think they could have been better leaders.

The protagonist, Waiyaki, was so engrossed in his quest for education of the ridges that he neglected the immediate problems his people faced. He joined the Kiama only to withdraw soon afterwards, little did he know that his withdrawal from the Kiama would give his antagonists-Kabonyi and Kamau, his son, an apprehend to outwit him. Kamau was appointed secretary in place of Waiyaki to the Kiama. Waiyaki fell in love with Joshua's elder daughter, Nyambura, despite all the resistance from his people.

Instead, he made more excursions to Makuyu and to Joshua's church. Nyamebura finally agreed to marry him after revolting against his father's rigid religious oppression of her. At the meeting of the elders and people of the ridges, Waiyaki and Nyambura were both condemned to stand trial before the Kiama where Kabonyi, the antagonist, knew too obviously that he would have an advantage over Waiyaki, his rival. Waiyaki was condemned by the council of elders as a traitor and he therefore leaves the ridges with his loved one, Nyambura, to the city.

The Setting:

The novel is set in Kenya, the narrative is based on the Gikuyu society of central Kenya in the early 1930s. This was the period when the whiteman came to Kenya with colonialism and Christianity. It was also a period characterized by the question of land ownership which was considered a very vital legacy of the Gikuyu. The whiteman had come to snatch the land away from the Gikuyu. This era was also a time when taxation and formal education were introduced by the Europeans in that part of Kenya. Gikuyu customs and traditions were strictly adhered to at this time. This adherence was to enable them protect and safeguard the land as well as fighting out colonialism.

The geographical features mentioned in the first chapter is simply to lay bare the situation at the ridges before the sudden intrusion of the Whiteman.

5. THE THEMES OF THE NOVEL

In studying Ngugi's, *The River Between*. One would notice that two major themes are protected in the novel.

The first theme deals with the problems the protagonist faces in defending his position as leader against reactionary forces within the tribe. That is to say there is a struggle for leadership. The second theme projects the influence of European culture and religion over African culture. That is, the theme of social and religious clashes.

Waiyaki, the protagonist in the novel is the teacher in Kameno and Makuyu. He faces jealousy within the tribe. He is charged by Chege, his father, an ealder in the tribe to fulfill an ancient prophecy by Mugo, and old Gikuyu prophet:

Salvation shall come from the hills. From the blood, that
flows in me, I say from the same tree a son shall rise. And
his duty shall be to lead and save the people.

It is upon this prophecy that Waiyaki is sent to school by his father. This is due to the fact that Chege, his father, believes that as the last of the line of the ancient prophet, Waiyaki must lead his people to fulfill that ancient prophecy.

Chege is a man of foresight. He sees that before Waiyaki can successfully lead and redeem the Gikuyu from the bondage of the whiteman, he must have knowledge of the whiteman's secrets so that he can face him squarely. Waiyaki is therefore sent to the mission school at Siriana to learn the wisdom of the whiteman. Chege counsels him before he leaves for school.

Arise. Heed the prophecy. Go to the mission place. Learn all
the wisdom and all the secrets of the whiteman. But do not
follow his vices. Be true to your people and the ancient rites.

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One immediately sees the fears that Chege entertains in sending his son to the mission school. His father is that Waiyaki, would be corrupted once he goes to the mission school. Waiyaki as we learn, later rises to be the leader of a group of teachers who broke away from the mission school to establish native schools, so that they will preserve the tribal culture as well as teach their children the Whiteman's wisdom and secrets. The leadership of Waiyaki is attained by dint of hardwork. However, his peers as well as some elders of the tribe envied him, as Ngugi puts it:

A young man who rises to leadership is

always a target of jealousy for his equals,
for those older than himself and for those
who think they could have been better leaders.

This rivalry manifests itself in various ways in the novel. Waiyaki is caught between two rival factions. The overbearing zealotry of Joshua who leads the Christian group in Makuyu and the hatred and jealousy of Kabonyi who seeks to wrestle the leadership from him. Kabonyi, like Waiyaki, is Christian oriented but also breaks away from the church because it victimizes those who prostituted with the two religions – Christianity and traditional. Kabonyi, as the member of the school's governing committee makes sure that he opposes, Waiyaki's suggestions for improvement in the education of the children. On every possible occasion. As an elder in the tribe and also as one who feels he can be a better leader than Waiyaki, he dislikes the rate at which Waiyaki's popularity is rising. He accuses Waiyaki on several occasions of associating himself with Joshua and the whiteman at Siriana mission. This accusation is done openly at a meeting:

But since you rose into the position in which you are, you have
deliberately worked against the tribe. How many times have you
been in Joshua's church? How many? No, wait, you have also
been to Siriana. How many times? We know of two.
You never told anybody that you were going there. Do you
expect us to believe that you went to get teachers? Do you?
you'll have to tell us any secrets dealings between you, Joshua
and Siriana. Will you sell us to the whiteman?

The resentment Kabonyi has for Waiyaki is clearly shown in the above speech. Now suspicious sets in and the people are split into two groups – those who still hold Waiyaki innocent of the accusation and those who support Kabonyi as speaking the truth about Waiyaki.

There is also the need to consider the impact of European civilization on the African culture. Following the abolition of the slave trade, concern for African flowed from several corners in Europe. Africa and the Victorians describes this in the following words:

Concern for African flowed from some of the most vivid
experience of Victorian religion and Political life. And for this
reason, the chief African question for the Victorians were ones
of atonement and duty. The claim had to be struck from the
African's neck. He must be converted. He would be civilized.
He should be traded with...

Though these ideas may seem noble, their implementation is what strikes us. The implementation of these ideas of conversion civilization and trade, were not easy and thus resulted in conflicts in many areas in Africa. It was upon this question of converting, civilizing and trading with the African that the

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Europeans opened missions and later schools in Africa. The methods adopted by these first Christians were, however, very harsh and cruel and so the very idea of civilization seemed completely out of the question. Their main aim was to wipe out completely all aspect of African culture, which they thought unchristian. A look at the missionary activities in The River Between gives us a vivid picture of the above point.

As mentioned earlier, Christianity is entrenched in Makuyu. The early Christians as can be seen in the novel are in many cases ostracized from their society because they refuse to take part in any native customs and rituals. It therefore, means that one is totally cut off from his clan if one is a Christian. The converted Christians in Makuyu worship with much favour and do away with anything they think heathen. Within the church itself. The Christians are divided as to which customs to regard as unchristian and which as Christian. This division brings about a conflict.

The question of circumcision, particularly, is a result of the clash between the Christian and Traditionalists. The Christian church preaches circumcision as a very sinful thing which many of the converts disagree with. They know that one can only belong and is a responsible member of the tribe if that fellow is circumcised. Many who hold circumcision and other practices as vital in their lives therefore decide to leave the church. The most notable of them is Kabonyi, the antagonist to Waiyaki. Muthoni, the daughter of Joshua, circumcision complicate things. She is one who feels that Christianity does not satisfy her fully. Like the others she thinks that to have a meaningful existence, she must be initiated into the ways of the tribe. With this in mind she puts the following questions to Nyambura, her sister:

Why! Are we fools? She shook Nyambura. Father and Mother
are circumcised. Are they not Christians? Circumcision did not
prevent them from being Christians. I too have embraced the
Whiteman's faith. However, I know it is beautiful, oh, so beautiful
to be initiated into womanhood. You learn the ways of the tribe.
Yes, the Whiteman's God does not quite satisfy me. I want, I need
Something more.

As fate would have it, Muthoni dies after her circumcision, but on her death-bed she does not give up but instead tells her sister:

I am still a Christian, see a Christian in the tribe.

Although Muthoni is disowned and ostracized from the Christian community by her over-zealous Christian father, she is not deterred at all in any way and goes ahead to participate in the circumcision rites. In the end she is seen as martyr in the eyes of both the Christians who sympathized with her cause, and the traditionalists as well. This action of Muthoni is a clear indication that any religion that seeks to divorce, totally the people from their traditional beliefs and practices is doomed to failure.

One would be right to say, therefore, that those and other incidents throughout Africa, which brought tribal warfare and civil strife caused the generation of modern missionaries to adopt gradual methods in eradicating customs which are unchristian. It is simply ignorance on the part of the missionaries, of these customs which make them brand everything African heathen and uncivilized. No doubt, churches of recent times have come to accept some African customs and ways of worship like dancing and clapping of hands and drumming, probably to get the African more involved in Christian worship.

Another area where the Whiteman met with strong opposition was in the field of politics. As soon as they forcefully made the natives to accept them on the land. They made their other intentions clear. They not only came to Africa to convert, "civilize" and trade with the natives but also to govern them. In the Southern and Eastern part of the continent, in particular, the whiteman seized most of the fertile lands from the rightful owners. It is probably because of these injustices that the Gikuyu hoped that a Messiah would come to save them from this suppression and to restore their lands to them. Waiyaki, the expected Messiah, did not tackle the problem of suppression the way the people wanted it. Instead of leading the people to fight out the Whiteman and his ways, he rather wanted to unit them. There is thus no doubt that this enemies

led by Kabonyi, caused this opportunity and instigated the people to reject him and call him a traitor. He therefore fled from the ridges in order to avoid persecution by his enemies who triumph over him.

Besides these two major themes, one also sees the themes of love and betrayal echoed in the novel. The theme of love, for instance, is reflected in the love affair between Waiyaki and Nyambura, Joshua's daughter. It is this intense love for Nyambura that makes him visit Joshua's church which Kabonyi, his antagonists use to outwit him. It is also this love for Nyambura that Kamua, son of Kabonyi, who also loves her, helps his father to overcome Waiyaki, because he knows that Waiyaki has had a better chance of the girl over him. Waiyaki is therefore condemned by the Kiama as a traitor in the tribe which eventually led to his escape to the city with his loved one. The intense love is what also led Nyambura to desert his father and the Christian church to marry Waiyaki. The also leading to her rejection by her father.

The other minor theme is that of betrayal of the tradition or tribal ways by Waiyaki. The theme is hinted at when Waiyaki, knowing very well that the tribe abhors contact with the Christian, still want ahead to visit Joshua's church. The tribal customs and practices forbid the coming into contact with the uncircumcised. But we see that Waiyaki goes in to love Nyambura who is uncircumcised and is unclean by tribal standards. The tribal ways also forbid any one touching a dying person, but Waiyaki, here again, carried Muthoni to the hospital where she died.

All these lapses gave Kabonyi and his followers the opportunity of gaining the better part of the case against Waiyaki. The Gikuyu are highly disappointed that their teacher has become a traitor of the tribes, thus giving Kabonyi a big opportunity of becoming the saviour.

6. CHARACTERIZATION

Ngami Wa Thieng'o's mastery of the art of the novel can also be seen in his delineation of characters can be seen in Waiyaki who is superior to his tribesman in intelligence. He understands the problem posed by the Whiteman in their midst mere than anyone else. This is because of his personal contact with the Whiteman at the mission school. He realizes that this people can only come to terms with the Whiteman if they acquire the Whiteman's education which they can use as a weapon to fight him. Waiyaki, therefore advocates the establishment of more schools all over the ridges to give formal education to the people.

Waiyaki can be seen as a charismatic leader. The enthusiasms with which his followers swarm round him and sing his praises make him a jealous target for his opponents. The people call him a savior and see in him the messiah who has been sent to redeem from the suppression of the Whiteman. They expect him to lead them with arms to drive away the Whiteman, but he insists that "Education" and "Unity" are the only necessary weapons they can use to achieve their aim. Like the Israelites who expected Christ to lead them to fight the Romans and save themselves from Roman oppression, but rejected him when he preached "Love" and "Peace", so also the Gikuyu reject Waiyaki for preaching Unity and the Whiteman's Education. Waiyaki's enemies who believe in action ask whether the Whiteman's education can claim their land back to them.

Waiyaki is kind and considerate. He takes Muthoni to Sariana mission hospital when she is dying, even though it is a taboo to touch a dying woman. This aspect of his character endears him to the people because as a teacher one needs to have such qualities. He fights an emotional conflicts which is both on the individual and social level. As a teacher, he epitomizes all the stands for the purity of the tribe. He is, however, torn between his level for his tribe and his love for Nyambura, the elder daughter of Joshua. Association with a Christian or an uncircumcised woman is held in scorn as a betrayal of the tribe. Waiyaki is warned at a meeting of elders about the oath he took and he replies them, saying:

"Nyambura has nothing to do with this. If I love her.

If you have nothing else to tell me, I will go".

"Remember the oath!

The oath!

You took it.

It did not forbid me to love people".

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Waikaki cannot help loving Nyambura even though he knows it will lead to disaster when this association is known. He stands in danger of losing his position and he is asked to choose between Nyambura and his position.

Another conflict that Waiyaki faces on the social level is his passionate desire to keep tribal values intact and his love for European Education. There is a definite clash between the two cultures. He believes fervently that formal education is the key to the salvation of his people, but others fear that education will rather corrupt the youth. Waiyaki teaches the children the Whiteman's wisdom, but at the same time instills tribal pride in them. Kabonyi and his supporters accuse Waiyaki of associating himself with the whiteman's ways and at a meeting pressurizes him to make his intentions clear. To this Waiyaki gives them the following reply:

I too am concerned with the purity of the tribe. I am also
concerned with the growth and development of the ridges.
we cannot do this through hatred. We must be united.
christians and non-christians alike. Makuyu and Kamenno.
Salvation of the hills lies in our hands.

Waiyaki, therefore, stands in the position of a mediator, caught between two factors, Joshua's zealotry and Kabonyi's hatred and jealousy. Waiyaki ends up a rejected figure in the tribe. He breaks the oath and is condemned by the Kiama because of his association with Nyambura.

Waiyaki, the protagonist, can best be considered a man who ardently desires the welfare of his people but he chooses the wrong method to effect the progress that he envisages at least in the eyes of his people.

Nevertheless, his tragedy is not solely the cause of antagonistic forces, but partly his own weakness, even though at the end of the novel we sympathize with him and blame his own fall on such "reactionary" forces. His tragedy was therefore be summed up as a "commanding personality who, despite his good intentions is blinded by his obsessions". He fails to see his people's hope and aspirations so as to bring his aspirations in line with them. His enemy exploits his short comings.

KABONYI:

Another important character worthy of study is Kabonyi, the chief antagonist of Waiyaki, the protagonist, in the novel. It will be of great interest to know what Kabonyi Possesses to make him stand out as the leader of the opposition group.

Kabonyi is the only elderly man, apart from Chege, who knows about the prophesy of a savior by Muge wa Kibire. Because of this he fears that Kaiyaki may be the one sent to redeem the Gikuyu, instead of his son, Kamau – hence his intense hatred for Waiyaki. The author, thus, describes Kabonyi as a destructive element.

Kabonyi was a destructive element. And he hated
Waiyaki intensely and identified this hatred with
the wrath of the tribe against impurity and betrayal.

He is not wealthy and holds no tittle. He is a man of substance because of his passionate desire to uphold all tribal values which stand the danger of being wiped out by the alien culture. Kabonyi is at first a staunch Christian, but breaks away from the church because of the questions of circumcision which the church preached against. His ambition is based on personal glory. Kabonyi wants to wrestle the leadership from Waiyaki. He therefore adopts several devious ways to outdo his opponent. He is a powerful orator and in the end he is able to win the people to his side.

Perhaps, one will say that Ngugi effectively depicts Kabonyi as jealous, ambitious and a powerful orator, so as to present a formidable rival to the protagonist. Kabonyi is a politician well-endowed with the oral traditions of the tribe. Ngugi says of him:

He could speak in proverbs and riddles and nothing
could appeal more to the elders, who still appreciated
a subtle proverb and witty riddles.

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His gift of oratory makes him know his audience very well, carefully assesses his opponents nature and lays a trap to ensnare him.

JOSHUA:

The part played by the converts to Christianity in Gikuyu society can not be overlooked. A mention of the man who leads to Christians and his influence over his flock is therefore very vital in his study.

Joshua is also a traditionalist from Makuyu who is converted to Christianity together with Kabonyi. With the coming of the Whiteman to Gikuyu land he becomes a biggetted religious fanatic, a powerful preacher and the leader of the converts at Makuyu. He owns away from the hills as a young man and goes with the white missionary to the newly established mission center at Siriana. He returns years later full of the power and knowledge of the Whiteman and establishes the church Makuyu. He is over-zealous and as Ngugi puts it:

.... preached with vehemence and fury
that frightened even his own listeners.

Few people can resist his voice and he preached against circumcision:

"In fact Joshua believed circumcision to be so sinful
that he devoted a prayer to God asking him to forgive
him for marrying a woman who had been circumcised.

Joshua constantly prays to God to punish the people of Kamene like Sodom and Gomorrah in the Christian Bible.

Joshua is proud, and obedience to him, as his wife observes, is an expression of one's faith and belief in his religion. In Joshua, we see the ill effects of the uncritical acceptance of alien cultures and ideologies. His brand of Christianity of "typical of the religion of the Pharisees of ancient Judea". Though well versed in the Bible, he frequently quotes from the Old Testament on the grounds that his concept of Christianity is not one of "Love" and "Mercy" as by Christ, but that of Moses and the Patriarchs which is that of vengeance and justice untempered with mercy.

He is unforgiving, and when his daughter, Muthoni, runs away to be circumcised, he disowns her. He does not even show any sign of emotional upset when the death of his daughter is reported to him. To Joshua she has ceased to exist from the moment she runs away to be his kindred. And this is what Ngugi has to say about him:

What one admired in Joshua was his fidelity. Ever since
he took to the new faith he had remained true to
Livingstone and his God.

He even goes further to curse Naymbura who deserts him and follows Waiyaki, in the words:

.... You will come to an untimely end.

Joshua is so stubborn that his tribesmen thought he is encouraged by the Whiteman to fight against his own customs and traditions. His steadfastness and religious farvour, however, helps to bind the Christian converts together.

MUTHONI:

She is the beautiful and tragic daughter of Joshua. She is brought up in a Christian home. She is young, vivacious and on the thresh held of womanhood. She is an intelligent girl who reasons about things before taking decisions.

Muthoni is therefore able to realize through her intelligence that a religion devoid of a people's culture is meaningless. She, therefore, goes back to the tribe to be circumcised. This can be considered as an attempt to reconcile and bridge the gap between the two cultures.

She unfortunately dies in the process and wins for himself martyrdom. However, on her death bed she tells her sister Nyambura:

I am still a Christian, see a Christian in the tribe.

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Muthoni's death provides Waiyaki with a purpose the need to work for the unity and reconciliation of the ridges. Her sacrifice, ironically, is lost; for her death only widens and intensifies the rift between the two factions. That apart, her death also marks the beginning of the Waiyaki-Nyambura love affairs which eventually leads to Waiyaki's doom.

NYAMBURA:

She is the elder daughter of Joshua. She accepts the Christian religion without question because she fears and obeys her father. The wrath and displeasure of her father scares her away from going in for circumcision. Muthoni's death however, is a good lesson to her:

Muthoni said she had seen Jesus. She had done by going back
to the tribe, by marrying the rituals of the tribe with Christ. And
she had seen Him through suffering. She had become circumcised
and she had become a woman.

Nyambura realizes after this that religion must come to man within his environment:

Day by day she became weary of Joshua's brand of religion... she
could only be saved through Waiyaki, Waiyaki then was her savior,
her black Messiah, the promised one who....into the light.

She remains uncircumcised but rebels against Joshua and married Waiyaki he 'black messiah'.

From the above analysis, one would say without doubt that Ngugi's effective presentation of his characters makes his novel a thriller and a real work of art.

7. LITERARY TECHNIQUES

Since the novel is intended for both African and non-African readers, Ngugi uses English as his medium of expression. He uses very simple and lucid languages in his narrative and dialogue. One would notice that Ngugi makes his characters speak in plain simple English. They don't speak in proverbs. There is hardly any distinction between the language of a village elder, like Chege and that of a young and educated person like Waiyaki or Joshua. For instance, Chege tells his son, Waiyaki about the history of the tribe in simple and lucid language:

That is a blessed and sacred place. There, where Mumbi's feet stood,
grew up that tree. So you see it is Kameno that supported the father,
and the mother of the tribe. From here, Murungu took them and put
the munder Mukuruwe Wa Gathanga in Muranga. There our Father
and Mother had nine daughters who bore more children. The children
spread all over the country, some came to the ridges to keep and guard
the ancient rites....

Ngugi uses symbols, images and biblical language instead of proverbs. The two ridges are couched in the image of 'two lions'. There is an underlying irony here because when one views the ridges from the valley one sees the ridges as antagonistic to each other because of the way in which they seem to stare at each other. Another ironic unity-in-division symbol is the Honia river which means 'cure' and is referred to as the 'soul' of the ridges, giving life to all things in the novel. When separation comes between the two ridges, the church in Makugu draws inspiration from Honia, while the traditional religion is celebrated on its bank. Images such as 'butterflies' are used by Ngugi to symbolize the visual attractiveness of the Whiteman. Thus the old Gikuyu seer, Muge Wa Kibire warns the people:

There shall come a people with cloths like butterflies.

Chege also refers to the Whiteman as butterflies. Yet another major ironic symbol in the novel is Ngugi's use of Christian and Gikuyu myths.

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One cannot go without seeing the close similarity between the myths of Gikuyu and Numbi and that of Adam and Eve. Murungu, the Gikuyu deity assures Kamenno just as God (Yahweh) assures Adam and Eve.

This land I give to you, o man and woman. It
is yours to rule and till you and your posterity.

Muge, just as Isaiah, also prophesies of the coming of a Messiah who will come to save the Gikuyus:

Salvation shall come from the hills. From the blood
* that flows in one me a son shall rise. And his duty
shall be to lead and save the people.

Waiyaki emerges as that saviour.

The parallels between the pure Christian myths and the Gikuyu myths are too opponent to be ignored.

Ngugi extensively quotes passages from the Holy Bible in places where Joshua preaches to his flock:

Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a
son, and you shall call his name Immanuel.

Let not your heart be troubled: Yes believe in God,

believe also in me. In my father's house are many
mansions: If it were not so, I would have told you.

I go to prepare a place for you.

In fact Ngugi also uses this Biblical style in his other novels, more especially in *Weep Not Child*. His simplicity of expression does not arise from too limited a vocabulary. But rather lies in his use of the right word and exactness of expression. There are instances where Ngugi uses images and similes. Such instances are when we are told that Waiyaki's fame 'spread like a fire in a dry bush' and again that to his jealous friend, Kamau, Waiyaki appeared as 'the hawk that always snatched his piece of meat'.

Above all these, Ngugi employs short and terse sentences. Together with the strong narrative style and vivid description of scenes and incidents go to heighten the drama and suspense in the novel. Gikuyu words and phrases are used sparingly in them. This is done in order to add local colour to the narrative. It must also be noted that the meanings of such Gikuyu words are given in the phrase immediately following them. For example, 'Thahu' – evil, 'shambas' – farms, 'trugu' – an uncircumcised person, 'Ni Wega' – I have done my duty.

Ngugi's use of dreams and hallucinations as presentiments of doom in traditional African society is also effectively evoked in the novel.

In view of the above observation, fellow readers will fervently agree with the researcher that Ngugi's effective use of simple and lucid English: short and terse sentences as well as his use of various literary devices capture his readers' interest in the novel. Ngugi is therefore undoubtedly a genius as far as novel writing and the use of literary techniques are concerned.

8. CONCLUSION

Many novels coming out of Africa today are based on the theme of Protest and Conflict. These two themes are the most widely explored in Africa Literature. Many novels protest against political systems such as colonialism, apartheid and the French policy of Assimilation. A study of contemporary African writing reveals that most authors start their writing with the theme of conflict of cultures, namely euro-christian culture and the native African culture which is threatened by the alien one.

The study of Ngugi's *The River Between* reveals that the novel focuses its attention on a traditional African society and the conflicts which arise as a result of the imposition of another culture – Western culture – on that society.

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Ngugi's novel can be classified as a work of Art because of its literary values. The various themes presented in the novel are of universal interest. This is because it deals with the social problems of human beings. Ngugi takes us into the past and we experience the rich culture of the Gikuyu before the interruption of colonialism and euro-christian culture. The events in the novel also help us to look at colonialism objectively.

Ngugi's plot is impressionistic; one is made to feel what is happening through the experience of the protagonist.

One cannot also fail to appreciate the beauty of style in the way Ngugi uses language, symbols and imagery as well as biblical allusions to carry his message across to his readers.

In conclusion, therefore, one could say that Ngugi has succeeded in arousing the consciousness of the effects of the advent of the European in Africa. He has also been able to read the blind acceptance of alien culture, particularly when one considers the divisions between people of the same clan and even within the family as can be seen in Joshua and his two daughters. These things which Ngugi has brought out clearly still occur today in traditional African society where even members of a family may become alienated from one another as a result of religious differences.

9. METHODOLOGY

HOW TO TEACH "THE RIVER BETWEEN" IN SECONDARY SCHOOL FORMS ONE AND TWO:

The main aim in teaching Literature and for that matter fiction, in the lower forms of the secondary school should be to help students enjoy and understand the text so as to cultivate the habit of reading on their own. At this stage the teaching of literary devices such as themes, plot, setting, character study, style or literary techniques as well as other devices should not be emphasized.

STEP 1: In teaching, The River Between in form one and two in the secondary school, the teacher's sole aim should be to assist a student to read the novel with comprehension and enjoyment. To begin, the teacher should first of all give his student a background information of the author, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o. Areas to tackle here should include, the place and time of his birth, his education, his attitude to life, his literary works as well as his aspirations and achievements. This background information will form the basis for the understanding of the novel.

STEP 2: After the background information has been taught, the teacher should next give students a brief introduction of the novel. This will arouse the interest of the student to read the story. In this introduction, the teacher should talk about the place and time when the novel was written as well as the message the author is trying to reveal to his readers. Students should, especially, be made to know that the novel is about a struggle for leadership in a community – Gikuyu- and also about the influence of European culture over African culture. To make this point clear, the teacher may mention some of the things that the Europeans came to Africa, especially to Ghana, to do. The teacher should ask the students to mention some of the things. Some of these things that the white men came to do include, trading, religious conversion and the introduction of formal education and finally to rule and exploit the continent.

STEP 3: When the teacher has finished giving students a gist of what the novel is about, he should encourage the students to read the novel. Ask students to list events in the novel which are similar to events in their various localities. For instance, wrestling and the herding of cattle, initiation ceremonies such as circumcision for boys and clitoridectomy for girls. Apart from these, other traditional religious practices such as the worship of God through the symbol of trees, hills, rivers, groves and rocks, could also be mentioned. To foster easy understanding and also to encourage students to read the novel the teacher may ask the following initial questions:

- i. What is the title of the novel?
- ii. Who is the author or the writer?
- iii. What impression do you get from the title of the novel?

STEP 4 : After the students have read the novel on their own, the teacher should discuss the text with students chapter by chapter making sure that the story is well understood. The teacher should note that if this is done effectively, students will grasp the story with keen interest. The subject matter of each chapter should be discussed thoroughly

STEP 5: For the lessons to be lively and to get his students more involved in the lessons the teacher should use the dramatization method; interesting scenes or episodes in the novel should be acted by students. Chapter seventeen (17)

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which deals with Joshua's preaching and Waiyaki's presence in the church as well as his (Waiyaki's) encounter with Kamau and Nyambura would be worth dramatizing. Chapter eighteen (18) which is about the meeting of Waiyaki and his staff with the parents of his pupils and the outcome of the meeting with Kabonyi, his rival, may also be an episode to dramatize.

STEP 6: To be sure that every student understands and enjoys the novel, the teacher may give them quizzes after every chapter or two. For example, the teacher could ask the following quiz questions on chapter one:

- i. What are the names of the two ridges?
- ii. What is the name of the river mentioned in the passage?
- iii. What is the meaning of the name of the river?
- iv. Who is the great Gikuyu seer mentioned in the text and where was he born?
- v. Who in the text killed a lion by himself?

These questions and many of their type will make the students read the novel with seriousness.

STEP 7: ASSIGNMENT:

The teacher should also give the students assignments which require short answers. This will form a basis for cultivating the habit of answering essay questions. Questions such as the following could be given:

1. Write briefly on what the chapter is about.
2. Describe the events that take place in the chapter.
3. What do you like or dislike in the chapter and why?
4. Which person is spoken of often in the text? List all the things said about him.

The above method is not fool proof method for teaching the novel, but only a suggested model. The individual teacher may devise his own method of teaching the text, taking his students' ability into consideration. I therefore advise the teacher to consult other books for additional material. I am, however, assuring teachers that if the method suggested above is followed very carefully, fruitful results will be yielded and students will enjoy and appreciate literature lessons.

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