

## CHARACTERS, THEMES AND STRUCTURE IN NGUGI WA THIONG'O'S A GRAIN OF WHEAT

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I must state from the outset that Ngugi's *A Grain of Wheat* is the proverbial dirty dish that contains a delicious meal. It is indeed a great novel but it is flawed by countless blindspots. What with crowding a moderately-sized novel with characters too numerous to remember-characters too quickly and violently eliminated to be allowed to develop any meaningful interpersonal relationships with other characters in the novel. Who is so clever a reader of *A Grain of Wheat* that he remembers off-hand what part half of these characters are supposed to play in the novel: Wambui, Githua, Gitogo, Warui, D.O. Robson, Waitherero, Wangu Makeri, Harry Thuku, Mbugua, Rev. Jackson Kigundu, Muniu, Kariuki, Njeri, Gatu, Dr. Brain O'Donoghue, Roger Mason, Mrs. Dickinson, Mr. Rogers, Dr. Lynd, Wangari, Jvambuku. The above reads already like a list of characters from a Russian novel. And what sensitive reader is not irritated by the all too palpably loose structure of the novel, befuzzed even more by its endless and confusing flash-backs-flashbacks that make it almost impossible for the reader to trace any emerging pattern in the novel. Add to all these the most infuriating artistic blunder by Ngugi in the novel -the all too evident lack of narrative distance between the author and his subject matter. Rather too often the author comes out in propria-persona and intrudes with too many a "we" and "us" in purely narrative passages that cannot be attributed to the voice of any character in the novel.

For example, to whose voice but the intrusive author's does one assign the following passage-one of so many similar authorial intrusions:

*The remembered heroes from our village, too... and underneath it all was the chord that followed us from street to street. Somewhere, a woman suggested we go and sing to Mugo, the hermit, at his hut (p. 232)1.*

This is an artistic flaw that flies in the face of T. S. Eliot's dictum that, "the more perfect the artist, the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates."<sup>2</sup> The problem with Ngugi in *A Grain of Wheat* is that he was so closely involved in the Kenya Emergency that, knowing too much and remembering too much, he could not help showing that he suffers from an emotional and psychological impediment which at the early and middle points in his

novel disrupts the form and obscures his meaning. As more seasoned critics might put it, Ngugi could not let the artist in him emerge stronger than the man. The end result is that we come across all too often, passages that are artistically infelicitous in the extreme—passages that contain too many actual and historically accurate dates in Kenya's struggle for independence, plus names of actual historical figures that one still reads about on the pages of current newspapers—all these in a work that claims to belong in the imaginative realm.

But in spite of the apparent formlessness and lack of narrative distance; and in spite of a forest of static and undeveloped characters that are methodically eliminated immediately after being introduced; and in spite of too many flashbacks that confuse the reader and bore him to death; and in spite of the unbelievably larger social awareness given to illiterate peasant characters — characters who seem to have had no formal education but can quote from the Bible and know all the current world events — one cannot lose sight of the fact that an unbroken though thread runs throughout the novel. This narrative thread is centred on Mumbi and what happens to her and her relationship with various important characters in the novel, notably, Gikonyo, Karanja, Mugo, and Kihika. And allied to this are those themes which lend coherence and artistic depth to an apparently formless and directionless novel. I identify these themes as follows:

- i. Mumbi and the theme of love
- ii. the theme of betrayal and of confession
- iii. the theme of violence

"My belief," writes Virginia Woolf (in "Mr. Bennet and Mrs. Brown") is that "men and women write novels because they are lured on to create some character which has thus imposed itself upon them," saying, as it were, to the novelist, "my name is Brown. Catch me if you can".<sup>2</sup> Although modern critics dispute Woolf's claim that the basis of good novel-writing is character-creating and little else, I hazard to suggest that in *A Grain of Wheat* the character of Mumbi actually imposed itself on Ngugi and invited him to catch her if he could. It is the character of Mumbi, above all else, that lends form to an otherwise amorphous novel. She is the centre toward which every important line in the novel points, and what happens to her is what concerns the reader and the author most of the time and what supremely matters. To Ngugi, Mumbi is the ideal beauty, the ideal wife, the ideal woman, the ideal daughter-in-law, the ideal and sympathetic friend, the enchanted princess. But she is all too human. She, in a moment of unexpected happy news about her husband's

release from detention, succumbs in dubious expression of gratitude to Karanja. But the author made sure that her betrayal of her husband was not to rob her of her dignity for, at the very end of the novel she walks out on her husband at the hospital, placing the onus of reconciliation on him who must, "in the future ... reckon with her feelings, her thoughts, her desires" (p. 280).

The centrality of Mumbi's character in the novel is shown at every turn. At the early part of the novel, each time Gikonyo is with Mumbi, she forms the nerve-centre of the group in which he moves for she is the focal personality for the men: Karanja, Kihika, and later on, Mugo. It is observed that these men were gathered at Gikonyo's when Mumbi brought him the panga to be repaired. They were all again gathered at her house when Gikonyo returned the finished work to her. In a novel in which unity and disunity feature so prominently, she is the symbol of unity, the repository of people's confidence, even the confidence of the sly, go-it-alone Mugo.

As I pointed out earlier, the story of Mumbi's relationship with the hero is the one unbroken thread in a novel that harbours so many broken and disjointed narrative threads. That relationship champions both characters to self-awareness and provides for the reader those rare delectable moments that are like emotional anodyne in a novel full of so much violence. When Mumbi visited Gikonyo and they sang together, the emotional thrill of the moment ties them together in a bond of unity that is beautiful and that transcends the immediate moment:

*She felt the workshop, Thabai, earth, heaven, felt their unity. Then suddenly her heart was whipped up, she now rode on strange waves: alone defying the wind and the rain; alone fighting hunger and thirst in the desert alone struggling with strange demons in the forest, bringing glad tidings to her (p.92).*

The same relationship leads charm, inspiration, and excitement to Gikonyo's work and then leaves him at peace with Himself and with the world. When after Mumbi's visit Gikonyo starts work on the panga, "low waves of excitement left his heart in a glow as he chose a piece of wood on which to work ... His hands were firm Gikonyo saw Mumbi's gait, her very gestures, in the feel and movement of the plane. Her voice was in the air as he bent down and traced the shape of the panga on the wood. Her breath gave him power" (p.94).

Mumbi is the enchanted princess whose influence on the characters of the novel produces a catalytic effect. She radiates love, she inspires confidence, she has a hold on all the major characters that could not be attributed to her personal beauty alone. Even her mother-in-law — Ginkoyo's mother—could not bring herself to accuse her of wrong-doing when it was discovered she was carrying Karanja's child. In fact, she takes her part against her son's seemingly unreasonable fits of jealousy. The salutary and soothing effect she produces on the men in contact with her is evident in Gikonyo's admission to Mugo: that when he first made love to Mumbi

*I felt whole, renewed... I had made love to many a woman, but I never had felt like that before... Before, I was nothing. Now, I was a man. During our short period of married life, Mumbi made me feel it was all important... Suddenly I discovered... no, it was as if I had made a conversant with God to be happy, (p. 114).*

It is not surprising, therefore, that Gikonyo confessed the Oath and betrayed the Party just to be near Mumbi—Gikonyo, who had been so strong. Nor is it surprising that he goes to pieces over her unfaithfulness, her betrayal. He told Mugo that once out of detention, he had hoped he could "make something great out of my life with Mumbi... She was my life, all my life." Unfortunately for Gikonyo, after six years in detention, the world had changed for, "she too had changed" (pp. 80 — 81).

But Mumbi is not just Gikonyo's angel. Much of the inter-personal relationships in the novel centre around her. She is the idol of every other main character in the novel. She is also a character with whom the author seems to have fallen in love. To the author, she can do no wrong and care was taken not to place her in a situation that was too degrading or too embarrassing. Even her unfaithfulness to Gikonyo, such as it is, is attenuated by exculpating circumstances. She never gave her heart to Karanja even though he took her body. And, ironically, her unfaithfulness is what she did on behalf of the Gikonyo and for her delicate love for him, out of sheer gratitude for the unexpectedly happy news of his release from detention. She did it for him so that Wangari, Gikonyo's mother, aged and mature, seemed to understand and was very accommodating.

It was for Mumbi that Gikonyo and Karanja ran two races in the novel. It was also for Mumbi's sake that both of them betrayed the Party and confessed the Oath. As ' the narrative voice says:

*When Gikonyo was taken to detention, Karanja knew he would never lei, himself be taken away from Mumbi. He sold the Party and the Oath secrets, the price of remaining near Mumbi. (p. 238).*

And as Karanja ran the second and final race with Gikonyo and others on Unuru day, he- Karanja. reminiscent how he "had always wanted Mumbi to come to him' freely Ana how he was running for her. Had she not given him a second chance? Her note had rescued him from terrible despair" (pp. 238 — 239).

Ngflgi, conscious of the centrality of Mumbi's character in A Grain of Wheat, temporarily frees her from her marriage to Gikonyo, to make the struggle for her hand again, the central issue between Karanja and Gikonyo on Uhuru day. On the surface of things, it seems Ngugi stumbled on to the second race on Uhuru day by a sheer tour de force of his artistic intuition, because the race is the event in the scene that clarifies for the reader more than any other scene, the centrality of Mumbi's character in the novel. When Karanja finally joins in the seemingly unscheduled final race, Ngugi comments about him:

*Then contempt for the carpenter (Gikonyo) filled his heart. He would not give up the race, he resolved, remembering their old race to train. The unfinished drama was going to be re-enacted in front of Mumbi, and only a few yards from the same railway station, perhaps this time he would win the race and Mumbi together. Why else had she written that note, he reasoned with anxious optimism, as he bent down to unlace his shoes, (p.235).*

Earlier, Mumbi had told Mugo what Karanja said of her: that "he loved me, so he said, and he wanted only me, that he had saved himself from detention and forests for me" (p. 168).

Then, there is Gikonyo competing in the race on Uhuru day to win Mumbi back again:

*He knew that Mumbi was watching him; he did not want to De humiliated in front of her, by her lover (Karanja). She had come to mock him, he thought. She had come to show that she was now independent, (pp.239-240).*

The triangle, therefore, involving Mumbi, Gikonyo, and Karanja is one that keeps the emotional pitch of the novel on high tension wires. To untangle that triangle, Ngugi had to wriggle himself out of the mess by the questionable method of *Deus ex machina*. The ugly triangle looked like this: Gikonyo, by law and custom, is the husband of Mumbi, but he has no children by her. This makes it possible and rather easy for her to leave him and re-establish her freedom and independence. On the other hand, Karanja has a child by Mumbi, thus establishing a blood tie with her that has no legal or customary sanction. The race on Uhuru day was one, therefore, with explosive implications. Mumbi was a re-negotiable personality in the eyes of both men so that as they ran the race, Karanja reflected that all his life he has.

*run for her... This was his last race.  
If he got Mumbi, his life would be completed.  
Uhuru and its threats would not, nothing would ever touch him. ill.  
So now he increased his pace. (p. 239)*

For Mumbi herself, the last race on Uhuru day was fraught, too, with explosive consequences. While it lasted, she was tortured with contradictory emotions: "She wanted Gikonyo to win and also prayed that he might lose," but "whenever Karanja passed she felt embarrassed, and she could not control this feeling" (p. 240).

I said just a moment ago that Ngugi resolved the spiraling entanglements in the relationships between Karanja and Gikonyo vis-a-vis Mumbi, by the technique of **Deus ex Machina**. Gikonyo's fall which involves Karanja breaks the seemingly endless and unchanging tensions existing in the entangled relationships existing between them and Mumbi. Neither Gikonyo nor Karanja up to that point, had gained a vantage point, decisively, in their individual aspirations to possess Mumbi, finally. Karanja's "fall" becomes, therefore, the gimmick that enables Ngugi to wriggle himself out of an entanglement that seemed to have no solution in sight. By his "fall" Karanja has fallen out completely in the struggle for Mumbi's hand. A win by Karanja in the race would have complicated things unnecessarily for Mumbi and for the author.

On the other hand, Gikonyo's second race which he again lost through his fall, triggers something significant in Mumbi; it brings out in her that residual love she has always nursed for him. She renders him first aid and goes to the hospital to see him, thus making it possible for them to re-negotiate their future relationship. Gikonyo, the two-time loser of the

two races ironically becomes the two-timer winner of the object of each race — Mumbi — and from their re-united love, one hoped, would grow a grain of wheat.

Again, the centrality of Mumbi's character is one on which the last work will hardly be written. It was to Mumbi that the secretive, go-it-alone Mugo, first confessed that he betrayed Kihika, her brother" And after that, how he stood in her estimation was an object of solicitous concern to him. It was to Mugo that Gikonyo, Mumbi's husband confessed his own betrayal of the Oath, just to be near Mumbi. And it was to Mugo that Mumbi confessed her betrayal of Gikonyo and the circumstances surrounding that betrayal. Nor was Karanja just a mere name to Mumbi. She cared enough about him to send him a warning note not to come to the public celebrations on Uhuru day because his life was in danger. Here is the ambivalence in Mumbi's character that was puzzling to Karanja. He was indeed quite hurt when, at the very end, Mumbi refused to allow him to see his child by her, before he left for Githima: "And she won't even let me see the child, he thought sadly, as he took the road to Githima" (p. 261).

For Mugo, how he stood in Mumbi's eyes was the final catalyst that prompted him to make the public confession on Uhuru day. His initial impulse was Characteristic of him: "to let Karanja bear the blame." But "he dismissed the imputation and stood up. How else could he ever look Mumbi in the face?" (p. 267). Furthermore, it had worried him after his confession to Mumbi that "to her now . . . in- was vile and dirty" (p.266), and he could not allow her to confirm this view of him by letting Karanja bear the blame. So the sly hermit, Mugo straightens out on the account of Mumbi. Mumbi, for whom Karanja ran two races and lost is the same Mumbi for whom Mugo straightened out at the end, and it is she who inspired Mugo as a carpenter in the early part of the novel and again inspires him at the end to carve a stool of unity in anticipation of their muted re-union in the end.

The creation of the character of Mumbi by Ngugi brings to light the blindness of certain expatriate critics who charge African novelists with inability to create convincing characters. One must admit, without belabouring the point, that the creation of Mumbi's character is a definite advance on Ngugi's novelistic technique. After all, the distinguishing mark of a good novel is the richness and the intricacies of its interpersonal relationships. *A Grain of Wheat* makes A Grain of Wheat rich by making it possess these in diverse abundance.

I have written elsewhere of Ngugi that the inability of people to connect lies at the core of his tragic vision that is always muted in his works is the Conradian dictum of solidarity or lack of it so that betrayal features prominently in his major works, and that those who betray others, who fail to join those of their group in a show of solidarity, either are tortured by mental anguish or meet violent ends. Ngugi thus writes in *The River Between*: "Betrayal. Betrayal is a bad thing for a man in a position of influence. The curse of the people falls on him."<sup>3</sup>

Another important theme in *A Grain of Wheat* centres on who betrays others or is betrayed by them. The major tensions in the novel are therefore sustained by the all-pervading theme of betrayal. Karanja betrays the Mau Mau and those with whom he took the oath. In his collaboration with the white man when he registered as a home guard (from which position he further brutalised his people), Karanja's betrayal involves the entire community and is not confined to those with whom he took the oath. This makes his betrayal the most heinous. At the end of the novel, the author banishes him to Githima — away from his family and with the painful sense of loss of Mumbi to his arch rival, Gikonyo.

Then there is Mugo who betrayed Kihika's trust in him by reporting their secret rendezvous to agents of the British who captured him and hanged him. He suffered a lot of mental anguish, isolating himself from the rest of the people who regarded him as their hero. The most humiliating end awaited him, in addition to his violent death at the hands of Lt. Koinandu, and General R. Gikonyo betrayed his fellow prisoners in detention, just to be near Mumbi, by confessing he had taken the oath when no one else in his camp had done so. Poetic justice overtakes him in his knowledge of the fact that during his absence, his Mumbi had been seduced by his rival, Karanja, and has a child to show for it. This knowledge is like a permanent scar in his heart.

Mumbi, even Mumbi, betrays Gikonyo while he was in detention, through her adulterous relationship with Karanja. In spite of the extenuating circumstances surrounding her betrayal, she does not escape unpunished, for she suffers terribly during those fits of jealousy displayed by Gikonyo. In addition to physical abuse she suffered at his hands, she also lost his love which necessitated her going back home to her family. Even at the end of the novel, her reconciliation with Gikonyo is only muted, not a **fait accompli**. Recognition of the all-pervading presence of betrayal in *A Grain of Wheat* prompts Gikonyo to say to Mumbi about Mugo:



*He was a brave man inside... He stood before much honour, praises were heaped on him. He would have become a chief... Remember that a few people in that meeting are fit to life a stone against that man. Not unless I-we-too-in turn open our hearts naked for the world to look at. (p.265).*

So far, there seems to be established a definite rhythm: betrayal, remorse, confession, punishment.

Now, the above instances of betrayal are evident to the average reader. But there are numerous cases of betrayal that are not so evident on the surface. Mrs. Thompson betrays her husband in her adulterous relationship with the brusque, drunk-prone Dr. Van Dyke. The M.P. betrays his people—those who trusted and elected him—by using his position for self-enrichment at their expense. He acquired Green Hill Farm for which Gikonyo had asked him to help him get a loan. By this act, the M.P. had joined the crowd of "women-rulers who enriched themselves and forgot the responsibility of their office" (p. 194). Wambuku betrayed Kihika when she refused to follow him into the forest, after they had sworn to love and fight together; although it could equally be said that it was Wambuku who first felt betrayed by Kihika after she had elicited his promise never to leave her and go away: "You'll not go away from me. You'll not leave me alone," she said. "Never!" Kihika cried in ecstasy, seeing Wambuku at his side always" (p. 113).

John Thompson feels betrayed by the British Government which, so he thought, meekly and all too quickly succumbed to the Mau Mau insurgency and granted independence to Kenya: Thompson sensed with a vague sense of betrayal" on "glancing through reports on Uhuru preparation for Thursday. Some of the populace, people in Karanja's camp, regarded Thompson as a martyr and expressed "shame the way the British government abandoned men she encouraged and sent abroad" (p. 185).

But Ngugi's vision of people as betrayers of others is not unmitigated by glimpses of fidelity and devotion in **A Grain of Wheat**. This saves the novel, with its open ending, from being, in spite of so much bloodshed and human inconstancy, a tragic work: Kenya's independence was achieved and there is a strong possibility of reconciliation between the two major characters — Gikonyo and Mumbi. So, we have glimpses of fidelity that act as a counterweight to the almost all-pervading existence of betrayal. There is Jomo Kenyatta, devoted resolutely and successfully

to the end, to Kenya's independence. There is Kihika, looking for the one sacrifice, the one martyrdom that would save Kenya, and becoming the arch martyr, keeping to the end his solidarity and fidelity to the Oath and to the Party. And there is little Njeri who promised eternal love and fidelity to Kihika, and unlike Wambuku, never betrayed her promise, for she was shot dead in a battle, soon after Kihika's death. Then, there is Lt. Koinandu's worshipful fidelity to Kihika, as he keeps swearing: "I will never leave him. I swear to God above I'll never abandon Kihika" (p. 31), and he never did. It was in adherence to this promise that he and General R. never hesitated in killing Mugo, the betrayer of Kihika. And who is it that shall forget the masses of those Kenyans who, in spite of torture, imprisonment, and long detention, remained faithful to the Oath. They are the unsung heroes of the revolution whose collective sacrifice made the dream of Kenya's independence a reality.

Finally, a minor theme of confession emerges from the betrayals: Karanja confesses his guilt at Githima: Mumbi confesses to Mugo her betrayal of Gikonyo, and Mugo first confesses privately to Mumbi his betrayal of Kihika and publicly M'pcats the same confession on Uhuru day, while Gikonyo confesses to Mugo his betrayal of the Party after first confessing the Oath in front of fellow prisoners 'lining detention. So we have two levels of confessions and confessors at two planes: confessions extorted from prisoners in detention who were either intimidated or were homesick: Gikonyo, Karanja, and a host of nameless others. Confessions voluntarily given: Mugo. Then, we have on one plane, confessors of the Oath: Mugu, Karanja, and Gikonyo, and a host of nameless others; and confessors to others in self-abasement and to purge one's guilt-ridden conscience Gikonyo to Mugo, Mugo to Mumbi, Mumbi to Mugo. The theme of confession thus helps deepen the meaning and complexity of *A Grain of Wheat*.

**A Grain of Wheat** is preoccupied with the Emergency declared by the British in order to contain the Mau Mau insurgency. Violence, repressive measures, and brutality are expected, therefore, to take up a large part of the novel. Kenya's independence was not handed, in the parlance of African politics, "on a platter of gold." It was brought about through violent upheavals started by the Mau Mau insurgency, and the violence was fuelled in a show of force by the British and sealed by the blood of martyrs. The theme of violence is thus evident in the novel.

The early chapters of **A Grain of Wheat** are disturbing to the sensitive readers -disturbing in the sense that there is bloodshed everywhere and in

the sense that the reader is never sure where the author was heading, as he seemed to be stumbling along, quite unsure of himself. Numerous characters are introduced at these early chapters and quickly killed off. First, deaf and dumb Githogo is introduced and then quickly eliminated, mowed down with bullets, a casualty of the Emergency, the first martyr in the course of Kenyan independence. He was not a member of the Mau Mau as the authorities had thought. Then the uneasy rhythm of meteoric rise and sudden fall begins. Waiyaki rises and is as quickly killed off, "buried alive at Kibwazi with his head facing into the centre of the earth" (p. 15). Young Harry emerges and is quickly clamped into jail. Then Kihika becomes the new Moses and is soon hanged in public. Jomo Kenyatta is next presented as the Burning Spear of Kenya, but the authorities quickly silence him by clamping him in jail. Soon Gikonyo is in the ascendant but he, like Mugo, is detained and humiliated. Then, there is the brutality of John Thompson under whom eleven detained Africans died during questioning accompanied by tortures.

But violence in *A Grain of Wheat* is not one-sided-not just what the British and their agents perpetrate against rebellious Africans. The Africans themselves are violence-prone\* Kihika shoots D.O. Robson and Lt. Koinandu rapes Dr. Lynd. The Reverend Jackson Kigundu, pro-British and a born-again Christian revivalist Minister was among the first group of Christians killed by the Mau Mau: "his body was one morning found hacked with pangas into small pieces. His house and property were burnt to charcoal and ashes" (p. 99).

Karanja became a chief (as a British collaborator) because Chief Muruithia who was known for his cruelty was shot dead by the men from the forest, on their second attempt. But Karanja proved more cruel than Chief Muruithia and continued the reign of violence. With blood flowing everywhere, "people started talking about Kenya, the land of conflicts" (pp. 144—145). And the British made many more martyrs of Kenyans. There was a lot of death by hunger during the Emergency. As old women and children were forcibly ejected from their homes which were routinely set on fire, "altogether twenty-one men and women died. They were buried beside the trench" (p. 166).

Besides all these more or less deliberate bloodsheds, a number of accidents claimed several lives. Githua lost his leg when a truck he was driving overturned at Nakuru. Wambuku died during pregnancy after a severe beating from a soldier whose advances she spurned. Njeri was shot dead in a battle in the forest, and Gatd hanged himself in his cell

during detention. Mr. Rogers, the Agricultural Officer was crushed to death by a train at Githima crossing, and Dr. Henry Van Dyke, the meteorological officer who had sworn he would kill himself if Kenyatta was ever set free, crashed his car on to a moving train soon after Kenyatta's release from Maralal. Even after Kenya's independence was a fait accompli, doomsayers were still predicting more violence following the departure of the Europeans:

*Mrs. Dickinson, the Liberian... predicted a holocaust after Uhuru. He and Roger Mason, her boy-friend, had already booked a flight to Uganda, where they would stay to escape the violence that would be unleashed on all white people in Kenya, (p. 185)*

With all this violence and blood, Kihika's wish for a martyrdom which would change Kenya ("in Kenya we want a death which would change things, that is to say, we want a true sacrifice" (p. 110) was an overstatement. Kenya gained her independence not from a single death or a single sacrifice but from the collective martyrdom of so many unheralded sacrifices.

Finally, it remains for me to restate that *A Grain of Wheat* is a good and artistically well-designed novel, when the numerous rough edges are smoothed over or completely overlooked. The convergence of the numerous characters on magnetising Mumbi gives the novel coherence; and the three major themes discussed strengthen this coherence and give the work depth and breadth. It is a novel that shows a marked advancement in Ngugi's total artistic development.

#### NOTES

1. James Ngugi, *A Grain of Wheat* (London: Heinemann Educational Books, Ltd., 1971). This and subsequent quotations in this study will be from this edition. All page references will be interpolated within the text. The italics are mine.
2. T. S. Eliot, *The Sacred Wood* (New York, 1960, p. 54.
3. Charles E. Nnolim, "Background Setting: Key to the Structure of Ngugi's *The River Between*", *Obsidian: Black Literature in Review*, vol. II (Summer, 1976), p. 20.