

ABSTRACT

"THE MOST UNKINDEST CUT": A study of Ngugi's fictional treatment of betrayal in modern Kenya.

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Betrayal as a phenomenon is native to sudden and drastic socio-political upheavals which almost always create divisions, conflict and chaos in society.

This study undertakes a close textual analysis of Ngugi wa Thiong'o's first three novels, *THE RIVER BETWEEN*, *WEEP NOT, CHILD* and *A GRAIN OF WHEAT*, in order to critically examine Ngugi's treatment of the various manifestations of betrayal resulting from the collision between the more technologically advanced European culture and the pre-literate African society.

The trilogy captures the traumatic experience of the Gikuyu people of Kenya during the very turbulent period of the 1920's through to the 1950's - from the establishment of the Europeans in Kenya through to the national war of Independence, better known as the Mau Mau uprising. Ngugi thus posits the colonial phase of British imperialism as the prime generator of the web of betrayals and counter-betrayals which he explores.

The introductory essay in this study locates the Europe-Africa contact in its historical context and seeks to place the phenomena of conflict and change in a

theoretical frame. It also suggests that the resulting disturbance and divisions in the social structure provide fertile soil for betrayal. Chapter one, which is focused on *THE RIVER BETWEEN*, looks at the alien and divisive christian religion which sets in motion the vicious cycle of betrayal by carving deep rifts in the relatively stable and cohesive traditional society. The next two chapters look at the colonial treachery - the alienation of Gikuyu land for European use - which not only exacerbated the divisions created by christianity but was also directly responsible for the cataclysmic socio-political upheavals which are dramatised in *WEEP NOT, CHILD* and *A GRAIN OF WHEAT*.

Ngugi thus demonstrates that betrayal as a phenomenon is the natural spin-off of drastic social and political changes, divisions and disturbance in society, the conflict of loyalties and the peripeteia of values.