BOOKS: Weep Not, Child (London & Ibadan: Heinemann, 1964; Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1967);
The River Between (London: Heinemann, 1965; Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1967);
The Black Hermit (Nairobi, London & Ibadan: Heinemann, 1968; New York: Humanities, 1969);
This Time Tomorrow: Three Plays (Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau, 1970);
Njia Panda (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1974);
Secret Lives, and Other Stories (London: Heinemann, 1975; New York: Hill, 1975);
The Trial of Dedan Kinyuki, by Ngugi and Mcere Gachae-Mugo (Nairobi: Heinemann, 1976; London: Heinemann, 1977);
Ngaahika Ndeenda: Ihaaka ra Ngerekana, by Ngugi and Ngugwa Mba; (Nairobi: Heinemann, 1980); translated as I Will Marry When I Want (London & Exeter, N.H.: Heinemann,
Detained: A Writer’s Prison Diary (London & Nairobi: Heinemann, 1981);
Writers in Politics (London & Exeter, N.H.: Heinemann, 1981);
Education for a National Culture (Harare: Zimbabwe Publishing House, 1981);
Njamba Nene na Mbaathi Mathugu (Nairobi: Heinemann, 1982); translated as Njamba Nene and the Flying Bus (Nairobi: Heinemann, 1986);
Bathitoora ya Njamba Nene (Nairobi: Heinemann, 1984); translated as Njamba Nene’s Pistol (Nairobi: Heinemann, 1986);
Matigari na Njiriwangi (Nairobi: Heinemann, 1986); translated as Matigari (Oxford: Heinemann, 1989);
Writing Against Neocolonialism (London: Vita, 1986);
Njamba Nene na Chibu King’ang’i (Nairobi: Heinemann, 1986);

PLAY PRODUCTIONS: The Black Hermit, Uganda National Theatre, November 1962;
The Trial of Dedan Kmachii, Nairobi, 1974;

RADIO: This Time Tomorrow, BBC Africa Service, 1967.


SELECTED PERIODICAL PUBLICATIONS—UNCOLLECTED: “The Tension between National and Imperialist Culture,” World Literature Written in English, 24 (Summer 1984): 3-9;

When he was incarcerated as a political de-
tainee in Kamiti Maximum Security Prison near Nairobi in 1978 for his part in the production of his Gkuyu-language play Ngaahika Ndeenda, published in 1980; translated as *I Will Marry When I Want*, 1982), Ngugi wa Thiong'o caused consternation among the warders by refusing to submit to the ritual of being chained before being transported out of the prison for medical treatment or family visits. It was made clear that refusing to be chained meant he would receive no visits from his family and no treatment for his abscessed tooth, but for Ngugi, always alert to the symbolism of colonial and neocolonial oppression, being chained was too high a price to pay for the privileges.

Ngugi's refusal to submit to shackles in Kamiti can be seen as an appropriate symbolic culmination to nearly twenty years of writing and lecturing in which he released himself, link by link, from the mental shackles of his colonial education, with all the attendant assumptions about race, class, and language. Throwing off those shackles has brought Ngugi persecution and an enforced exile, but it has also led to the production of a body of fiction, drama, and essays so original, technically assured, politically committed, informative, and influential that many of Ngugi's admirers regard him as the most important African writer.

Ngugi was born on 5 January 1938 as James Thiong'o Ngugi, son of a Kenyan peasant farmer who, having no access to land of his own, was forced to live as an ighori, a squatter or "tenant-at-will" on the land of "one of the very few African landlords in pre-independence Limuru," as Ngugi says in *Detained* (1981). Ngugi was one of about twenty-eight children in a polygamous household in which his father had four wives: Ngugi was the fifth child of the third wife. Describing his childhood, Ngugi has said in *Homecoming* (1972): "Harvests were often poor. Sweetened tea with milk at any time of day was a luxury. We had one meal a day—late in the evening. Every day the women would go to their scruffy little strips of shamba. But they had faith and they waited."

Ngugi received his first schooling in 1946 at Kamaandura, a missionary-run primary school about two miles from his home. In 1948 he was taken out of the mission school and sent to Maanguu, a school run by Gkuyu nationalists. The change in schools had clear political overtones. Ngugi told Amooti wa Irumba in a 1980 in-
terview that, while he can't remember precisely what occasioned the change, "It was thought that in missionary schools some things were deliberately held back from students, and that in Gikuyu Karinga schools nothing would be hidden from the students to keep them ignorant." With the declaration of the "State of Emergency" in Kenya in 1952 all the independent schools were either closed down or taken over by district education boards: English became the medium of instruction, and so Ngug learned English.

In 1955, largely on the strength of a credit in English, Ngug won a place at the prestigious Alliance High School at Kikuyu, "one of the most elitist institutions for Africans in colonial Kenya," as Ngug describes in Decolonising the Mind (1986). He was "the only student from virtually the whole of Limuru" to be there. Ngug's subsequent comments on the prevailing ethos of the school have been scathing, as is this one in the Irumba interview: "I think the education offered to us at Alliance was intended to produce Africans who would later become efficient administrators of a colonial system . . . . We were being trained to become obedient servants of Her Majesty the Queen of England, to serve her and the British Empire, and never to question the legitimacy or correctness of that Empire."

What Alliance High School did for Ngug in a positive sense was to sustain his interest in reading and arouse a speculative desire to write, though this direction was achieved perhaps more through random novel reading in the comparatively well-stocked library than through the formal curriculum. Ngug read widely, works by Charles Dickens, Sir Walter Scott, Rider Haggard, John Buchan, Alan Paton, and W. E. Johns being explored by him. But it was of Robert Louis Stevenson that Ngug was later to say (in his 1964 interview with Dennis Duerden): "He is the one who really set my imagination flying, and I thought that one day I would like to write stories like those which he himself had written." However, in 1967, when interviewed by Alan Marcuson and others at Leeds University in England, Ngug said, "I wrote, I suppose, because I had been moved by the bloodshed and violence during the Mau Mau uprising [in Kenya from 1952 to 1956]."

Although Ngug's formal education was not seriously interrupted by the state of emergency, he could not be left unaffected by the turmoil in central Kenya resulting from the armed revolt of
the Land and Freedom Army (called “Mau Mau” by the settlers) against the inequities—particularly the unequal distribution of land—of the colonial system. Ngūg’s elder brother, Wallace Mwangi, joined the guerrillas in the forests between 1954 and 1956, as a consequence of which Ngūg’s mother was detained for three months and tortured at the home-guard post at Kamrthu, where the family then lived. In a 1973 interview with Reinhard Sander and Ian Munro, Ngūg addressed the question of the extent of his awareness of the emergency: “As a child growing up during this period, it would be silly and not true to say one was aware of all implications of even the struggle itself. But one did get the impressions. You are so young. You see your uncles being killed. . . . You see some of your friends being taken from their homes. These things stay with you. You see an old man you respected being emasculated as a condition of war. These things leave you with an impression.”

On his return to Kamrthu after his first term at Alliance Ngūg found that, as part of the colonial forces’ anti-insurgency “protected” village strategy (designed, in fact, to cut the forest fighters off from their food supplies), his home had simply disappeared. As he says in Detained, “My home was now only a pile of dry mudstones, bits of grass, charcoal and ashes. . . . Not only my home, but the old village with its culture, its memories and its warmth had been razed to the ground.” The trauma of this experience led to the attempted return home being a recurrent motif in Ngūg’s fiction, and his writing is often at its most powerful when re-creating the anguish and heroism of the Mau Mau revolt.

From Alliance High School, Ngūg, like many of his classmates, went on to Makerere University College, Kampala, where in 1959 he embarked on a four-year honors degree in English. In retrospect Ngūg regards the real importance of his time at Makerere as being his exposure to African and West Indian writers for the first time, though they had no place on the syllabus. Ngūg singles out three works as having impressed and influenced him in particular: Chinua Achebe’s Things Fall Apart (1958), George Lamming’s In the Castle of My Skin (1953), and Peter Abrahams’s Tell Freedom (1954).

At Makerere, Ngūg joined the University Drama Club and Play Reading Circle, and in 1960 he wrote a short story, “The Fig Tree,” as a
result of telling a member of the editorial committee of *Penpoint*, the English-department literary journal, that he had already written one. This story was the start of an intensely creative three-year period during which Ngug wrote six other stories later collected in *Secret Lives* (1975), and two novels: "The Black Messiah" (published as *The River Between*, 1965) and *Weep Not, Child* (1964).

In 1962 Ngug participated at Makerere in the historic Conference of African Writers of English Expression, which was attended by most of the better-known Anglophone African writers, including Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Christopher Okigbo, Es'kia Mphahlele. Writing in prison in 1978, Ngug commented: "What I remember most about the conference: after all, we were part of a continent emerging from a colonial era into . . . what? We never answered the question, but the hopes and the dreams and the confidence remained. Now we have no doubt, two decades later, about the answer" (*Detained*).

In addition to his burst of creative writing, Ngug was also, by the end of his four-year degree, editing *Penpoint*, which had become a vehicle for writers from all over east and central Africa, and writing a regular column for the *Sunday Nation* in Nairobi. He still found time to obtain a good upper-second-class honors degree, writing his major essay on Joseph Conrad.

The first novel, Ngug wrote (but the second one he published) started life as "The Black Messiah" and was begun in March 1961 in response to a challenge posed by an East African Literature Bureau novel-writing competition whose deadline was in December that year. Ngug won the competition.

The action of the novel takes place among the ridges in the heartland of Gkuyu territory in the late 1920s, at the time of the conflict between the Church of Scotland missions and Gkuyu traditionalists over female circumcision—described by Ngug in a 1962 *Sunday Nation* article as a "brutal" custom (as quoted by Bernth Lindfors). Ngug makes use of a symbolic topographical setting: two long-standing ridges, Kameno and Makuyu, the homes of Gkuyu traditionalists and Christian converts respectively, confront each other across the river noted in the published title. This setting provides him with a simple but effective schematic base from which to explore the relationships between Christianity and Gkuyu tradition (including the similarities be-
between the mythologies underlying each), between private and public responsibilities, and between education and political activism.

Waiyaki, the "Black Messiah" of the original title, is last in a line of descent from the Gkuyu seer Mugo wa Kibiro, and is looked to by his father, Chege, an elder from Kameno, to fulfill Mugo's prophecy: "Salvation shall come from the hills. From the blood that flows in me . . . a son shall rise. And his duty shall be to lead and save the people." To this end, Waiyaki is sent by his father to a church mission to learn the wisdom and secrets of the white man—but he is enjoined to be true to the Gkuyu people and their ancient rites. The inherent contradiction proves insurmountable.

When circumcised Gkuyu children are excluded from Siriana, the mission school, Waiyaki returns to the ridges and establishes the first Gkuyu independent school. He fires the people of the ridges with his enthusiasm for education—seen by him as the solution to the encroaching domination of the colonial power—and comes to be seen as a savior. But Waiyaki is so single-mindedly intent on his schools that he fails to give due recognition to the political significance of the Kiama, a Kameno-based, proto-Mau Mau organization led by Kabonyi, a lapsed Christian who is intensely jealous of Waiyaki. The Kiama is dedicated to the "purity of the tribe," and prepared to use more direct forms of political activism than Western education to oust Christianity and colonialism.

Like Romeo with Juliet, Waiyaki falls in love with Nyambura, the daughter of Joshua, the fanatical leader of the Christian converts of Makuyu, who is the archenemy of the Kiama. Kabonyi manages to engineer a public trial of Waiyaki for betraying the tribe by associating with the Christians, Waiyaki refuses to renounce his love for Nyambura, and the pair are handed over to the Kiama for judgment and, presumably, execution.

Asked about his writing by an interviewer at Leeds in 1967, Ngug's comment on The River Between was, "I had come from a missionary school and I was deeply Christian. . . . In school I was concerned with trying to remove the central Christian doctrine from the dress of Western culture, and seeing how this might be grafted onto the central beliefs of our people. The River Between was concerned with this process."

That the novel is, to some extent, a project in contextualizing theology is borne out by its ex-
tensive use of biblical language and imagery, by the way it sets the Gkuyu creation myth beside the Christian one, and by such recognitions as the one arrived at by Waiyaki toward the end: “Even his [the white man’s] religion was not essentially bad... But the religion, the faith, needed washing, cleaning away all the dirt, leaving only the eternal. And that eternal that was the truth had to be reconciled to the traditions of the people.”

But this project, which suggests that Ngugi’s sympathies lay on the Makuyu side of the river, does not come across as the dominant concern of the novel to most readers. Christianity in the novel is represented by the somewhat caricatured Joshua (“he would never refrain from punishing a sin, even if this meant beating his wife”), and while much of the novel is concerned with the foundation of the Gkuyu independent schools movement, there is no mention of the historically parallel independent church movement. The focus on Christianity is similar to that in Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*: it is a divisive influence that produces a violent reaction on the part of traditionalists and provides the obvious focus for an exploration of the impact of colonial penetration on traditional ways of life. Not that the Kiama finds much favor either; it is characterized by “extravagant enthusiasm,” led by a jealous fanatic, and its members are symbolically depicted as “figures lurking in the edges of darkness.”

The two themes most critics have seen as dominant in the novel are the relationship between education and political activism, and the relationship between private commitment and public responsibility. Waiyaki’s preoccupation with education leads him to lose contact with the people he wants to serve, or perhaps more accurately—considering his messianic sense of his own destiny—to lead and save. Only at the end of the novel does he come to recognize that “The Kiama was right. People wanted action now,” and he decides that, if he had the opportunity, he would preach “education for unity. Unity for political freedom.” He is repeatedly described as “confused” and is often unaware of the implications, and sometimes even the origins, of his actions.

Ngugi is clearly inviting readers to be critical of Waiyaki’s simplistic positing of Western education as the cure-all for political ills, and his divorcing of education from political action. Waiyaki has no reply to Kabonyi’s crucial ques-
tion: “do you think the education of our tribe, the education and wisdom which you all received, is in any way below that of the white man?” Waiyaki does not, however, appear to come in for authorial criticism in his quest for the reconciliation of the ultimately irreconcilable opposites represented by Kameno and Makuyu.

The focus on Waiyaki’s public role as founder of the independent schools is to some extent eclipse by the attention given to his love for Nyambura. It is this shift in emphasis that has led some critics to regard the theme of private conscience and commitment set against public responsibility as carrying the main weight of the novel's message. G. D. Killiam, for example, says the theme that most interests Ngugi in this novel is “the place of love as a means of achieving personal redemption and by extension as an agent for redemption in the community” (An Introduction to the Writings of Ngugi, 1980).

The novel is characterized by simplicity of language and the schematic opposition of contending values and their champions, which have much in common with the myths on which the novel draws so heavily. The complexity of the themes could well have borne the fuller and more complex treatment given to themes in Ngugi's later novels, but the critical tendency to sum up the novel in the manner of Killiam's opinion—"It is a modest beginning in a small novel"—does perhaps not do justice to what was a remarkable achievement for a university student producing the first novel in English by a Kenyan writer.

If, as David Cook and Michael Okninmke claim, Ngugi now finds The River Between embarrassing, that is because he has traveled a long way, ideologically, in the interim. He would no longer endorse either the Christianity, however contextualized, underpinning the novel, or the subordination of the education/political-activism debate to the slightly cliché love story at the end. But Ngugi has no need to feel that The River Between is an embarrassingly weak first novel.

In January 1962 Ngugi started on his second novel, Weep Not, Child. Set twenty years later, at the time of the 1950s state of emergency in Kenya, when many of the latent tensions and antagonisms explored in the earlier novel boiled over in armed conflict, Weep Not, Child is generally held to be the most autobiographical of Ngugi’s fictional works.
The protagonist is a young boy, Njoroge, through whose often naive perceptions most of the action of the novel is filtered. The youngest boy in a polygamous family renowned for its domestic harmony, Njoroge, like Ngugi himself, plays no active role in the armed rebellion in which his family becomes caught, but he carries on with his school, placing his faith, like Waiyaki, in education: "He always thought that schooling was the very best that a boy could have. It was the end of all living."

The novel traces Njoroge's career as a scholar, which takes him to Siriana (a fictional version of Alliance High School) as "the only boy in all that area" to get there—again like Ngugi himself. At the same time, the story charts the progressive disintegration of the ideally harmonious home and family. When the novel opens, Ngotho, Njoroge's father, is a landless peasant living as an akoi on the land of Jacobo, a rich African farmer, and tending the tea plantation being grown on his own ancestral land, now "alienated" and given to a Mr. Howlands under the post-World War I soldier-settler scheme. Ngotho loses his job as a result of taking part in a strike and leading an attack on Jacobo, who, true to his collaborationist role, is trying to persuade the strikers to return to work. This wholly uncharacteristic action on the part of Ngotho is embarked on in an attempt, in part, to appease his son, Boro, who is an embittered former serviceman who despises his father and his father's generation for their passive submission to colonial rule.

These four characters exemplify, emblematically and with great economy, the forces unleashed in central Kenya with the declaration of the State of Emergency in October 1952. Howlands becomes a fanatical district officer who plays a brutal role in the repression of the revolt: Jacobo becomes a "loyalist" home-guard leader who viciously exploits his position to settle the score with Ngotho; Boro takes to the forest as a guerilla leader and is responsible for killing both Jacobo and Howlands, but Boro is captured in the process; and Ngotho is the hapless victim, the peasant caught in the cross-fire, who confesses falsely to the killing of Jacobo and is tortured and castrated by Howlands before dying. Njoroge's part is to be a passive spectator until arrested at school on suspicion of complicity in Jacobo's killing, whereupon he too is tortured—both physically and, more particularly, by the denial of further schooling.
Ngũgĩ's attitude toward his protagonist is difficult to discern. Njoroge's response to the gathering conflict, described sparingly but with considerable historical authenticity, is to retire behind fantasies of his destiny: "he was lost in speculations about his vital role in the country. He remembered David rescuing a whole country from the curse of Goliath." In comparison with Waiyaki, Njoroge has no basis for his fantasies in achieved action or in heredity and prophecy, and it is clear that the reader is not intended to take them very seriously. But Ngũgĩ's characterization of Njoroge seems almost wholly without irony, and the reader is not invited to take up the same position of detachment in relation to Njoroge's other main line of escape—another Romeo-and-Juliet love relationship, with Mwihaki, the daughter of Jacobo.

Even the ending of the novel is somewhat ambivalent. With his father dead, his brothers all in prison or detention, and Boro to be hanged, Njoroge tries to commit suicide when Mwihaki refuses to elope to Uganda with him. His courage fails him, however, when his two mothers, Nyokabi and Njeri, true to the life-giving and supporting role they play throughout the novel, come to find him in the darkness. The act of attempting suicide is presented as a cowardly escape, yet Njoroge appears to escape censure. He is allowed to run ahead as the three return home and symbolically to "open the door" of the future for his mothers.

Ngũgĩ's apparent ambivalence toward Njoroge extends to his attitude toward the Mau Mau movement itself, whose effects on the Gĩkũyũ villagers form the central concern of the novel. As Ngũgĩ put it in his interview with Dennis Duerden: "Actually in the novel I have tried to show the effect of the Mau Mau war on the ordinary man and woman who were left in the villages. I think the terrible thing about the Mau Mau war was the destruction of family life, the destruction of personal relationships." Many critics incorrectly interpret this novel, presumably on the basis of their readings of later ones, as sympathetic toward the guerrillas.

The novel is successful in both the depiction of the bitter disillusionment of former service-men who returned from fighting for freedom to discover that was not about to be extended to them, which was one of the main catalysts of the revolt, and in the depiction of the plight of the landless Gĩkũyũ peasantry, the main spur to the re-
volt. Indeed Ngüg's description of Ngotho lovingly watching over his land by working on it as a "shamba-boy" for the colonial settler usurper, Howlands, is likely to bring home to the reader the anguish of the dispossessed with a far more memorable poignancy than any statistics about the square miles of land "alienated," Ngüg is also unflinching in his portrayal of the ruthlessness and brutality of the colonial response to the Mau Mau. But the movement itself, as represented in the person of Boro, is kept at a firm distance from the reader's sympathies and is depicted as motivated by revenge and as fighting for nothing more principles than "To kill. Unless you kill, you'll be killed. So you go on killing and destroying. It's a law of nature."

Three major themes can be identified in the novel: education and messianism, which are carried over from The River Between; and the suffering of the ordinary villagers because of the revolt. This last was intended by Ngüg to have a representative dimension: "... in my approach to the novel you use even a small village as a symbol of a larger concern. ... I use a small village as a guide for the whole African struggle for identity."

In comparison with the treatment of education in The River Between, Njoroge's notion of education is abstract and theoretical, and the novel does not explore the tension between education and political activism at all, although in many ways it is better set up to do so. Although it could be argued that Ngotho's recounting of the Gkuyu creation myth is designed to show that education is not, in fact, the exclusive preserve of schools, the novel as a whole seems to endorse a generally uncritical acceptance of Western education, along the lines of Ngüg's comment in his interview at Leeds: "The gospel of the peasant has always been: 'Get ye first education, and all other things will be added unto you.'"

Even if we are no expected to take Njoroge's messianic urgings seriously, no skepticism is shown in Ngüg's identification of Kenyan leader Jomo Kenyatta variously with Moses and with Christ. As a student at Makerere, Ngüg clearly shared the popular conception of the still-detained Kenyatta as a savior; as Ngotho sees it, "To him Jomo stood for custom and tradition purified by grace of learning and much travel." Kenyatta's condemnation of the Mau Mau and the resort to political violence, both before and during his detention, must have had considerable
influence on the distance the novel puts between itself and the movement.

Where the sufferings of the ordinary villagers under the State of Emergency are concerned, Ngugi uses Njoroge's family as a microcosm of the Gikuyu peasantry, ninety percent of whom, though one would certainly not guess it from the novel, are estimated to have taken the movement's oath of loyalty. The break-up of the home is intended to exemplify the break-up of the larger Gikuyu society, and the tragic dimension of this disintegration is personified in Ngotho and dramatized in his decline in public esteem and self-respect as a result of his conflict with Baro. One of the problematic aspects of Ngugi's fictionalization of the State of Emergency is that it appears to invite its readers to see the Mau Mau, rather than the repressive colonial dispensation against which the movement was revolting, as being responsible for the disintegration of Ngotho's family and the wider society it represents.

Generally evaluated by critics as a work of apprenticeship, paving the way for *A Grain of Wheat* (1967), *Weep Not, Child* manages, nonetheless, to evoke the conditions of the State of Emergency in Kenya with considerable power and poignancy. Ngugi's style is sparser and less biblical than in his earlier novel, in keeping with a project in fictional realism that is more firmly based in history and has less of the air of myth making about it. Where the novel has weaknesses, for example in the imprecision of the treatment of the central question of education, and the partial nature of the analysis of the revolt, they can be attributed not simply to the technical consequences of the choice of Njoroge's consciousness as a vehicle but also to the closeness of the subject matter to Ngugi's own experience and the interpretations a privileged university student, a product of the colonial educational system, would inevitably place upon that experience.

*The Black Hermit*, a play, was written as the Makerere Students Dramatic Society contribution to Uganda's Uhuru celebrations and was first produced in the Uganda National Theatre in November 1962. It was published in 1968. In the play Remi, the only son of his tribe to have achieved a university education, is confronted with the choice of remaining as a "black hermit" in the city or returning home to provide political leadership for his people, which would bring material benefits all round but would take him back to
Thoni, his brother's widow, whom custom decreed that he should marry. He returns, but the failure of each to communicate his or her love for the other leads Thoni to commit suicide. The first act, with stylized and generally formal language, focuses on the traditional world of the village; the second act, in which the language is colloquial and informal, deals with the city; the third act deals with the fatal intersection of the two. In the preface for the publication of the play, Ngugi distances himself from its main concern: "I thought then that tribalism was the biggest problem besetting the new East African countries... that all we had to do was to expose and root out the cantankerous effects of tribalism, racialism and religious factions."

The Black Hermit, like Ngugi's other early plays, has tended to receive short shrift from literary critics, who have lambasted it for didacticism, cumbersome themes, and characters who are not developed and are used as mere "mouthpieces for views on political education," as Clifford B. Robson says. It is by no means certain, however, that those who watched the plays in performance shared these views.

Ngugi filled the interval between graduating from Makerere and going to Leeds in September 1964 with work as a junior reporter on the Daily Nation in Nairobi. His regular column during this period, called "As I See It," ranged widely, from William Shakespeare to African socialism, and provides useful insights into Ngugi's liberal ideological position at this time.

Leeds provided something altogether different, though once again it was on the fringe of the formal curriculum that the development of Ngugi's thinking and writing received its major boost. Formally Ngugi spent most of his time at Leeds engaged in research for a two-year M.A. in Caribbean literature. Informally Ngugi's political thinking was revolutionized by his first exposure to works by Karl Marx and Frantz Fanon; by his interaction with other students including Grant Kamenju, Peter Nazareth, Ime Ikiddeh, and Alan Hunt; and, perhaps more particularly, by socialist academics such as Arnold Kettle. Apart from the West Indian writers on whom Ngugi's research focused, the specifically literary influences to which he was first exposed at Leeds were Bertholt Brecht's plays and Robert Tressell's The Ragged-Trousered Philanthropist, described by Ikiddeh as a "major influence" on Ngugi.

Ngugi took the opportunity while in Great
Britain to travel extensively. He not only toured England and Scotland and visited the continent but also attended the 1966 Afro-Asian Writers Conference in Beirut, from where he went on to visit Palestine refugee camps in Lebanon and to travel to Damascus with a group from the conference. He also visited the United States as a guest of honor at the international P.E.N. conference. His first impressions of the United States were mixed, as he told a Leeds interviewer: "I was impressed by the actual material progress. But in the streets of New York, one of the richest cities in the world, I found beggars crawling in the streets and people who had nowhere to sleep. I couldn't believe it."

Ngugi's main preoccupation while he was at Leeds was, however, the writing of *A Grain of Wheat*, which was completed in November 1966.

The action of the novel covers a time span of four days leading up to Kenyan Independence Day, 12 December 1963, and involves four main characters, who are all villagers from the Čkuyú village of Thabai: Mugo, Gikonyo, Mumbi, and Karanja. Within the four-day fictional present, Ngugi manages, principally by means of a series of interlocking flashbacks, to convey not only the personal histories of the important characters, focusing in particular on their experiences under the State of Emergency, but also an outline of the history of Kenyan resistance to colonial rule.

The most significant structural break with the pattern of the earlier novels is his abandonment of the single central protagonist, who is replaced by a group of protagonists. The intention, derived from Ngugi's exposure to socialist thinking at Leeds, and to that of Fanon in particular, is clearly to employ a fictional form better suited to the rendering of collective consciousness. This plan does, however, run into problems. The first one is apparent from the title, whose meaning is made explicit in the epigraph to the last section: "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." The novel makes extensive use of biblical imagery and also takes as its "metadiscourse" the Christian model of individual guilt, expiation, and redemption.

Second, the plot parallels that of Joseph Conrad's *Under Western Eyes* (1911) very closely; Conrad's influence is clearly discernible elsewhere in the novel; and Conrad can be seen to have provided Ngugi with a model of a secular (but otherwise very similar) pattern of betrayal, re-
morse, and redemption. The result is an internal tension between a fictional structure designed as a historical project, which explores Kenya's past and present from the collective vantage point of the Kenyan peasantry, and a fictional rendering—at times almost obsessive in its minuteness—of the states of mind and the spiritual redemption of a group of essentially isolated individuals. Gikonyo's perception, "To live and die alone was the ultimate truth," seems definitive.

The opening of the novel focuses on Mugo, whose solitariness and air of self-sufficiency, combined with his reputation as a hero of the struggle, have led the villagers to see him as their choice as the main speaker at the independence celebrations. One of the purposes of the celebrations is to honor those who died in the struggle, most notably Kihika, a Mau Mau leader from the village who was betrayed and hanged.

Mumbi, Kihika's sister, fulfills a key role as the catalyst for the development away from the pervasive atmosphere of guilt, self-doubt, and betrayal that characterizes the villagers' preparations for the freedom for which they endured so much. Gikonyo and Karanja are long-standing rivals for Mumbi's affections. Gikonyo, the village carpenter, marries Mumbi, is sent to a detention camp, and betrays the movement in order to return to Mumbi. On his return he finds Mumbi suckling a child she has had by Karanja, who, in spite of having lost her to Gikonyo, has also betrayed his people and joined the "loyalist" home guard in order to avoid detention and remain near Mumbi. Having held out against his advances for six years—during which Karanja becomes a sadistic and much-hated home-guard chief—Mumbi yields to him in her ecstasy at hearing of Gikonyo's impending release. The existence of the child acts as a total block on communication between Mumbi and Gikonyo.

As the action unfolds, it becomes apparent that the apolitical Mugo, who, resentful like Conrad's Razumov at having the even tenor of his solitary existence intruded upon, has betrayed Kihika when the latter came to him for shelter after assassinating a notoriously brutal district officer. Mugo initially refuses to speak at the celebrations, which are to be used by Kihika's former comrades as an opportunity to denounce and execute Karanja as Kihika's betrayer. But as a direct result of Mumbi's confiding her marital problems to Mugo and his own private confession of the betrayal of Kihika to her, Mugo makes a public con-
ession at the meeting in order to save Karanja and is himself duly executed.

Mugo's courage in publicly confessing and expiating his act of betrayal provides the inspiration for Gikonyo to reconsider his harsh rejection of Mumbi and her child. Their reconciliation—which, through the closeness of their names to those of Gikuyu and Mumbi, the mythical founders of the Gikuyu nation, implicitly symbolizes the regeneration of the Gikuyu people and postindependence Kenya as a whole—is emblematized at the end of the novel in Gikonyo's plans for the carving of a traditional stool as a gift for Mumbi. The stool will not only incorporate a figure of a woman pregnant with a child as a symbol of hope for the future, but Gikonyo contemplates working into beads on the seat an image of "a field needing clearance and cultivating." The struggle is not over with the celebration of independence: much clearing still needs to be done if the ground for genuine freedom is to be successfully cultivated.

The focus of *A Grain of Wheat* is predominantly on the past. The criticism of the postindependence political dispensation in Kenya is low-key and almost incidental, in spite of Ngugi's author's note: "But the situation and the problems are real—sometimes too painfully real for the peasants who fought the British yet who now see all that they fought for being put on one side." The closest Ngugi gets to a critique of the direction of Kenya's independence is in the pillorying of the member of Parliament for Thabai. Gikonyo, anxious to buy a farm for a cooperative farming venture, goes to the M.P. to ask him to organize a loan. The latter, who is clearly intended as a representative of postindependence corruption, buys the farm in question for himself.

Where *A Grain of Wheat* breaks most significantly with the earlier novels is in the abandonment of education as containing the key to Kenya's problems and in the acceptance, at least in the abstract, of the necessity for armed struggle. Kariuki, Mumbi's younger brother, who, like Njoroge and Ngugi himself, "was the only boy in these ridges to get a place in Siriana secondary school," is a wholly insignificant character who plays no part in the action. His acceptance at the school, as the brother of a Mau Mau leader, is not, as with Njoroge, treated as an area of potential political reconciliation deriving from universal aspirations for education but is much more realistically, and in keeping with Ngugi's own...
experience, made politically contentious: "why... should a boy whose brother was in the Forest, be allowed to go to a government school, while the sons of loyalists could not?" The main characters are not singled out by their education: they are all uneducated peasants, and Kihika is shown to have run away from the brutality and blinkered vision of formal education. The endorsement of the Mau Mau remains at an abstract level. Kihika is the only major character in the novel who is not guilty of betraying some person or ideal, and is explicitly likened to Christ at certain points, but he is characterized as insensitive to the needs of his girlfriend Wambuku, as contemptuous over what he sees as the weakness of his father's generation, and, essentially, as the Conradian man "haunted by a fixed idea." The living Mau Mau representatives in the novel are portrayed as obsessed by guilt over their past acts of individual violence, a pervasive guilt that implicitly expunges any political legitimacy the novel might elsewhere be seemingly to try to establish for the movement's resort to violence. Despite Ngug's reading of Fanon, this novel is clearly not informed by the surprisingly Fanonist view expressed in Ngug's 1963 review of Fred Majdalany's *A State of Emergence* (1962): "Violence in order to change an intolerable, unjust social order is not savagery: it purifies man."

Although *A Grain of Wheat* does provide some evidence of an ideological shift, Ngug's exposure to socialism at Leeds was too recent to have been fully assimilated, and this novel, like the previous one, can be seen to be predominantly informed by liberalism. Aesthetically this slant is perhaps most evident in the impulse toward balance in structure and characterization. So Ngug is at pains to explore the consciousness of, and invite sympathy for, politically antipathetic characters such as Karanja and John Thompson, a once-idealistic colonial administrator who ends up being responsible in the novel's fictional version of the Hola detention camp massacre.

The major development demonstrated by this novel is in the area of fictional technique. Apart from his assured handling of the fractured time scheme, Ngug makes effective use of some intricate patterns of symbolism and develops a flexible prose style far better adapted to the complexity of many of the issues raised by the novel than the brevity and simplicity of the two earlier novels. Songs become part of the texture of the
narrative, the narrative voice assumes an identity as one of the Tha bai villagers in the second half of the novel, and, in general, Ngug can be seen to be making a concerted attempt to adapt the novel form to make it an appropriate vehicle for the consciousness of a group of Gkuyu peasants with little formal Western education. The attempt is somewhat undermined by Ngug's residual liberalism, leading to the contradictory focus on individual consciousness, usually of guilt, but this does not prevent *A Grain of Wheat* from being one of the major accomplishments of African literature; nor has it hindered most critics from recognizing it as such.

*A Grain of Wheat* was the major outcome of Ngug's stay at Leeds. He did not complete his M.A. thesis, clearly regarding the production of his novel as more important and possibly becoming skeptical about the value of postgraduate degrees. His decision not to complete the M.A. may also have been connected to a more radical and far-reaching questioning, which first found expression in the interview he gave to fellow students at Leeds before returning to Kenya. When asked whether he had plans for any other books, Ngug replied, "No plans at present. You see I have reached a point of crisis. I don't know whether it is worth any longer writing in English. . . . I am very suspicious about writing about universal values. If there are universal values, they are always contained in the framework of social realities. And one important social reality in Africa is that 90 per cent of the people cannot read or speak English. . . . The problem is this—I know whom I write about, but whom do I write for?"

In less formal terms what Leeds did for Ngug is perhaps best summed up in a comment he made to Mcere Gthae-Mugo: "I think I was confused at Makerere. I had more questions than answers and by the time I left I was disillusioned about many things. Leeds systematized my thinking."

In 1967 Ngug returned to Kenya as a special lecturer in English at University College, Nairobi, having earlier in the year attended the African Scandinavian Writers' Conference. He had apparently overcome his doubts about writing in English sufficiently to sign a contract with Heinemann to write a book, to be titled "A Colonial Affair," about the social life of European settlers in Kenya. Significantly, however, although he embarked on serious research for the project,
he found himself unable to write the book. As he puts it in *Detained*, "An account of their social life would have to include a section on culture, and I was by then convinced that a Draculan idle class could never produce a culture."

Ngug's stay at University College was brief but productive. During this time he edited *Zuka*, the English department literary journal, and he was one of the driving forces behind the move to abolish the department and replace it with a Department of African Literature and Languages. In *Homecoming* (1972) he argues that "The primary duty of any literature department is to illuminate the spirit animating a people, to show how it meets new challenges, and to investigate possible areas of development and involvement," and is predicated on a central question: "If there is need for a 'study of the historic continuity of a single culture,' why can't this be African?" The outcome of the debate was the establishment of two departments: Languages and Literature.

Early in 1969 Oginga Odinga was invited to speak on campus but was prevented from doing so by the government; the students boycotted lectures in protest; the police intervened with considerable violence; and the college suspended five students. As he told Peter Darling, Ngug resigned his post in protest "against the mishandling of the crisis by the College administration, and ... the failure of a large body of members of staff to come out clearly and publicly with their views or attitude towards issues underlying the crisis."

Ngug was immediately offered a year's fellowship in creative writing in the Department of Literature at Makerere University, during the course of which his 1970 collection of short plays, *This Time Tomorrow*, was published, his last work to appear under the name James Ngug. In March 1970, since he was not a Christian, Ngug decided he would begin using the name Ngug wa Thiong'o rather than his Christian name, James Ngug. *This Time Tomorrow* consists of three one-act plays: "The Rebels" and "The Wound in the Heart," which were written at Makerere; and the title play, which was written as a radio play for the BBC Africa Service and first broadcast in 1967.

"The Rebels" deals with the return of the university-educated favorite son of a village, who is unexpectedly accompanied by his foreign (but African) girlfriend, to be confronted by the parental demand that he marry a less-than-enthusiastic
village girl chosen for him by his father. "The Wound in the Heart," rejected for the 1962 Uganda Drama Festival by censors, reads like a preliminary sketch for Gikonyo's return from detention in *A Grain of Wheat*, the major difference being that the patiently waiting wife has eventually remarried as a result of having been misled into believing that her husband has been killed. In both plays the solution to the dilemma is found in the somewhat improbable death or suicide of the woman the protagonist loves. "This Time Tomorrow" is an account of the destruction of a Nairobi shantytown. In highlighting the poverty of the majority of Nairobi's inhabitants and their disillusionment with independence, it presages Ngugi's later works.

On completing his fellowship at Makerere, Ngugi accepted a year's visiting professorship in African literature at Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois—where the long process of writing *Petals of Blood* (1977) was begun—before returning to Nairobi in August 1971 to take a lectureship in University College's Department of Literature. He was rapidly promoted to senior lecturer and before long was acting chairman and then chairman of the department.

In 1972 Ngugi published his first collection of critical prose, *Homecoming*, which brings together essays, speeches, and reviews written from 1962 to 1970 and thereby provides documentation, invaluable to the interpretation of the fiction, on the shift in Ngugi's thinking over this crucial period in both Kenya's and his own political development. Ngugi argues in the author's note that *Homecoming* "is an integral part of the fictional world" of the early novels: "Literature does not grow or develop in a vacuum; it is given impetus, shape, direction and even area of concern by social, political and economic forces in a particular society."

The collection is divided into three sections. The essays in the first, "On Culture," lead from an early critique of racism and tribalism, through a scathing indictment of the role of Christianity in serving colonial expansion, most obviously through the destruction of traditional culture, to the advocacy of a national culture that will depend on "a completely socialized economy, collectively owned and controlled by the people," and on the prior "complete and total liberation of the people through the elimination of all exploitative forces."

The second section, "Writers in Africa," in-
cludes essays on Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, T. M. Aluko, Okot p'Bitek, and East African writing. The literary criticism is always related to the overall polemical thrust of Ngug's lucid and impassioned attack on monopoly capitalism, and he comes to the conclusion that "It is not enough for the African artist, standing aloof, to view society and highlight its weaknesses. He must try to go beyond this, to seek out the sources, the causes and the trends of a revolutionary struggle which has already destroyed the traditional power-map drawn up by the colonialist nations."

The third section, "Writers from the Caribbean," the fruits of Ngug's research at Leeds, consists of two essays on George Lamming and two broad surveys of Caribbean fiction. The volume concludes with an appendix containing the memorandum "On the Abolition of the English Department," prepared as part of the Nairobi debate, which has been the single most influential document in the revision of university-level English-department curricula in Anglophone Africa.

In 1974 a joint project by Ngug and Mcere Ghæ-Mugo, which had been conceived in 1971, finally found fruition in the play The Trial of Dedan Kmathi (published in 1976). The final spur to completion was the 1974 publication of Kenneth Watene's play Dedan Kmathi, which, following the pattern of colonial writings about the Mau Mau, depicted the leader Kmathi as a crazed and brutal paranoiac. Ngug and Ghæ-Mugo, by contrast, in what they call in the preface an imaginative re-creation and interpretation of the collective will of the Kenyan peasants and workers in their refusal to break under sixty years of colonial torture and ruthless oppression by the British ruling classes," were determined to re-create Kmathi as the "great man of courage, of commitment to the people" of popular memory. The content of the play derives from the actual trial of Kmathi after his betrayal and capture in 1956, but the polemical thrust is aimed at highlighting another, contemporary, kind of trial: "We believe that Kenyan Literature—indeed all African Literature, and its writers is on trial. We cannot stand on the fence. We are either on the side of the people or on the side of imperialism."

The play makes no attempt at a naturalistic re-creation of the trial and makes extensive use of mime, dance, and song, with the songs frequently in Gkuyu. It is episodic, with the action in the courtroom being interrupted by scenes de-
picting other, related, action. In a scene early in
the play, the actors enact black history—from the
time of the slave traders to the continuing strug­
gle against imperialism as an overarching histori­

cal context for the action of the play. There is a se­
ries of scenes in which a symbolically unnamed
Kenyan woman, representative of the Kenyan peo­
ple, recruits a boy and a girl as her helpers in an at­
temt to assist Kmathi to escape.

Toward the end of the play there is a long
flashback to his time in the forests: Kmathi is
seen putting on trial a group of guerrillas, includ­
ing his brother, who have betrayed him. In the de­
piction of Kmathi’s ultimate betrayal as result­
ing from his having “so hated the sight of
Africans killing one another that he sometimes be­
came a little soft with our enemies,” Ngug and
Mugo directly repudiate Watene’s interpretation.

There is also a series of scenes in the mid­

dle of the play in which Kmathi is su­

jected to private trials in his cell. These depict the colonial
magistrate’s promises to spare Kmathi’s life in re­
turn for his acknowledging the jurisdiction of the
court; the blandishments of black businessmen
and the exhortations of the clergy; and, finally,
his torture. While these trial-cum-temptation
scenes are reminiscent of T. S. Eliot’s Murder in
the Cathedral (1935), the play as a whole is far

closer in genre to Brecht’s epic theat­

re—if one is

looking for Western antecedents to set beside its
obvious debt to the Gkuyu oral tradition.

“We believe,” say Ngug and Ghae-Mugo
in their preface, “that good theatre is that which
is on the side of the people, that which, without
masking mistakes and weaknesses, gives people
courage and urges them to higher resolves in
their struggle for total liberation.” That this idea
of what constitutes “good” theater was shared by
many among the enthusiastic audience who at­
tended its first (1974) run in Nairobi was attested
to by a first-night review in the Sunday Nation: “a
degree of audience participation and apprecia­
tion which one seldom sees in Nairobi—

culminated in many of the audience joining in
the final triumphant dance down the central aisle
and spilling out into the street.” This kind of audi­

ence response, rather than official approval of
the content of the play, led to its being sent to
Lagos as one of Kenya’s official entries for the
1977 Festival of Arts and Culture.

In 1975 Ngug published Secret Lives, a collec­
tion of thirteen short stories, which he describes
in the preface as his “creative autobiography over
the last twelve years." Many of the stories were published (usually in *Penpoint*) while Ngug was at Makerere, and many of them feature characters, themes, or situations that recur in the novels. Thus, for example, "The Return" is another variation on a theme that has its fullest exploration in Gikonyo's return from detention in *A Grain of Wheat*; "Goodbye Africa" deals with a situation and relationship similar to that of John Thompson and his wife in the same novel; and the ghoulish political competition to see who can provide the most extravagant coffin for the character Wahinya in "A Mercedes Funeral" presages the competition of thieves and robbers in *Caitanni Mutharakain* (1980; translated as *Devil on the Cross*, 1982).

The collection is divided into three sections. The first, "Of Mothers and Children," includes three of Ngug's earliest stories and conveys a profound concern for the hardships endured by women in traditional Gkuyu society, particularly the plight of barren women, thereby presaging the dominant role played by women in much of Ngug's fiction. The stories in the second section, "Fighters and Martyrs," either explore the confusion and indecision that result from the conflict between Gkuyu tradition and Christianity, perceived in terms very similar to those of *The River Between*, or deal with the State of Emergency and its aftermath.

The last section is notable for three much longer stories, written after Ngug's return to Kenya from Evanston in 1971. "Minutes of Glory," "A Mercedes Funeral," and "Wedding at the Cross," focus on the victims of postindependence Kenya's much-bruited economic "success": those left behind or trampled underfoot in the scramble for wealth and stature. These are highly accomplished stories, scathingly satirical, and similar in mood to much of *Petals of Blood*; they conclusively give the lie to Ngug's 1973 comment to Sander and Munro: "I don't think I'm particularly good at them [short stories] myself."

Ngug spent September 1975 as a guest of the Soviet Writers Union at Yalta, where he completed *Petals of Blood*. "It was not," said Ngug in a 1978 *Weekly Review*, "a very easy novel to write. It kept changing all the time. I grew with it all the time. And that is why it took so long to write." Change is a word that recurs repeatedly in Ngug's answers to questions about how *Petals of Blood* relates to his other works: "I feel that I have
changed, in terms of outlook," he told Anita Shreve in 1977.

The fiction Ngugi produced in the 1970s does not simply embody more explicit statements of positions already held when writing the earlier works, as one might infer from many of Ngugi's critics. Killam, for example, in discussing Secret Lives in his Introduction to the Writings of Ngugi, says: "Ngugi's position in the stories as in A Grain of Wheat and Petals of Blood is that of a humane socialist..." In fact Petals of Blood reveals a marked break from the liberal humanism of his early works, mediated aesthetically through Christian and Gikuyu mythology and the "Great Tradition," and a shift to a militant socialism informed by Marx, Fanon, and Amilcar Cabral.

Ngugi has been quite explicit about the ideological thrust of his 1977 novel compared to the previous ones. Referring to the characters, he said in his 1978 Weekly Review interview: "I am more interested in their development from the stage of black cultural nationalism to the stage of class consciousness. From a stage when he [a character] sees oppression in terms of culture alone, to the stage when he can see oppression and exploitation as being total, that is, as being economic, political and cultural." Ngugi sees this novel, as he told Jürgen Martini in 1981, as representing "a shift...from a concentration on the vacillating psychology of the petit bourgeoisie to the position of the worker and the peasant." However, none of the four main characters is, strictly speaking, a representative worker or peasant.

The central focus of the novel is on the fictional village of Ilmorog, which changes, in the twelve years the action of the novel takes, from a drought-stricken dereliction in the middle of nowhere to a commercial boomtown astride the Transafrica Highway. Ilmorog's "progress," representative of that of postindependence Kenya as a whole, is the vehicle for the most comprehensive critique in African literature of the corruption and indifference of the neocolonial elite. The practical consequences of the village's economic and cultural dependence is seen most starkly in the poverty and dispossession of the peasantry. Ilmorog's condition at the beginning of the novel is described as that of "an island of underdevelopment which after being sucked thin and dry was itself left standing, static, a grotesque distorted image of what peasant life was and could be."

In order to place Ilmorog's fate in its
proper historical context, Ngug reconstructs Kenya's history from precolonial times. As the character Karega puts it: "To understand the present ... you must understand the past. To know where you are, you must know where you came from...." Knowing where one came from, in this novel, involves, in marked contrast to Ngug's early novels, understanding the relationship between education and the ideology it serves.

The structure of the novel is borrowed from the detective story. Three prominent company directors in New Ilmorog have been murdered by arson; the four main characters in the novel, Munira, Wanja, Karega, and Abdulla, have been arrested as suspects; and the present-time of the novel is taken up with Inspector Godfrey's investigation of the murder, conducted mainly by the extraction of a lengthy written statement from Munira, the headmaster of the village school, in which he recounts events in Ilmorog since he arrived there twelve years earlier. Much of the narrative thus takes the form of extended flashbacks that, in turn, allow scope for the reminiscences of the other three main characters. The four individual histories are gradually laid bare, as are the many coincidental points at which those histories intersect with each other and with those of the three murdered men. The history of the community in the days before Munira's first arrival is reconstructed through the reminiscences of Nyakinyua, Wanja's grandmother, an archetypal village elder who is the guardian of Gkuyu myth, legend, and lore.

Of the four central characters Wanja is the dominant personality. Her promising school career is terminated by her seduction, impregnation, and abandonment by Kimeria, who becomes one of the murdered men, and she earns a precarious and sordid living as a barmaid before arriving in Ilmorog. Once there, her dynamism leads to her becoming a successful businesswoman, initially via the brewing of Theng'eta, a traditional herbal spirit made from flowers with the "petal of blood" of the title. She becomes involved in relationships with Munira, Karega, and Abdulla in turn, but, bitterly disillusioned by the loss of her brewing business, as a result of the greed of capitalist investors in New Ilmorog, and by her abandonment by Karega, she uses her remaining money to set herself up as the madam of the market brothel in which the three company directors are incinerated. The philosophy by which Wanja
then regulates her life is: “This world . . . this Kenya . . . this Africa knows only one law. You eat somebody or you are eaten. You sit on somebody or somebody sits on you.”

Munira is a portrait of inadequacy—the epitome in fact of the “vacillating psychology of the petit bourgeois.” Expelled from Siriana for his part in a pupils’ strike, he becomes a schoolteacher and accepts a post in Ilmorog as a refuge from his rigid, Christian wife and father and from his sense of failure in the face of the worldly success of his siblings. Munira’s father, Waweru, is a wealthy landowner who acquired his wealth through collaboration with the colonial government and carries much of the weight of Ngugi’s criticism of institutionalized Christianity. Inadequate as a teacher, anxious to avoid having to make choices and become involved in other people’s lives, and unable to have a fulfilling relationship with Wanja, Munira eventually consigns himself to a fanatical revivalist Christianity.

Karega, as part of a pattern of repetition to be found throughout the novel, was also expelled from Siriana for his involvement in a pupils’ strike in protest against an inflexibly Eurocentric education. Karega becomes Munira’s assistant and conceives of the villagers’ epic journey to Nairobi—consciously reminiscent of the march of the women in Sembène Ousmane’s God’s Bits of Wood—to seek drought aid from Ilmorog’s absentee member of Parliament. The journey rekindles the collective spirit in the community, but its end result, the development of new Ilmorog, brings, by a bitter irony, the final destruction of that community. Dismissed because of Munira’s jealousy, Karega leaves Ilmorog but returns to become the trade-union organizer at the Ilmorog brewery. Of all the characters, Karega learns most during the course of the action, and through his perceptions much of the novel’s criticism of the neocolonial dispensation in Kenya is voiced.

Abdulla is the novel’s representative former Mau Mau guerilla, whose unqualified heroism, depicted in Fanonist terms, is a marked change from the equivocation surrounding the treatment of the Mau Mau in Ngugi’s earlier novels. Maimed in the forest and unrewarded for his sacrifice after independence, he returns as a petty trader and storekeeper to Ilmorog. Infused with the spirit of the warrior heroes of Kenya’s first resistance to colonialism, he comes into his own as the community’s chief storyteller and inspiration.
on the journey to Nairobi.

Abdullæ, dispossessed and impoverished in New Ilmorog, fathers the child Wanja conceives, after so many years of waiting, at the end of the novel. This child serves the same symbolic function as the pregnant woman Gikonyo plans to incorporate in his carved stool. The baby signifies, as Ngùg told Shreve, that "There are always possibilities of renewal and growth ... possibilities of creating a new world through a united people's determined resistance against imperialism, against foreign domination, against all other social forces that diminish men and women."

In keeping with the movement away from the liberal individualism of his earlier fiction and the focus on the history of Ilmorog as a community, Ngùg makes extensive use of community-oriented fictional techniques. The Ilmorog community as a whole is the narrator of the first part of the novel; there is frequent recourse to untranslated passages of Gikuyu and Kiswahili; many more songs are incorporated into the text than was the case in his earlier novels; the names of the characters have suggestive meanings in the vernacular; and the recounting of myth, legend, and history, as well as the frequent reminiscences of the main characters, fit into the pattern of traditional storytelling.

Ngùg no longer feels the aesthetic need to construct a fictional balance by interiorizing villains such as Kimerta. This new approach led to adverse critical response, such as that by Gerald Moore, who castigates the "melodramatic encounters with figures of corruption and evil ... cardboard 'baddies' who are never anything but bad...". Taxed about such reactions, Ngùg explained to Shreve: "In this novel there are individual characters that are not fully explored. They are supposed to stand as class types, as typical of a class that has come to be completely indifferent to the cry of the people."

The critical reception of Petals of Blood has tended to be rather less enthusiastic than that accorded to A Grain of Wheat, generally as a result of uneasiness about Ngùg's conflation of the categories of literature and politics. Robson, for example, says, "in Petals of Blood Ngùg goes beyond what is acceptable in fiction; he is giving us polemic." David Cook and Michael Okenimkpe assert that "the intellectual skeleton grins through the vital literary flesh in a number of places in Petals of Blood," but they conclude, "A Grain of Wheat is the more perfect novel, but Petals of Blood is ar-
guably the greater.” Eustace Palmer almost cer­
tainly speaks for the majority of Ngu’s readers in Africa when he concludes, “It  is enough that
he [Ngu] has presented the problems of his soci­
ety as powerfully as anyone can.” Taking A Grain
of Wheat and Petals of Blood together, Moore
would find a good deal of critical support for his
assertion that these two novels “form the most im­
pRESSive and original achievement yet in African
fiction.”

In 1976, responding to a request from a
woman from Kamrthu village—“Why don’t you
and others of your kind give some [of your] educa­
tion to the village?”—Ngu became involved as
chairman of the cultural committee of the
Kamrthu Community Education and Cultural
Centre, which was being transformed from a dis­
used youth center into a cooperative labor proj­
ect focusing on adult education, cultural develop­
ment, craft production, and health awareness.

After a successful initial literacy project the
next step was a venture into cultural activities,
and in December 1976 Ngu and Ngu wa
Mr. chairman of the center’s education com­
m mittee, were commissioned to produce the working
script for a play. By the time the play, Nguahika
Ndeenda, opened in October 1977, the script had
been transformed by additions made by the local
peasants; an open-air theater with raised stage,
roofed dressing-rooms, and a two-thousand-seat
auditorium had been built; and a cast and orches­
tra consisting entirely of local talent had come to­
gether in a production that drew enthusiastic audi­
dences of thousands.

The symbolic focus of the play is the
framed deed to one and a half acres of land that
hangs in the house of a farm laborer, Kguunda
wa Gathoni, and his wife, Wangeci. The plot
shows how Kguunda’s employer, Koi, a wealthy
Christian businessman, gains possession of the
land (so that a foreign-owned insecticide facto­
y can be built on it) by persuading Kguinda to
join the church and to mortgage the land so that
he can pay for a Christian wedding service in
order to “cleanse” his “sinful,” traditional mar­
riage. Kguunda succumbs because he and
Wangeci are led to believe that this service is to en­
able their daughter Gathoni to marry Koi’s son
John. But John seduces her and abandons her to
the life of a barmaid when she falls pregnant.
When Kguunda fails to repay the loan, the bank
of which Koi is a director, forecloses; the land is
auctioned; and Koi buys it. In broad terms the
play, as Ngūg puts it in *Decolonising the Mind* (1986), “depicts the proletarisation of the peasantry in a neocolonial society.” This play is relentless in its attack on imported religions, particularly Christianity: “Religion is the alcohol of the soul! Religion is the poison of the mind!” It concludes, strikingly, “The voice of the people is the voice of God.”

Formally the most important elements of the drama are mime and, particularly, song and dance which are an integral part of the action. As Ngūg says (in *Decolonising the Mind*), “the song arises from what has gone before and it leads to what follows. The song and the dance become a continuation of the conversation and of the action.”

The success of a venture in community theater such as *Ngaahika Ndeenda* will ultimately be measured in social and political, rather than purely literary, terms, but the verdict of Magayu K. Magayu in the *Weekly Review* (25 April 1980) seems apt when he describes the play as “a revolutionary classic of our time.”

A self-help cultural center that gave peasants and workers a collective confidence in their abilities and a collective cultural focus was seen by Kenyan authorities as posing a political threat—far more of a threat than that posed by the chairman of a university literature department occupying his time with the writing of novels and plays in English, however critical those might be of the government. On 16 December 1977 the district commissioner of Kiambu withdrew the licence for any further performances of the play, and on 31 December Ngūg was taken to Kamiti Maximum Security Prison as a political detainee.

*Detained: A Writer’s Prison Diary*, published in 1981, provides a vivid account of Ngūg’s experience during his year in detention. But *Detained* is more than just an account of the day-to-day life of a political prisoner; it also presents Ngūg’s impassioned reflections on Kenya’s colonial and postindependence history and on the transformation of Kenyatta from the anticolonial nationalist of the 1930s to the self-serving president of the 1980s; and it provides an invaluable account of the gestation of Ngūg’s prison novel, *Caitaani Mṣatharabain* (*Devil on the Cross*).

The writing of a novel in Gkūyū while in detention was conceived of by Ngūg as not only “an insurrection of a detained intellect” but also “one way of keeping my mind and heart together.” The first draft of *Caitaani* took Ngūg
ten months to write and was virtually complete when he was released on 12 December 1978. It was originally written on toilet paper, discovered, confiscated, and then returned to Ngugi by the senior superintendent with a critical comment destined for immortality: “I see nothing wrong with it.” Cattaani is the classic prison novel.

Like Petals of Blood, Cattaani has four main protagonists. Of these the most important is Warnga, a young secretary whose promising academic career has been ruined as a result of her seduction and impregnation by a rich old man. When the novel opens, she has been sacked for refusing her boss’s advances, but by the end she has become an emancipated and self-confident motor mechanic, a “heroine of toil.” Ngugi describes her genesis in Detained: “Because the women are the most exploited and oppressed section of the entire working class, I would create a picture of a strong determined woman with a will to resist and to struggle against the conditions of her present being.”

The other three characters are Gaturia, a radical music student attempting to compose an oratorio that will convey the whole of Kenya’s history; Wangar, a heroine of the liberation struggle, a dispossessed peasant whose attempts to find employment in Nairobi have led to her arrest for vagrancy; and Muturi, who is an enigmatic leader of an undefined workers’ revolutionary movement.

The four meet for the first time in a matatu (a transport for hire—usually a minibus), on their way to a cave near Ilmorog to attend, as spectators, a “Competition in Modern Theft and Robbery.” The journey provides the framework for the recounting of their individual histories. They attend the competition and are duly appalled by the bare-faced cynicism with which the competitors, all members of the bourgeoisie, boast of their various methods of exploiting the Kenyan masses.

Wangar reports the presence of these robbers and thieves to the local police (her promise to do so having been the condition of her release) and is arrested for her pains. Muturi leads a procession of peasants and workers in a march on the cave, where they disrupt the competition but are violently dispersed by the police, and Muturi is also arrested. Warnga is profoundly affected by the experience and devotes herself to the workers’ cause, while Gaturia, with whom she falls in love, gets on with his composition.
The novel ends when, prior to their marriage, Gaturiatake Wangata to meet his parents. His father turns out to be the rich old man, who tries to seduce Wangata again, so she shoots him.

Roughly half the novel is taken up with the description of the competition in the cave, a tour de force of satire and burlesque, combining an irrepressible imaginative inventiveness with a relentless exposure of political corruption and economic chicanery. The competitors, who have to announce their credentials in terms of the cars and women they possess, recount their methods of achieving wealth—which range from land speculation to employing aged or crippled white women as headmistresses and motorized white mannequins as dummy pupils in order to attract the children of the black elite to “international” schools—and conclude with their blueprints for novel ways of exploiting the masses in the future.

Ngug's satire is at its most devastating. The mildest suggestion is that the air should be canned for sale to the peasants and that they should be sold earth by the potful for cultivation. One competitor envisages a factory for making human parts: “This would mean that a really rich man would never die. . . . We could purchase immortality with our money and leave death as the prerogative of the poor.” But the climax comes when Kneenderi wa Kanyuanjii plans to pen his workers on his farm with barbed wire and fix machines to their bodies for milking their sweat, their blood, and their brains, which can then be piped away for export.

In Caitanni the unequivocal political stance of Ngug's fiction is assured—drawing ultimately perhaps on Wangata's recognition that “There is no love that is not linked with hate. How can you tell what you love unless you know what you hate?” The novel's ending countenances no doubt as to the moral and political correctness of Wangata's resorting to the gun as a necessary instrument of class struggle in her execution of the symbolic representative of Kenya's neocolonial bourgeoisie, “parasites that live on the trees of other people's lives!” Before she pulls the trigger, Wangata speaks “like a people's judge about to deliver his judgement.”

Ngug's control of fictional form is masterly, particularly in the adroitness with which he manages to dovetail the widely divergent modes of fictional realism—employed in the framing narrative and the flashbacks conveying the life stories of the main characters—and burlesque satire,
which informs the cave scene. The finished prod-
uct fully justifies Ngūgī's resolve, described in De-
tained, to "use any and everything I had ever
learnt about the craft of fiction—allegory, para-
ble, satire, narrative, description, reminiscence,
flash-back, interior monologue, stream of con-
sciousness, dialogue, drama—provided it came
naturally in the development of character, theme
and story." Cook and Okenimkpe rightly assert
that "Ngūgī's determination to communicate
more generally has led him not towards technical
crudity but to a new and more appropriate kind
of technical brilliance."

In formal terms the writing of this novel in
Gkuyu has resulted in a far heavier reliance
even than that in Petals of Blood on devices drawn
from, and deliberately signaling the novel's relation-
ship with, an oral tradition. The narrator re-
fers to himself as "Prophet of Justice" and is ad-
dressed as Gicaandi Player on the opening page:
the use is made of proverbs and riddles in di-
alogue: figurative language almost always has a
local reference; and songs, particularly Mau Mau
liberation songs, are integrated into the narra-
tive. As in his previous novel the plot relies on coin-
cidence and the chance intersections of the lives
of the main characters in the past.

In keeping with his unequivocal political posi-
tion and the challenge posed to half-committed in-
tellectuals (not, however, his main target group),
there is a strong element of the medieval moral-
ity play about Caitanni. As Muturi puts it, "Our
lives are a battle field on which is fought a continu-
ous war between the forces that are pledged to
confirm our humanity and those determined to
dismantle it. . . ." Satan himself is one of the dram-
atīs personae, in the form of "The Voice," which
speaks to Warnga in a vision. He is allowed
some of the most penetrating criticisms of neocolo-
nial Kenya in the novel (giving rise to the most
complex ambiguity in the novel from an interpre-
tive point of view), but he is unsuccessful in tempt-
ing her toward a self-seeking individualism.

The title's reference to the Devil—crucified
(historically perhaps at "Independence") but res-
cued from the cross and nursed back to health
by his worshippers, the postindependence bourgoisie—is only the most obvious of many
ironic references made to Christianity, whose my-
thology remains, in Ngūgī's view, more widely ac-
cessible than any other to an audience consisting
of all the peoples of Kenya. Ngūgī's irony at the ex-
pense of institutionalized religions also extends
... to Islam.

Ngugi’s project in Caiitemi can best be summed up by reference to part of the testimony of Khaahu wa Gatheeca, one of the competitors in the cave, who says: “I’m very grateful to the masses of the Kenyan people. For their blindness, their ignorance, their inability to demand their rights are what enable us, the clan of man-eaters, to feed on their sweat without their asking us too many awkward questions.” The novel is addressed primarily to the peasants and workers of Kenya and is designed to encourage the asking of awkward questions and the demanding of rights.

On its publication in Gkuyu in Nairobi, the novel was an instant success, going almost immediately into second and third printings. It reached a wide audience of nonliterate Gkuyu via, among other means, public readings in matatus and by professional readers who sprang up in bars, timing the emptying of their glasses to coincide with climaxes in the plot. Ngugi’s assertion of the political role of fiction makes it difficult to assess the novel’s success in any terms other than his own: how many more people are asking awkward questions?

Ngugi was eventually released from detention in 1978 as part of a general amnesty following Kenyatta’s death earlier in the year. Ngugi was never given any reasons for his detention. If the intention was to intimidate him, or as he speculated, that his “brain would turn into a mess of rot,” the exercise was obviously a signal failure. In terms of the production of fiction, Ngugi’s spell as prisoner K6.77 in Kamt was his most intensely productive period since his days at Makerere. Writing in prison, Ngugi said, “I am where I am because I have written about and believed in a Kenya for Kenyans, because I have attempted to hold up a mirror through which Kenyans can look at themselves in their past, their present and perhaps in their future.” Ngugi continued to hold up that mirror, his determination to do so merely strengthened by his imprisonment.

Ngugi was never reinstated in his post at the university or given any explanation as to why he was not. Instead he was consigned to what Victoria Brittain describes in her preface to Barrel of a Pen (1983) as “the limbo Kenya reserves for its most articulate government critics. They become unemployable and isolated—a form of subtle torture which has broken less resilient people.”
Apart from trips abroad, such as his visit to Denmark in response to an invitation to take part in the 75th anniversary celebrations of the Danish Library Association in December 1980, and his visit to Zimbabwe in 1981, Ngug was occupied for the next two years with the English translation of Catanani (Devil on the Cross) and the publication of Detained and his second collection of essays, Writers in Politics (1981).

The collection comprises thirteen essays, written between 1970 and 1980, whose main concern is summed up by Ngug in the preface: "what's the relevance of literature to life?" Ngug explains that he has titled the book Writers in Politics "because literature cannot escape from the class power structures that shape our everyday life. Here a writer has no choice. . . . Every writer is a writer in politics. The only question is what and whose politics?"

As Homecoming is integral to the world of his early novels, so these essays are the obvious secondary source to turn to for an elaboration of the ideas embodied in Ngug's fiction and drama in the 1970s. The attack on imperialism, monopoly capitalism, and cultural dependency is unremitting and more forthright than in Homecoming. The topics range from the teaching of literature in schools, to the appropriate language for African literature (during which discussion Ngug coins the term "Afro-Saxon" literature for African literature written in English), to tributes to the assassinated J. M. Kariuki. Ngug's concern for the plight of the oppressed reaches out from Kenya to America and Asia, and he focuses, in particular, on South Korea.

During the early 1980s Ngug also maintained his involvement with the Kamrthu Community Education and Cultural Centre, though there were no plays for three years after the closure of Ngaahika Ndeenda. In 1981 he wrote the working script for a musical "Maitu Njurga" (Mother Sing For Me), which the group hoped to perform at the Kenyan National Theatre in February 1982. Unlike that of Ngaahika Ndeenda, the setting for this play is not contemporary; it deals with the colonial system in the 1930s and, as Ngug says in Decolonising the Mind, “depict[s] the heroic struggle of Kenyan workers against the early phase of imperialist capitalist 'primitive' accumulation with confiscation of the land, forced labour on the same stolen land and heavy taxation to finance its development into settler run plantations.”
The play's focus on the colonial rather than neocolonial system in Kenya was not enough, however, to deflect the unwelcome attentions of the state. The play was not granted the necessary license to open at the National Theatre. The university authorities were instructed to keep the performers out of the university theater when the group tried the expedient of continuing "open" rehearsals there—but not before some ten thousand people had attended such "rehearsals." On 10 March 1982 Ngug published a hard-hitting statement, which is reprinted in *Barrel of a Pen*, condemning the government's suppression of the play. On 11 March the government revoked the license of Kamiru Community Education and Cultural Centre. On 12 March three truckloads of armed policemen arrived and razed the Kamiru people's open-air theater.

Three months later, in early June 1982, in an atmosphere of mounting tension as the government once again set about detaining progressive politicians, lawyers, and academics, Ngug left Nairobi on his way to attend the launching of *Devil on the Cross* in London. The attempted coup in August took place in his absence, the climate of repression has intensified ever since, and Ngug has been unable to return to Kenya.

Since mid 1982 Ngug has been based in London but has traveled extensively: to Sweden and West Germany in 1982; to Zimbabwe; to West Germany again, where he was a guest professor at Bayreuth University for two months; to Fiji, and to New Zealand, where he gave the Robb lectures at Auckland University, subsequently published as *Decolonising the Mind*; and to the United States in 1985 and again in 1989, when he taught at Yale University for a term.

Although it contains little new material, *Decolonising the Mind* is a valuable addition to Ngug's publications in that it neatly condenses much of his earlier arguments on language, literature, and society into four, often informatively autobiographical, essays: "The Language of African Literature"; "The Language of African Theatre"; "The Language of African Fiction"; and "The Quest for Relevance."

Ngug spent the first half of 1986 taking a film course in Sweden, and he completed a twenty-minute feature film, "Blood-grapes and Black Diamonds," which examines the South African sanctions issue and draws attention, in particular, to the economic self-interest underlying Western opposition to sanctions. Besides publishing *Barrel of
a Pen, a collection of essays in the same vein as those in Writers in Politics, and Decolonising the Mind, Ngugi has also published three children's books in Gkuyu and a booklet, Writing Against Neo-colonialism (1986), as well as a second novel in Gkuyu, Matigari ma Njiruungi (1986; translated as Matigari, 1989).

As an adaptation of the novel form to the purpose of raising the revolutionary consciousness of Gkuyu peasants and workers through the incorporation of elements of an oral tradition, Matigari takes up where Caitamuni left off, though the greater use of repetition, the stronger adventure-story plot, and the tendency toward a less-baroque mode of satire all suggest that the novel is aimed at an even wider popular audience of Gkuyu-speakers, including children (judging by the prominent role given to the young boy Muriuki).

The unspecified setting of the allegorical story is evidently Kenya. The story tells of the emergence from the forests of Matigari ma Njiruungi (whose Gkuyu name means "the patriots who survived the bullets"), who has finally managed, after many years of hunting and being hunted, to kill Settler Williams and his faithful retainer, John Boy. Matigari symbolically buries his weapons, girds himself with a belt of peace, and sets out to find his "people" ("my parents, my wives, my children") so that together they can reclaim Williams's house, which Matigari built and which he has since fought for and won. When he tries to claim the house, he finds it has been sold by Williams's son to John Boy's son, John Boy Junior, the continuity of the name, with its weight of colonial insult, connoting a role for the postindependence elite indistinguishable from the servile collaboration of their parents.

Matigari is arrested and thrown in jail but mysteriously escapes. This experience, together with his earlier bravery in confronting the police, the way he appears at times to be miraculously protected from bullets and stones, and the way his appearance changes from youthfulness to age depending on his mood, lends him mythical status. He travels the country with dreamlike rapidity, asking everyone he meets where he can find truth and justice, and eventually he confronts the Minister of Truth and Justice himself with the same question. Matigari is sent to a mental hospital but escapes and, finally recognizing that "justice for the oppressed springs from the organised and armed power of the people," he takes off his
belt of peace and determines to dig up his weapons and kill John Boy Junior to reclaim the house. Savaged by police dogs, Matigari is finally carried away by a swollen river to an indeterminate end, after having burned down the disputed house—an ironic outcome of his original intention: “We shall all gather, go home together, light the fire together and build our home together.”

Again there are four main characters, though Matigari is dominant. The heroine, Guthera, is (like Wanja) a prostitute. By a bitter irony, this profession is the direct result of her religious devotion, which made her refuse to sacrifice her virginity to a policeman and thereby save her father’s life after he had been arrested for carrying bullets to the forest fighters. With no father to support her she took to the streets, refusing, however, to sleep with policemen. After meeting Matigari, she abandons this principle in order to ensure his release from jail, and under his inspiration she dedicates herself to doing “something to change whatever it is that makes people live like animals, especially us women.” Less idealized than Wanja, Guthera shares her perspicacity, and her reward for her transformation is to share Matigari’s fate at the end of the novel.

The other two important characters are Ngaruro wa Kirro, a representative worker at the Anglo-American Leather and Plastic Works, who is inspired by an encounter with Matigari to become a leader of a strike at the factory and publicly to defy a presidential decree against inciting people to strike. He, too, is committed to the mental hospital and escapes, but he is shot down by the police and dies. The last of the four main characters is the young Muriuki, who ekes out an existence by scavenging off the garbage dump and living in an abandoned car. At the end of the novel Muriuki is left to continue the resistance against oppression, as he unearths and girds on Matigari’s AK-47 rifle, pistol, and sword with the voices of workers, peasants, students, and “other patriots” ringing in his ears: “Victory shall be ours!”

Structurally Matigari is divided into three sections, whose titles reveal the symbolic significance of the names given to the main characters: “Wiping Your Tears Away” (Ngaruro wa Kirro); “Seeker of Truth and Justice”; and “The Pure and the Resurrected” (Guthera na Muriuki). The novel has a relatively long central chapter, describing a political
meeting addressed by the Minister for Truth and Justice—reminiscent of the cave scene in Caitamni in which Ngugi allows free rein to his delight in burlesque. Thus, for example, a member of Parliament argues that only the wealthy should be allowed to have children, and the caricatured political speeches are punctuated by a trio consisting of the editor of the Daily Parrotly, and a “Permanent Professor in the History,” and a lecturer in the “Philosophy of Parratology” leaping to their feet and singing songs from the governing party’s hymnal, Songs of a Parrot.

There are two main respects in which Matigari differs from Caitamni. First, in terms of genre, it is a far less complex collage. Storytelling is the dominant mode and carries much more of the political thrust of the novel than previously, as seen, for example, in the frequent repetition of Matigari’s personal history (insofar as a character who, in his author’s words, “symbolizes a collective worker” can have a “personal” history), which is always dovetailed with parables of “the tiller dying of starvation, the builder sleeping on the verandah; the tailor walking about without clothes and the driver having to go for miles on foot.” Generically the main variant on storytelling is parody, which takes the form of frequent newsbulletins from the Orwellian “Voice of Truth” national broadcasting service being interjected into the narrative and suggests that Ngugi sees an urgent need to counteract the hegemonic persuasiveness of government-propaganda media.

Second, Matigari suggests a far more complex attitude on Ngugi’s part toward Christianity than that to be found in the biting satire of Caitamni. Much of Matigari’s mystique results from the possibility raised in the popular imagination that his advent is the Second Coming, a possibility that remains open at the end of the novel. He is prone to utterances such as “Let the children come to me” and “You will see me again after only three days,” and he has a miraculous ability to transcend time and space. Ngugi is not simply utilizing the imagery of Christianity as a useful point of reference; Matigari’s status as hero depends on his Christ-like stature and involves an acceptance of Christian mythology. And this Christ figure is in no way undercut in the way Kihika is in A Grain of Wheat. This motif does not, of course, preclude a scathingly satirical depiction of the self-serving priest who represents the established church.
Matigari is a carefully crafted work that further develops the novel's potential as a cultural weapon in the fight against oppression. It is a powerful literary response to the recognition that comes to Matigari: "It dawned on him that one could not defeat the enemy with arms alone, but one could also not defeat the enemy with words alone. One had to have the right words; but these words had to be strengthened by the force of arms. In the pursuit of truth and justice one had to be armed with armed words."

The publication of Matigari in Kenya fired the imagination of peasants and workers in a way that closely paralleled the hero's effect on their fictional counterparts. This much is clear from the novel's postpublication history in Kenya, which also reveals just how much the Kenyan government apparently sees itself as having to fear Ngugi's "armed words." Ngugi describes how, soon after the novel's publication, Kenyan peasants started talking about a man called Matigari who was going around the country asking questions about justice... These reports were conveyed to the president, who ordered Matigari's arrest. When the police reported back to the president that Matigari was only a character in a book, the outcome was, in Ngugi's words, that "the book itself was arrested in 1987 from all bookshops—an operation involving the whole country." The "arrest" of his book effectively consigns Ngugi to a double exile: with Ngugi physically cut off from the peasants and workers in Kenya, who are the source of his inspiration, the banning of his book means that he cannot, through his fiction, communicate with those for whom he writes.

In "A Statement" at the beginning of Decolonising the Mind Ngugi announces that the book "is my farewell to English as a vehicle for any of my writings. From now on it is Gikuyu and Kiswahili all the way." Twenty years ago, in his interview with Leeds students, Ngugi followed up his statement that he had reached a point of crisis and didn't know whether it was worth any longer writing in English, by replying to the question of whether he intended returning to Africa: "I sincerely believe that Everybody's struggle, except in very special circumstances, lies in his own country where that struggle is taking place. I don't believe in exile, although there are situations where this is unavoidable."

Ngugi still does not believe in exile, though in his situation it is clearly unavoidable until such time as the political changes that his writings are
designed to hasten finally come about. A measure of Ngugi's intellectual consistency and commitment is that, since the arguments in favor of writing in Gkuyu have for him become almost moot, he still follows his original logic in the most difficult possible circumstances, thousands of miles from the peasants and workers for whom he writes. That courage and commitment, combined with a technical mastery of fictional forms and a total command of both English and Gkuyu, make Ngugi wa Thiong'o preeminent among African writers.

Interviews:
Alan Marcuson and others, "James Ngugi Interviewed by Fellow Students at Leeds University," Cultural Events in Africa, 31 (June 1967): i-v;
Peter Darling, "My Protest Was Against the Hypocrisy in the College," Sunday Nation (Nairobi), 16 March 1969, pp. 15-16;
Bettye J. Parker, Interview with Ngugi (1975), in Critical Perspectives on Ngugi wa Thiong'o, pp. 58-66;

Bibliography:
Carol Sicherman, Ngugi wa Thiong'o: A Bibliogra-
References:


Ingrid Björkman, “Mother, Sing For Me”: People’s Theatre in Kenya (London & Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Zed, 1989);

Victoria Brittain, Preface to Ngũgĩ’s *Barrel of a Pen* (London: New Beacon, 1983);

David Cook and Michael Okenimkpe, *Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o: An Exploration of his Writings* (London: Heinemann, 1983);

*Echos du Commonwealth*, special issue of *Petals of Blood*, 6 (1980/1981);

*English in Africa*, special issue of *Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o*, 8 (September 1981);


Mcere Gthae-Mugo, *Visions of Africa* (Nairobi: Kenya Literature Bureau, 1978);


G. D. Killam, *An Introduction to the Writings of Ngũgĩ* (London: Heinemann, 1980);

Killam, ed., *Critical Perspectives on Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o* (Washington, D.C.: Three Continents, 1984);


David Maughan-Brown, “Not Yet the Freedom,”


Research in African Literatures, special issue on Ngug wa Thiong'o, 16 (Summer 1985);

Clifford B. Robson, *Ngug wa Thiong'o* (London: Macmillan, 1979);


