



## A cram on the interpretation of myth in Ngugi's "*The River Between*"

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### ABSTRACT

A **myth** is a traditional story consisting of events that are ostensibly historical, though often supernatural, explaining the origins of a cultural practice or natural phenomenon. The word "myth" is derived from the Greek word *mythos*, which simply means "story". Mythology can refer either to the study of myths, or to a body or collection of myths. It can mean 'sacred story', 'traditional narrative' or 'tale of the gods'. A myth can also be a story to explain why something exists.

### INTRODUCTION

Human cultures' mythologies usually include a cosmological or creation myth, concerning the origins of the world, or how the world came to exist. The active beings in myths are generally gods and goddesses, heroes and heroines, or animals and plants. Most myths are set in a timeless past before recorded time or beginning of the critical history. A myth can be a story involving symbols that are capable of multiple meanings.

#### **A cram on the interpretation of myth in Ngugi's "*The River Between*":**

A myth is a sacred narrative because it holds religious or spiritual significance for those who tell it. Myths also contribute to and express a culture's systems of thought and values, such as the myth of gremlins invented by aircraft technicians during World War II to avoid apportioning blame. Myths are often therefore stories that are currently understood as being exaggerated or fictitious.

In European literature, the African myth of noble savage of the eighteenth century gradually gave way in the nineteenth century to the idea of Africa as a

Dark Continent. At the end of the nineteenth century, Europeans began to impose their myths and their political power on the Africans. Although colonial rule has disrupted African societies in several ways, it has given them the gift on the English language, through which they have given creative expression to their rich culture and tradition. The Anglo-phone African writers have explored experience in terms of a creative evocation of the African myth and legend. African myths and legends present the integrity, beauty and richness of their society. Though there exist regional variations in their myths, the basic principles are the same.

Nwangi (2004) describes the harmony that only explains a forest environment that accommodates the education, the philosophy and religion of a people. Similar invocation of the environmental praxis can be located in Ngugi's *The River Between*. The opening lines of the narrative presents a meticulous observation of the topography as he painstakingly described Makuyu and Kamau ridges and valleys. Waiyaki, the protagonist of the novel, belongs to the family of Mugo as Kibiro. Chege, the father of Waiyaki, believed that his son was the savior from the hills. So he sends his son to the mission school at Siriana to "*learn all the wisdom and all the secrets of the whiteman.*" (24) The story takes place in the two ridges, Kameno and Makuya. They are divided by the valley of life through which the river Honia flows. Waiyaki who believes in the messianic vision belongs to Kameno. Joshhua, the staunch converted Christian leader, is from Makuya. The two ridges are dominated by the two different religions.

According to the Gikuyu custom, only after the “second birth” will the boy be treated as grown up and all the secrets of the land and tribe revealed to him. One day after Waiyaki’s “second birth”, Chege takes him into the forest to impart all tribal knowledge. First, he teaches him all the medicinal values of various plants and roots. When they find an antelope running away, Chege comments: *“They see men and run away”*. (18) Waiyaki was very puzzled and asks, *“Don’t they run away from women?”* Then Chege narrates the story of how matriarchal families descended from nine daughters of Gikuyu and Mumbai and were changed to the patriarchal order. *“Long ago women used to rule this land and its men. They were harsh and men began to resent their hard hand. So when all the women were pregnant, men came together and overthrew them. Before this women owned everything. The animal (antelope) you saw was their goat. But because the women could not manage them, the goats ran away. They knew women to be weak. So why should they fear them?”*(18)

The brave elder of Kameno, Chege, tells his son very emphatically, *“Salvation shall come from the hills. A man must rise and save the people in their hour of need. He shall show them the way; he shall lead them”* (24). His aspiration is that Waiyaki, after learning the wisdom from the white man should lead the tribe. Waiyaki look it seriously after the death of his father. He constantly dwelt upon the words of his father and finally decided to work hard to keep the unity of the ridge against the white colonialists in the second half of the novel. He started new schools to educate the children of the Gikuyu country. *“In starting self-help in education Waiyaki had seen it as a kind of mission. It was a vision which he followed with hope and passion.”* (78) As **Douglas Killam** observes *“somehow the Gikuyu people always saw their deliverance as embodied in education.”* For Christians salvation came through Christ, the son of God. Joshua a middle-aged man of Makuyu was one of the first converts to Christianity. He stayed for sometime at Siriana, immediately after his conversion for he feared the revenge of the tribal Gods. When he became learned and understood the religion, he came to Makuyu and started preaching with knowledge and authority. He also believed in the prophecy of Isaiah about salvation. He thought *“Isaiah was great. He had told of Jesus the savior of the world.”* (33)

Muthoni, the first rebel daughter of Joshua, died a few days after she was circumcised at her aunt’s house in Kameno. She reveals this to her sister Nyambura, who

could not speak immediately and was momentarily paralyzed. She could not believe it at once and when she comes back to her senses, she reminds her sister that they are Christians and their religion will not accept circumcision of girls. She too recollects that they were baptized long ago and saved from sin. All this argument does not bring any change in Muthoni’s decision. Through Muthoni’s character the novelist might have carved out possibilities of harmony between the two religions. Muthoni tries to act as a reconciling agent, for she does not abandon any religion. She has faith in Christ; at the same time she wants to grow in the tribe. The idea is repeated by Muthoni before and after the circumcision when Waiyaki considers her a rebel, at the dance just before the ceremony, she expresses herself very clearly. Waiyaki fails to understand that she is trying for the reconciliation between the two faiths with which her life is connected.

## CONCLUSION:

At the end, though all the people unanimously accept the proposals of Waiyaki to fight against the whites, they could not bear the thought that their ‘teacher’ was going against the ‘Oath’. They are furious and wonder: *“How could their teacher betray them? How could he work for the togetherness and purity of the tribe and then marry a girl who was no circumcised?”* (174) Finally Waiyaki and Nyambura are asked to wait for the judgment of Kiamu. This shows that the Gikuyus are led by their religion and customs. Contrary to his, Ngugi focuses attention on the central theme to the exclusion of other aspects of social life. In this novel, Gikuyu rituals conventions are focused against the background of Christian beliefs.

## REFERENCES

1. Bharathi, T. “Myth in Ngugi’s The River Between.” *The Commonwealth Review* 4.1 (1992-93): 126-132.
2. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/myth>