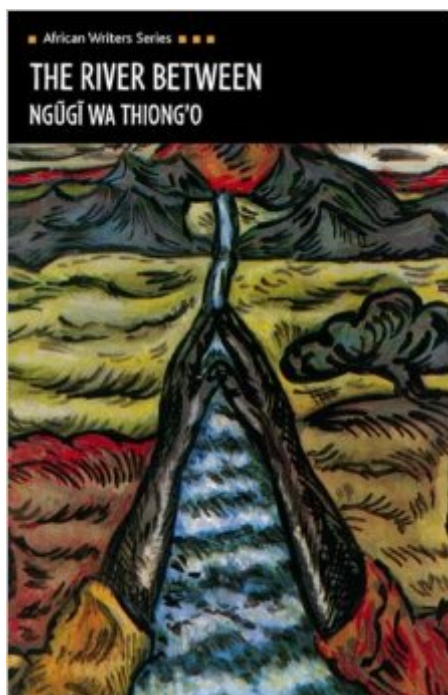


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The River Between (African Writers Series)



Synopsis

Christian missionaries attempt to outlaw the female circumcision ritual and in the process create a terrible rift between the two Kikuyu communities on either side of the river.

Book Information

Paperback: 152 pages

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Customer Reviews

With every work of Ngugi's that I read, the more impressed I am. I first came across his "Petals of Blood" by chance in a used bookstore years ago, and ever since I've kept an eye open for other books of his. I admit that I've only read his novels, though; reading plays (as opposed to seeing them performed) for the most part doesn't move me nearly as much. In "The River Between", Ngugi once again arrives at a viewpoint of tolerance while denouncing corruption in society; he manages to do so without demonizing the people on either side of any particular issue. He recognizes the strengths and weaknesses, the convictions and the doubts with which most human beings are imbued. He doesn't automatically blame all of his country's or his continent's problems on the "White Man", but rather he recognizes that the corruption and venality that continue to plague his society are things which are rooted in the universal human condition, not imports from Europe or the USA. He manages here to deal with a highly charged issue, as provocative and controversial now as it was at the time he wrote this book, namely "female circumcision" or "female genital mutilation", depending on your point of view. Almost uniquely, it seems, among Kenyan intellectuals he questions the absolute necessity of the practice to the maintenance of traditional social structure and values; but he does so while neither fervently condemning nor acclaiming it. As I've come to expect from Ngugi, he finds a road between extreme and fanatical stands - or a "river between", if

you prefer; the protagonist attempts to make up his own mind rather than unquestioningly accepting received teaching about the absolute rightness or wrongness of either traditional practices or revolutionary knowledge.

The River Between is a subtle tale that manages to comprehensively deal with a variety of themes including the challenge of leadership, the values of traditional heritage, the destructive nature of rejection of culture and finally, the multi faceted dimensions of the human personality. As an African woman in the Diaspora, the writing of African writers from the Continent is a very important and an integral means of connecting with a heritage that I am routinely forced to ignore and misunderstand. This novel, amongst many other African novels, is an important tool in the re-education of the mind, forcing you to understand the dynamics of the many diverse African cultures as well as introducing you to the unique mode of storytelling that African writers illustrate so well, and Ngugi is a particularly accomplished story teller. A River Between, although set amongst the Gikuyu, has lessons for all African people everywhere fighting for self-determination, survival and most importantly, global unity amongst African people. The way in which Ngugi deals with the issue of Female Circumcision is one that I have to respect. He does not simply demonise the practice but puts the practice into the context of tradition and heritage. Indeed, he highlights the perils of literally 'white' washing African cultures through the character of Joshua who ultimately loses both his children. One of the most memorable quotes for me occurs in Chapter 25 when Waiyaki thinks to himself about Joshua, the 'white' man's horse: "He had clothed himself with a religion decorated and smeared with everything white. He renounced his past and cut himself away from those life-giving traditions of the tribe.

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