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THE LEEDS-MAKERERE CONNECTION AND NGUGI'S INTELLECTUAL DEVELOPMENT¹

Carol Sicherman

"THE LEEDS-IBADAN CONNECTION: The Scandal of Modern African Literature," reads the cover of *Okike* 13 (1979), the celebrated magazine edited by Chinua Achebe. Inside, in an article headed "CONTROVERSY," Chinweizu, Onwuchekwa Jemie, and Ihechukwu Madubuike resumed the attack on Soyinka and other practitioners of "euromodernist poetry" that they had launched in the same magazine five years earlier. How, asked the "troika," as Soyinka derisively dubbed them, had such a "wrongheaded and blighting tendency" toward European "obscurantism" been "imported, and entrenched?" They answered that "the fountainhead of this poison" emanated from "the Leeds-Ibadan connection" and maintained that Nigerian writers who made "indoctrinating pilgrimages to Leeds" had returned to infuse the poison in Nigerian literary life (Chinweizu et al. 196).²

The focus of this essay is not with these allegations of a poisonous Leeds-Ibadan axis but with the link between Leeds and another African university in the mid-1960s, when the Department of English at Makerere University College in Uganda sent a number of highly gifted graduates to Leeds.³ Did Leeds exert neocolonial mind control on Ngugi wa Thiong'o and the other Old Makerereans who came there for graduate work just three or four years after Soyinka left in 1960? I will argue that it did not — that, indeed, Ngugi and his friends learned at Leeds (if not from the university in an official capacity) to challenge their colonial education. But I will also argue that the East African students forged this opportunity out of a somewhat fortuitous confluence at Leeds of four influences, only one of which was present in Soyinka's day: Arnold Kettle, the well known Marxist literary critic, who taught at Leeds 1947-67; an intense left-wing student culture wrought to an even higher pitch by crises of the 1960s, such as the Vietnam War; the Africans' discovery of Frantz Fanon; and the creative friendships that flourished among the Leeds African literati.

Armed with a British Council scholarship, Ngugi arrived in Leeds early in October 1964, preceded a year earlier by four Makerere graduates whom he knew: Peter Nazareth, Grant Kamenju, and Pio and Elvania (Van) Namukwaya Zirimu. The "absolutely depressing," Leeds provided instant shock therapy: "all those houses crouching like old men and women hidden in the mist"; buildings "like giant cockroach shells," the air so filthy that "you woke up to the sound of birds coughing."⁴ It was not only the physical appearance of this northern

proletarian city that shocked the newly arrived Africans; they were also appalled to observe, on home ground, violations of the British ideals they had learned to revere, as when police officers manhandled student demonstrators (Ngugi in Marcuson 7). Whereas Ngugi had previously been grateful for the ivory-tower aspects of Makerere, at Leeds he became more fully aware of Makerere's "colonial character" (Ngugi interview). But the disillusioning aspects of Leeds were far less important for the Africans than the positive: "iconoclasts with radical ideas" who set them thinking (Nazareth in Lindfors, *Mazungunzo* 89). For at Leeds, the Africans breathed a "revolutionary atmosphere" (Ikiddeh, "Foreword" xiii).

With nothing Oxbridgean to seduce the mind or eye, Leeds afforded a far better milieu than did the older universities to students seeking to shed the illusions of empire, for it was not hamstrung by ancient traditions. Leeds was then (1948-63) headed by a Vice-Chancellor, Sir Charles (later Lord) Morris, with a long-standing interest in higher education throughout the Commonwealth, a leader who turned Leeds from an essentially regional institution into one with national and international scope (Maxwell 12, 50, 433, 462)⁵ Because Leeds had hitherto concentrated on science and technology, Morris' encouragement of new arts appointments was important, for it enabled the rapid expansion of Commonwealth literary studies that was envisaged by that "human dynamo" (Ravenscroft interview), A. Norman Jeffares, who came in 1957 as head of the School of English.

Under Jeffares' predecessor, Bonamy Dobree, the Leeds Department of English had already begun attracting students from the Commonwealth (mainly India). Its development as a center of Commonwealth literary studies took off with the advent of Jeffares, a Yeats scholar with doctorates from both Trinity College in Dublin and Oxford. His imperial ambitions soon became evident. Astutely recognizing the likely boom in Commonwealth literature, Jeffares set about building a pioneering department (see Jeffares, "Expanding"). In 1958, he established a Visiting Fellowship in Commonwealth Literature that brought annually a critic or writer from abroad who gave a graduate course in his area, and he soon attracted full-time staff interested in the field: Arthur Ravenscroft, William Walsh, and Martin Banham.⁶

Jeffares aroused strong emotions, as might be expected of anyone with his enormous energy. Positive appraisals are larded thickly throughout the *estschrift* in his honor (Maes-Jelinek, Petersen, and Rutherford). Some people, however, thought "that he was a wheeler and dealer who enjoyed the whirligig of power" (Niven, "Nothing" 41), and such is the opinion today of a number of African students of the 1960s. Nazareth, who had come personally recommended to Jeffares, found him unsympathetic and even devious. Nazareth's retrospective

interpretation of him as a betraying surrogate father may allegorize the relationship between European teachers and their Commonwealth students—"hungry wounded souls wanting recognition from the mother country," with Jeffares as "the 'straw boss' who'd keep the 'natives' in line." But "we didn't see that, because we came wanting to be recognized" (Nazareth interview).

Even embittered Africans admit the importance of Jeffares' Leeds as a propagator of Commonwealth literary studies in the mid-1960s, when it gave birth to two enduring institutions in the field of Commonwealth literature: the Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies (ACLALS) and *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*. In 1964, the founding meeting of ACLALS took place at Leeds, attended by 68 academics, writers, and representatives of British cultural institutions.⁷ This conference gave an historic jolt to studies of "nontraditional" anglophone literatures. Among the papers presented was Achebe's "Novelist as Teacher," with its call for reclamation of the postcolonial world by itself — a theme that ran throughout the conference. The most immediate result of the conference was the journal, founded in 1965; Jeffares assigned the massive job of editor to Ravenscroft, who worked at the task for fourteen years.

In his speech of welcome to the conference, Jeffares attempted a definition of Commonwealth literature.⁸ He noted approvingly that because the economics of publishing would force anglophone writers to address an "overseas market," they would never become "unacceptable" ("Introduction" xiii). "Good writing is possessed of human and universal qualities," he declared ("Introduction" xviii), articulating the "universalist-individualist outlook" that was a hallmark of the Leeds ideology (Chinweizu et al. 197) as it was at Makerere. Because the call for "universal" standards was accompanied by suggestions for comparative literary study that even the *troika* might consider reasonable (Jeffares, "Introduction" xiv), the ideology was not as thoroughly destructive as Chinweizu and others wittily imagined — "imperialist motherhens" clucking "to their wayward or outright rebellious captive chickens...: 'Be Universal! Be Universal!'" (Chinweizu et al. 89). There was some chance for counter-clucks.

Commonwealth literature had entered the Leeds graduate program in a small way in 1958 (Jeffares, "The Study" 25). Five years later, when the Makerere students started arriving, the structure of literary studies for students from Commonwealth countries was set: they would take a one-year Postgraduate Diploma in English Studies tailored mainly for them. In "exceptional cases" (*University of Leeds Calendar 1964-65* 391), Diploma students would then be admitted to the M.A. program, to which, in contrast, British graduates were routinely admitted after their B.A. In his first term, therefore, Ngugi

followed the Diploma regime: courses in drama, twentieth-century literature, the British novel of the nineteenth and twentieth century (taught by Kettle), and "Use of English" (taught by Ravenscroft); in addition, he had training in phonetics and bibliographies.⁹ After one term in the Diploma program, he was moved (on Ravenscroft's recommendation) to the M.A. by thesis program, which had been his goal all along.¹⁰

Kettle and Ravenscroft were the only members of the department who affected the African students in unequivocally positive ways; both qualified for the epithet bestowed upon Kettle in his colleague Douglas Jefferson's obituary: "one of the best-loved members of the university."¹¹ Kettle, whose international reputation was based on his two-volume *Introduction to the English Novel* (1951, 1953), impressed the African students with his learning, his committed yet open-minded Marxism, "his high and generous conception of friendship," and his teaching — "a great life-giving experience" (Jefferson, Martin, and Nandy 7). "A critic with artistic, personal and political sympathies as generous and deep as they [were] unsentimental" (Nandy 12), Kettle painted an implicit self-portrait when he described his wished-for students as "sensitive — sensitive to what is going on around them, sensitive to the actual struggles and conflicts of our contemporary world, sensitive to the needs of humanity not in a general abstract way but in terms of the actual human beings they come up against" ("On Becoming" 89). The African students would have appreciated his sense of literature as "an ever-present force...enabling us to cope with and shape our own lives" (Nandy 15).

Firmly grounded in socio-historical analysis, Kettle's thinking connected with the extracurricular intellectual explorations into Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Fanon that were ultimately to make the most lasting impact on the East Africans. Ngugi credits his own political change to "the intense ideological debate" among students in Kettle's course and in left-wing student politics (*Moving* 9). Kettle's critical approach, combining close scrutiny of the text with the Marxist belief that the intellectual's job is "not to understand the world, but to change it" (qtd. "Editors' Preface," Kettle, *Literature* vi), complemented that of F. R. Leavis in *The Great Tradition* — a canonical critical work at Makerere and hence one against which the East Africans were reacting.

The "enviable and wholly unpretentious wisdom" of his "shrewd and alert critical mind" (Nandy 2) led Kettle to an undogmatic insight into *A Grain of Wheat* when he read it in manuscript. His "uneasiness" about its ideological content—he thought Ngugi's "real talent" was "as a writer of fables" — may well have affected the final version, which was less "explicitly socialist" (Nazareth, "The Second Homecoming" 128-29).

Ravenscroft was less ideological than Kettle but still radical (Nazereth interview). Jeffares had recruited him to run the Diploma program because of his kindness, generosity, and "sensitive awareness of the problems of culture shock" (Jeffares, "Obituary" vii). In his "Use of English" course, which consisted of one lecture and one tutorial a week, he "showed how language could be used or misused, how you could analyze language to see precisely what was being said" (Nazereth in Lindfors, *Mazungumzo* 89). In the tutorial sessions, he would give the students a list of topics — a cat walking across wet grass, a mosquito bothering them at night — and ask them to write fifty words on each; these miniatures would be critiqued anonymously in the next week's tutorial (Ravenscroft interview). Ngugi's description of a man planing a piece of wood was later incorporated in *A Grain of Wheat* (71), as Ngugi revealed to his teacher when presenting him with a copy (*Moving* 2; Ravenscroft interview). Two years later Ravenscroft reciprocated with public praise for the "unpretentious, sometimes astringently clear prose" of *Grain* ("African Literature V" 136).

"Overwhelmed by George Lamming," Ngugi had come to Leeds determined to write a thesis on West Indian literature, despite having had access only to Lamming and Naipaul at that point (Abdullahi 129). He was assigned to work with Douglas Grant, even though Grant had no expertise in West Indian literature (he was a specialist in English eighteenth-century literature. His friend Jeffares had appointed him as the first Professor of American literature). Like Nazereth, Ngugi expected to continue the pattern set at Makerere, creative and critical work coexisting, even if the latter had to be scribbled in between a university student's lecture hours and "God-sent vacations" (Ikeddeh, "Janes Ngugi" 3).

Aside from Kettle and Ravenscroft, however, the Leeds staff "didn't give a damn about creative writing" (Nazereth interview). They must have known that one of their new students was the first East African to publish a novel in English; they must have known, too, when *Weep Not, Child* won the UNESCO First Prize for anglophone novels at the 1966 FESTAC, and "congratulations from all over the world" flowed to him at Leeds (*Moving* 5). They certainly knew that his second published novel, *The River Between*, had been launched at "Austicks bookshop across the road [from the English Department] flattering the author's ego with a fine display of the new book" (*Moving* 5). But while he succeeded as a novelist, Ngugi's academic work did not please, and he left Leeds without his thesis being accepted.¹²

Smelling faintly of the academic lamp, Ngugi's Leeds thesis turned up later as three of the four essays in Part III of *Homecoming*. As his academic plan had required, Lamming received the most attention, with consideration as well of Sam Selvon, Edgar Mittelholzer,

O. R. Dathorne, and John Hearne. It was Hearne, a Jamaican serving as Fellow in Commonwealth Literature, whom Grant asked informally for an opinion on the thesis; Hearne told Grant that it needed complete revision, and Ngugi departed for Nairobi.¹³ Undismayed, he maintained his interest in Caribbean literature — "the most exciting literary outbursts in the world today" (*Homecoming* 81), he told a Makerere audience a year after leaving Leeds. In that talk he discussed a "larger theme" that was his own at the time: "the search for an identity in an essentially colonial situation" (83, 89). The title of his talk, "A Kind of Homecoming," must have reverberated at Makerere: Africa was home; Leeds, a temporary and useful exile.

At Leeds, direct observation as well as reading played a part in Ngugi's political evolution. It was ironic "that it was the experience of social and economic relations in Britain, more than in Kenya, that actually settled [his] socialist conviction" (Ikiddeh, "Foreword" xiii). Besides the local radical scene and travels in Britain and Europe that provided "an ideological framework for opinions that he already vaguely held" (Ikiddeh, "Foreword" xiii), there were other significant experiences in his Leeds years: his participation in founding meetings of the Caribbean Arts Movement in London, through which he came to know intellectuals such as Andrew Salkey and Orlando Patterson; his visit in June 1966 as a guest of honor at an International P.E.N. (International Association of Poets, Playwrights, Editors, Essayists and Novelists) conference in the United States, where he saw extremes of poverty and wealth that further affected his political/economic analysis (see Marcuson 7); and his attending the Third Afro-Asian Writers Conference in Beirut in March 1967 (see Sicherman 6-7). Events on the world stage also contributed: the Palestinian struggle and the European student movements (Amoti 34), and the Vietnam War, "revolting to the conscience of mankind" (*Homecoming* 62).

The East Africans brought certain distinctive experiences to Leeds. Their socialism was less an intellectual construct than a "gut feeling" that came from an African "sense of community which would involve the whole nation, not just groups within the nation" (Nazareth in Lindfors, *Mzungunzo* 89). To achieve that "sense of community" at Leeds, the Africans had to gather into an intellectual kraal, their only British allies being Kettle and some leftist students. Except for Ravenscroft, everyone else was at best indifferent. One finds incomprehension of African, Asian, and Caribbean students illustrated again and again in *Disappointed Guests*, a book that includes the winning essays written for a 1963 competition for overseas students in Britain. The essayists, whose topic was "the colour problem," reveal their "disillusionment and even bitterness at the extent to which they felt themselves looked down upon, avoided or discriminated against

because of their colour, even in universities" (*University of Leeds Reporter*, Session 1965-66, no. 1, 20 Oct. 1965: 24). Those (like the Makerere graduates) who had previously studied in a relatively benign and multiracial atmosphere found that "prejudice and discrimination in Britain were much worse than was to be expected on the basis of experiences at home" (Tajfel and Dawson, "Epilogue" 140). Many had believed the myth that their long Commonwealth experience had placed the English "above colour prejudice" (Tajfel and Dawson 144). But the first Race Relations Act in Britain was passed only in 1965.

To mitigate the effects of culture shock, prejudice, and practical problems, Leeds University had appointed a part-time (later full-time) Adviser to Overseas Students in 1952. The pioneer in this post (1956-72) was a hard-working educational psychologist named Alexander Laing, who faced particular challenges with respect to students from Africa, Asia, and the West Indies. The British students didn't help much either: as a British undergraduate wrote, there was little "genuine contact" between British students and their colleagues of color (Hopkins). Another British student observed that the thorough "Englishness" of most Leeds student activities put "students from overseas at a disadvantage" (Heron).

While Ngugi found most British students politically naive, he admired "the few who are active," by which he apparently meant Marxist (Marcuson 7). There was not a single mention of Commonwealth literature or African students in *Giraffe*, the English Society Newsletter, between 1964 and 1967¹⁴, even while "Africa Week" twice took place (1965 and 1966) under sponsorship of the student Union, while Ngugi's publications received local publicity, and while Ngugi was the subject of an interview with several campus Marxists that was prominently featured in the student newspaper (Marcuson). The Union's own Arts Festivals in 1965 and 1966 had no African contributions. The 1965 Festival (which took place shortly before Africa Week) did include material with special appeal to the Africans: a three-day national seminar on Brecht and "committed theatre," along with productions of several of his plays. Brecht underlined the conclusion to which Ngugi and his friends were moving: that literature must both describe and facilitate social change. Not only did the young Ngugi agree with Brecht's ideas but in middle age he identified with him as an intellectual "forced into exile through fear of certain death or prison or both" (*Moving* 105). In *Detained* he literally gave Brecht the last word (232).

Undeterred by the lukewarm welcome, the African students tried to reach out through their first Africa Week, 1-5 March 1965. As reported in the *Leeds African Studies Bulletin* (no. 3, Oct. 1965, p. 5), events included films, "a symposium on the political and economic

problems of Africa, . . . an evening of plays and music," a book display in the Union, and a magazine. Among the plays was one by Elvania Zirimu, in which Nazareth acted (Nazereth interview). The magazine (twenty-nine mimeographed pages) was *Africa: Tradition and Change*;¹⁵ Ime Ikiddeh, a Nigerian who was close to the East Africans, was editor and Ngugi his assistant. In his "Introduction," which dealt mainly with African politics and economics, Ikeddeh asked "readers of all races" (5) to receive with open minds the varied contents, which included a poem by himself, an article on African linguistics by Pio Zirimu, and a pre-publication extract from *A Grain of Wheat* entitled "The Trench."¹⁶

Ngugi's immediate circle at Leeds was small, all East Africans except for Ikeddeh, Kamenju, a Kenyan, and three Ugandans — Nazereth and the Zirimus. With a few others, they formed what Nazereth called in his dedication to *Literature and Society in Modern Africa*, "a community in foreign territory"; they supported one another in personal crises, debated political ideas, and critiqued one another's creative writing. Observing Nazereth and Ikiddeh sitting opposite each other writing radio plays, Ngugi was stung to action: "You're both writing, [he said, in Nazereth's recollection] and here I'm writing nothing." And then he began writing *A Grain of Wheat* in class. We would write something and pass it around (Nazereth interview). The "ruthless scrutinizing of one another's work" included Nazereth's and Ikeddeh's objection to the "simple sentences almost *ad nauseum*" in Ngugi's first two novels; as a result, the sentences of *Grain* became a "medium for communicating complex ironies or complex ideas" (Nazereth, *Literature* 149-50).

Stimulated by their Marxist readings, the East Africans' critical approaches evolved beyond the Leavisite methods practices at Makerere. Nazereth sums up their shift by saying that when at Makerere, he asked of a work of literature first how good it was and then:

What does it mean? What moral values emerge from it? Now [at Leeds] I started asking, in addition, what does the work reveal about the society the writer is dealing with?...How powerful is the writer's vision and how central to me and my society are the issues he raises and the way in which he raises these issues? (*Literature* 1)

This "socialist" analysis was added to the close attention to the text learned at Makerere and at Leeds in Ravenscroft's course. Then came a crucial intervention:

[Grant Kamenju was] the person who first introduced Frantz Fanon to Leeds...He went to Paris, and in an obscure little

bookshop he found Fanon's book *The Damned*, which was later published outside France under the title *The Wretched of the Earth*. (Ngugi in Sicherman 23)¹⁷

Fanon's book "became a kind of Bible among African students" (Ngugi, *Moving 2*), and Ngugi soon put it to work in a talk at Africa Centre in London (*Homecoming 59, 66nl*).¹⁸ Nazereth, noting Ngugi's many spiritually maimed characters, argues that not only Fanon's political theories but his case histories of psychic mutilation also influenced *A Grain of Wheat* (*Literature 130-31*). If Ngugi's question in *Grain* is "whether there is any hope that any of the scarred souls may regain their wholeness" (Nazereth, *Literature 132*), he was addressing an issue that resonated personally for himself as for most postcolonial intellectuals.

Besides Fanon and Brecht, other main literary influences were also introduced extracurricularly, in particular Maxim Gorky and Robert Tressell. Gorky's novel *Mother*, "one of the first socialist-realist novels" (Nazereth, *Literature, 9*), in Ngugi's view "should be read by all African patriots" (Sicherman 23). Tressell's massive proletarian novel, the ironically titled *Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* (1914), was first published in a full edition in 1965 with an introduction by Alan Sillitoe; recommended by Kettle, it instantly caught the African students' attention (Nazereth in Lindfors, *Mazungumzo 89*; Ikiddeh, "Foreword" xiii).¹⁹ An "antidote" to the Makerere Great Tradition of sweetness and light, Tressell's densely detailed narrative connects his characters' feelings and lives with the political and economic forces shaping them, and he explicitly advocates socialist ideology; hence his passionate and humane work might "help an East African writer overcome his limitations" (Nazereth, *Literature 22*). Tressell's impact on Ngugi is reflected in his allusions to "ragged-trousered" workers in *Detained* (80) and *Writers in Politics* (48).

For all their power, these authors were "overshadowed" by Marx, Engels, and Lenin, about whom Ngugi learned through extracurricular lectures organized by left-wing students (Ngugi in Sicherman 23). As he "avidly read" their works, he came to see "the serious weaknesses and limitations of Fanon," his "mechanical overemphasis on psychology and violence, and his inability to see the significance of the rising and growing African proletariat" (in Sicherman 23). In the rather formidable list of his Marxist readings, Ngugi singles out as influential Engels's concept in *Anti-Duhring* of "movement and change" occurring through "the unity and struggle of opposites," an idea that he incorporated in *A Grain of Wheat* "through the image of a grain which has to die in order to bear life" (in Sicherman 23). Yet Fanon remained vital, his weaknesses notwithstanding. Years later, Ngugi

labeled *The Wretched of the Earth* and *Lenin's Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* the two books essential to understanding African literature (*Decolonising* 63).

Steeped in Kettle's humane socialism and imbued with Fanon and other Marxist writings, the East Africans returned to Africa ready to do battle with the expatriates still running the English Department of the University of East Africa. The question of how to marry socialism to literature remained without a clear answer; in 1974, struggling to complete *Petals of Blood*, Ngugi asked his old friend Ikiddeh: "How does one write a "socialist" novel?" (Ikiddeh, "Ideology" 150). Ngugi's "doubt reflected the conflict of the artist and the ideologue"; Ikiddeh describes Ngugi seven years after returning home as experiencing "a consuming personal crisis aggravated by his hardened antipathy towards capitalism" and by the "indefensible" inequities of "imperialist-devasted Kenya" (Ikeddeh, "Ideology" 150). Ngugi's solution in *Petals* was to present "a realistic, fictional dramatization of the social situation" described in a central text of his Leeds years, the Communist Manifesto (Ikeddeh, "Ideology" 151).

Ngugi's ongoing "crisis" supports his own remark that Leeds held an advantage for the ex-colonial student over more prestigious British universities: the student would return from Leeds "with a disturbed...mind" (Ngugi in Marcuson 7). Among the resultant "disturbances" in East African literary studies was the well-known curricular "revolution" at the University of Nairobi, in which Leeds overthrew "the ogres of Cambridge and Oxford" who had dictated the curriculum (Io Liyong 168). Because these "ogres" were so well meaning, so convinced of the greatness of the British literary tradition and its usefulness for the development of African literature, it is difficult to overstate the intellectual bravery required to contest their hegemony.

The spirit of Leeds helped lead this battle, waged differently in each of the three colleges of the then University of East Africa: at Nairobi (originated as Royal Technical College in 1956, reconstituted as University College in 1961), at Makerere (founded in 1922), and at Dar es Salaam (founded in 1961). At Nairobi the just-returned Ngugi spearheaded the revolution, with both African and European allies. As he himself asserts, two Europeans from Leeds were "instrumental" in the practical work of setting up the new curricula at Nairobi and at Dar es Salaam: Andrew Gurr as department head at Nairobi, and Arnold Kettle as Professor of Literature at Dar (*Moving* 9).²⁰ At socialist Dar es Salaam, Kettle was Kamenju's ally in installing an overtly Marxist curriculum (Kamenju in Lindfors, *Mazungunzo* 38-45). At Makerere, the institution most difficult to influence because it was the longest established, Pio Zirimu fired off attacks on Cook's reforms, which he said had failed to dethrone the old Leavisite gods ("Questioning").

Nazareth, then a civil servant in the Uganda Ministry of Finance, continued to publish socialist criticism and to participate in literary debates. Thus, while one cannot give the Leeds experience all the credit, Leeds graduates and staff were among the most important leaders of changes in East African literary studies.²¹

Appendix
Ngugi, Ikiddeh, Nazareth, Kamenju, and
Pio and Elvania Zirimu at Leeds²²

Members of the Ngugi circle at Leeds credit one another for personal and intellectual help. In *Homecoming*, Ngugi listed Pio Zirimu and Kamenju among those "friends whose provocative discussions are always frank, free, and fruitful." Nazareth dedicated his first book of criticism (*Literature and Society in Modern Africa*) to his Leeds friends, including Ngugi, Kamenju, Ikiddeh, and both Zirimus; in addition, he wrote from Leeds to promote a play by Ikiddeh (letter to the editor, *Transition* 4.19 [1965]: 6), and Ikiddeh wrote a poem on the birth of Nazareth's first daughter (Nazareth in Lindfors, *Mazungumzo* 88). Ikiddeh and Ngugi also helped each other professionally, Ikiddeh with introductions to a school edition of *Weep Not, Child* and to *Homecoming*; Ngugi, by assisting Ikiddeh with an anthology, *Drum Beats*, which included a section from *Weep Not, Child* (see Acknowledgements).

Ngugi's arrival in Leeds in early October 1964 had been heralded by Kamenju (Ravenscroft interview). As it appears in the records, Ngugi's career at Leeds is somewhat confusing. He applied for the Postgraduate Diploma and received a British Council scholarship (application dated 22 Dec. 1963; letter from H. A. Phillips, 2 Oct. 1964). Although he was transferred to the M.A. program in March 1965 (letter from Audrey G. Stead, Administrative Assistant in the School of English, 15 Nov. 1966), his formal application to the M.A. is dated 12 Sept. 1966 and carries his note: "I have been doing it for one and a half years." He was notified on 3 Feb. 1967 of his official acceptance as an M.A. candidate, the period of study being two years starting from March 1966 (letter from Deputy Registrar). In fact, Stead's letter of 15 Nov. 1966 says that he expected to complete his thesis in June 1967; the topic was "A study of the theme of Alienation in the fiction of the West Indies, with particular reference to the novels of George Lamming." Ngugi's return to Kenya in July 1967 explains the Deputy Registrar's report that he "has not attended as frequently as required; progress not entirely satisfactory" (letter, 23 Nov. 1967). Ngugi, in Stead's words, "was always regarded as a good student,

though one who perhaps spent more time on his own work for publication (he is a well-known African writer) than on the preparation of his M.A. thesis" (letter, 30 Nov. 1967); Stead also said it was unlikely that he would complete his thesis — no doubt she knew that he was then a Special Lecturer at University College Nairobi.

Nazareth's career at Leeds was also complicated. Initially accepted for the M.A., he was transferred on arrival to the Diploma course, which he completed in 1965. Although serious personal problems affected his performance in the Diploma program, he was recommended for the M.A., but he left for Uganda on family business and did not return. As a result of Amin's expulsion of Ugandan Asians — he is of Goan descent — his subsequent (and successful) academic career has been in the United States.

Kamenju at first sight seemed an unlikely candidate for Leeds, for he had been an indifferent student at Makerere, although noted as "a kind of liberal iconoclast" (Nazareth interview). He received a Lower Second in the Makerere two-year B.A. General Degree in 1961 (studying English, History, and Political Science) and then taught for a period in Kenya. Recognizing his potential, the Kenyan government funded his studies at Leeds — the Diploma (1964) and the M.A. (1966), with a thesis on "Three 'Red' Plays of Sean O'Casey." Not only a Marxist but a convinced Communist — Lenin was his guide to *Petals of Blood* (Kamenju, "*Petals*" *passim*) — he taught at the University of Dar es Salaam; he later moved to Nairobi and recently died.

Pio Zirimu, a linguist, received his M.A. in 1966. He then taught in the Makerere English Department (soon renamed as a Literature department), where he championed orature. Ngugi credits Zirimu, whose career was cut short by his premature death on 30 Dec. 1976, with "coin[ing] the word 'orature'" (*Homecoming* 70). Active in the regional cultural scene, he joined Gurr in co-editing a volume of papers from a 1971 colloquium at the University of Nairobi (*Black Aesthetics*), to which he contributed an essay.

As an undergraduate, Elvania Zirimu made her mark as a dramatist at Makerere, where she studied education, and was enrolled in the Honours B.A. in English at Leeds. After her return to Uganda, she was actively involved in theatre, publishing three plays, and worked as a teacher and broadcaster; she also published a collection of folktales for secondary schools and served as Tutorial Fellow in Creative Writing at Makerere. She was still closely in touch with Ngugi when he was detained — "Mrs Zirimu sends her greetings," wrote Nyambura in a letter to Ngugi in prison (*Detained* 114) — and died soon after, in 1979.

Ikiddeh received a Postgraduate Diploma in 1964 with a thesis on Achebe and an M.A. in 1966 with a thesis on Ibibio orature; he then returned to an academic career in Nigeria. The Leeds University

correspondence concerning him gives hints about the kinds of problems faced by African students. In one letter, Alexander Laing discusses Ikiddeh's financial problems, describing him as "a most persistent character [who]...will not go home without completing his M.A." (24 Nov. 1965) as if persistence were a fault. Laing had earlier written that in the view of the English Department, Ikiddeh was "certainly not a student of outstanding ability" (14 Oct. 1965). Douglas Grant told the Registrar (11 Oct. 1966) that Ikiddeh had "passed his examinations in June *very very* marginally." Such disparagements have to be taken with more than a grain of salt, particularly when one learns that Ikiddeh was one of the two "lucky" African students from Leeds to be awarded a six-week educational tour of the United States sponsored by the U.S. Department of State and the Afro-American Institute (Laing, report for 1966-67, 5).

NOTES AND REFERENCES

¹ Research for this paper was partly supported by grants from the PSC/CUNY Research Foundation. I am grateful to former students and staff of Leeds University who shared their memories with me, as well as to present-day staff at Leeds who enabled my access to student records and to Brotherton Library.

² I cite the version printed later (with minor editorial changes) in their book rather than the original article, which appears on pages 37-46 of *Okike*; the earlier articles were in nos. 6 and 7, December 1974 and April 1975.

³ It was common for Makerere graduates to proceed to further study abroad; Goldthorpe estimated that 50% of the students enrolled ca. 1960 would study abroad, most of them in degree-granting courses (66).

⁴ The first two phrases in this sentence are Ngugi's (Marcuson 7); the second two are Nazereth's (Lindfors, *Mzungumzo* 88).

⁵ In 1964-65, the year Ngugi came to Leeds, 11.4% (or 747) of the 6,443 full-time students were from overseas; 28% were from Yorkshire, and 60.6% from the rest of the UK (Laing 80). In 1964-65, there were 54 East African undergraduate and graduate students: 28 from Kenya, 14 from Uganda, and 12 from Tanzania; in the same year, 37% of the overseas students were doing graduate work, constituting 30% of the total graduate enrollment of 966 (Alexander Laing, annual report for 1964-65, pp. 1,7). In 1965-66 Leeds, with 736, had had the fifth largest enrollment of overseas students of any British university, behind London (4,546), Oxford (1,177), Cambridge (955), and Edinburgh (819) (Laing, annual report for 1966-67, p.1); ten years earlier, it was in sixth place, behind Manchester, with 420 (Livingstone 111). During the 1960s, an influx of non-English speaking immigrants prompted the "Leeds Project" at the University to develop teaching materials for immigrant schoolchildren from Asia and Southern Europe (Rose 280-81).

⁶ In Ngugi's day the Commonwealth Fellows included Eldred Jones from Sierra Leone (1965-66) and John Hearne from Jamaica (1966-67). The Irish-born Jeffares had Commonwealth experience in Australia, where he had held the Chair of English at the University of Adelaide; at Leeds, he also lectured and wrote on Commonwealth

literature. On Jeffares' career, see Welch and Bushui, "Introduction" 3ff.; and Maes-Jelinek, Petersen, and Rutherford, especially the essays by Bruce King (19-24), Alistair Nivan (40-43), Louis James (44-49), and Ken Goodwin (76-79). Ravenscroft, a South African who taught at Leeds 1963-83, was one of the early critics of modern anglophone African literature (see Barnard, Jeffares' "Obituary," and Niven's "Editorial"); in 1990, a year after his death, Ngugi delivered the first annual Ravenscroft Memorial Lecture on Commonwealth Literature at Leeds (see the title essay of *Moving the Centre*). Walsh, a friend of Jeffares, had served as Professor of Education (1957-72) and was also Douglas Grant Fellow in Commonwealth Literature 1969-73; in order to qualify in 1973 as the first Professor of Commonwealth Literature, he wrote *Commonwealth Literature* (Oxford University Press, 1973). Walsh's other publications in the field include a 1973 anthology (*Readings in Commonwealth Literature*); books on Patrick White, V.S. Naipaul, and R.K. Narayan; and *Indian Literature in English*. Banham, damned by Chinweizu and others as an evil influence on Soyinka and Ibadan (196), was a Leeds graduate who specialized in Nigerian drama; he has been active as a scholar and producer in the field of West African drama.

⁷ For details of the history of ACLALS and its nine regional sub-associations, see Maes-Jelinek, Petersen, and Rutherford 254-58.

⁸ The term itself is "woefully inadequate," as Ngugi observed in his Ravenscroft Memorial Lecture (*Moving* 8).

⁹ I summarize Ravenscroft's recollection (interview). The *University of Leeds Calendar 1964-65* (391) gives a somewhat different outline, listing prescribed courses in Bibliography and in Editorials and Scholarly Method, and an array of generally described courses the "may be prescribed." The latter include criticism, period/author/genre studies, American literature, and "Contemporary English Literature" — the last of which is asterisked without explanation as "only available to candidates whose native language is not English."

¹⁰ Except where noted, the information in this paragraph derives from my interviews with Ravenscroft and Nazereth.

¹¹ Despite (or because of?) his reputation, Kettle was marginalized by Jeffares, and when he was recruited as Professor of Literature at the University of Dar es Salaam by his former student, Grant Kamenju, he resigned rather than taking leave. At the expiration of his three-year term at Dar, he joined the new Open University as its first Professor of Literature (1970-80). His influence in Ngugi is possibly indicated by Ikiddeh's erroneous identification of him as Ngugi's Leeds supervisor ("Foreword" xiii). Ngugi later remarked that if Kettle and Raymond Williams had been read at Makerere, those "two most outstanding critical minds ... might have made my study of English Literature really meaningful even in a colonial setting" (*Decolonising* 90).

¹² According to Banham (interview), Ngugi's "failure" at Leeds later came to be perceived there as an "embarrassment to the institution"; Ravenscroft, perhaps because of his academic involvement with Ngugi, denied that there was any "failure," since Ngugi never formally presented the thesis (interview).

13 Suggesting that Hearne's literary approach would have been "diametrically opposed" to Ngugi's, Ravenscroft recalled that Grant and Hearne jointly discussed the latter's recommendations with Ngugi (interview).

14 There was at least one article during this period of interest to the Africans in *Giraffe*, Martin Milligan's "Alienation: Marx's Concept," in 2.4 (1967): 3-3a.

15 The Leeds Africans produced as well another magazine, *Omen*, edited by Kamenju; it published Ngugi's review of Achebe's *A Man of the People* in Oct. 1966, but there were apparently no further issues, and it has been impossible to trace. See Ngugi, *Homecoming*, 54nl.

16 As was his habit, Ngugi considerably revised these pages before book publication two years later (*Grain* 122-28). A second "Africa Week" took place 21-25 February 1966.

17 Kamenju reviewed *The Wretched of the Earth in Transition* ("Frantz Fanon"). Later, in a review of Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*, he again found Fanon's message applicable in "progressive African states" like Tanzania ("Black Skin" 48).

18 Because of Ngugi's propensity for revision, it is impossible to know whether the Fanon reference existed in 1966 or was introduced later when he prepared the talk for publication. Similarly, a sentence that seems to anticipate Fanon's famous assertion of the "cleansing force" of violence (*Wretched* 94) may be a later interpolation in a book review that Ngugi says was written in 1963, two years before he read Fanon: "Violence in order to change an intolerable, unjust social order is not savagery: it purifies man" (*Homecoming* 28, 30nl).

19 Nazereth's essay on Tressell, "A Committed Novel," was first published in *Transition* 6.29 (1967): 35-38; it was reprinted in *Literature and Society* 9-24.

20 Gurr, a Leeds lecturer seconded as department head to Nairobi (1969-73), was recruited by Ngugi for that purpose (Gurr interview).

21 I am currently researching the "revolution" in the constituent colleges of the University of East Africa.

22 Information in the Appendix is derived from Leeds Central Files, except for the paragraph on Nazareth, who is his own source (interview). On Nazareth's career, see also Scheckter (who erroneously places him at the London School of Economics rather than at Leeds [299]).

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