

Intertextuality in Joseph Conrad's *Under Western Eyes* and Ngugi wa Thiongo's *A Grain of*

Wheat

If there were only one truth, you couldn't paint a hundred canvases on the same theme.

--Pablo Picasso, 1966

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Abstract

From the youth of Kenya's political independence to the present, Ngugi wa Thiongo has symbolized the unending struggles of the masses for cultural, political and economic freedoms from western materialism and a new breed of predatory African political leadership. Yet behind his glaring achievements as a writer, there is an allegation, often made behind his back, that one of his best creative products, *A Grain of Wheat* is plagiarized from Joseph Conrad's *Under Western Eyes*. Though serious, the quiet allegation against Ngugi has neither been independently investigated, nor debated. We interrogate the conceptual understanding of intertextuality in art within the postmodernist theoretical postulates. The paper interrogates the extent to which a writer can borrow from tradition and yet remain 'original' in his or her artistic production. It reveals that contrary to the charges of purloin, Ngugi, in *A Grain of Wheat* demonstrates that themes of imperialism, revolution, betrayal and love are global, but with localized manifestations based on a writers awareness and fidelity to his or her historical sense.