

Course code: ENC 030

Course: New Literatures in English



MA ENGLISH

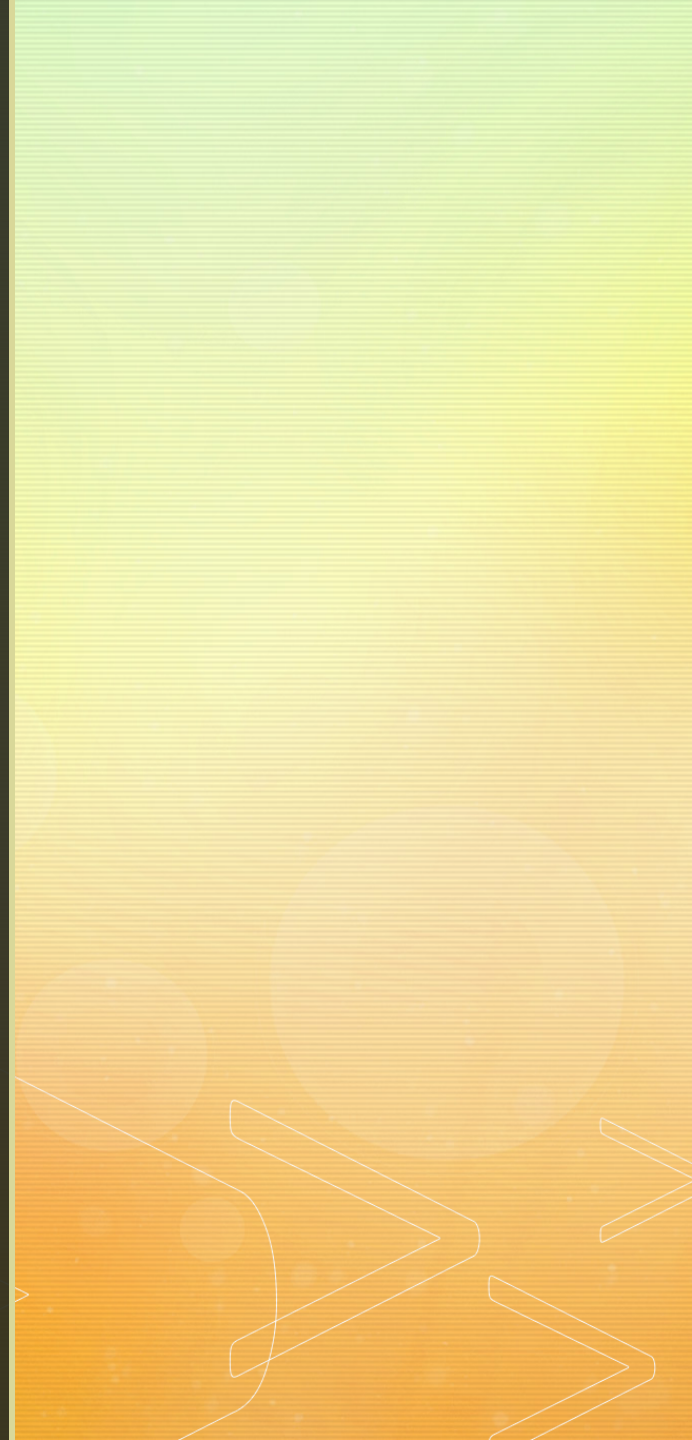
Semester 3

THE WRITER AND HIS PAST

(Based on a paper delivered at Ife Conference
on African Writing, 1968)

▾ Ngugi Wa Thiong’O

From HOME COMING Part II



PROFILE

- ❖ World-renowned Kenyan writer and academic
- ❖ writes primarily in Gikuyu
- ❖ works include novels, plays, short stories, and essays, ranging from literary and social criticism to children's literature



PROFILE

recent work is

**Globalectics:
Theory and the
Politics of Knowing
(2012)**

- taught at Yale University for some years, and has since also taught at New York University, with a dual professorship in Comparative Literature and Performance Studies, and at the University of California, Irvine
- renounced Christianity, writing in English, and changed his name to Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (James Ngugi)

NOTABLE WORKS

- Debut novel, *Weep Not, Child*, was published in 1964
- Second novel, *The River Between*, came out in 1965
- *A Grain of Wheat* in 1967
- *Petals of Blood* in 1977
- *Matigari* in 1994

NOTABLE WORKS

- Later works include *Detained, his prison diary* (1981)
- *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (1986), an essay arguing for African writers' expression in their native languages rather than European languages, in order to renounce lingering colonial ties and to build an authentic African literature

Homecoming: Essays on African and Caribbean Literature, Culture, and Politics (1972)

The Writer and his Past

- Ngugi talks about the importance of past as something important for the writer and insists on presenting equally well the 'Present' in literary works
- Feels African writers are good at presenting past because of their total involvement, but they fail while presenting 'present' except Wole Soyinka

Cont.....

- Cites the observations of Aristotle to differentiate the role and functions of a 'historian' and the 'poet'
- According to Aristotle a historian describes a thing that has been and a poet gives what that might be

▼
**VIEWS OF NGUGI
IN
'THE WRITER & HIS
PAST'**

FROM THE
COLLECTION

**HOME COMING
PART II**

- **Ngugi talks about:**
 - **The ingredients of African Culture**
 - **The obligations of African writer to vouch for Africa's Cultural integrity**
 - **The function of racial consciousness in the creative sensitivity of the Caribbean writer**

Ngugi attacks the prejudiced European view of traditional African Culture as without culture

INGREDIENTS OF AFRICAN CULTURE

- **Refutes the ideas of European writers like Rider Haggard, H G Wells, Joseph Conrad and Shakespeare for the negative portrayal of Africa and its culture**
- **Elaborates on the quest for culture in the works of Caribbean writers like Orlando Paterson, George Lamming, and V S Naipaul**

VIEWS ON WEST INDIAN NOVEL

- **Opines that the West Indian novel in English is in part preoccupied with a general quest for roots**
- **Further says that beneath most West Indian fictional characters there lurks a sense of exile**
- **According to him, the sense of alienation - individual and communal, is the one unifying theme in the West Indian novel**

VIEWS ON WEST INDIAN NOVEL

- Quotes from Orlando Patterson's novel, *An Absence of Ruins*, depicting the main character always conscious of standing 'outside of race, outside of history, outside of any value'
- Also quotes from V. S. Naipaul's novel, *The Mimic Men*, showing the hero, Singh, as a failed politician who finds himself in exile in London

OBLIGATIONS OF AFRICAN WRITER

- **Restoring African Culture to history**
- **Creating characters having human dignity and**
- **Recreating the dynamic spirit of living community of Africa**
 - **Appreciates Chinua Achebe for creating characters of human dignity like Okonkwos, Ezeulus, Odilis to show to the world of African indigenous culture and values**

The Writer in a Changing Society

(Based on a Speech delivered to
Makerere Extra-mural Students at
Jinja, Uganda, 1969)

Ngugi Wa Thiong'o

From HOME COMING Part II

Key Points of Focus

► **Emphasises the role of a writer as a sensitive being to register the changes around him**

Describes writer's role to respond quickly to the minute changes in the society

Opines that writer's outlook changes with time

- ❖ Focuses on the political and cultural changes & mood of the continent in Africa during the colonial period (in 1950s and 1960s)
- ❖ Discusses the cultural and political assertion in African writings
- ❖ Refers to the works of the Malawian poet and novelist, David Rubadiri, whose poem, “Stanley meets Mutesa” (1952) depicts negatively the cultural clash between Africa & Europe, however Rubadiri's later works reveal his distaste with the post-independence era in Africa

Key Points of Focus



Also refers to other
African writers

Okot P'Bitek,
Leonard Kibera, Chinua
Achebe, Wole Soyinka
and Ayi Kwei Armah

- ❖ Appreciates these writers for their depiction of social and political situation in Africa during colonial and postcolonial times
- ❖ Speaks about the disillusionment with the ruling elite in the mentioned authors and appreciates them for their broad outlook in reacting to the situation in Africa during 1950s

Key Points of Focus

Speaks about his own childhood days and the miseries of his family during colonial days

Speaks about the hope lingering in their minds of the better future and the song he use to hear from women working on plantations

- ❖ Describes his dream in young days to become a writer
- ❖ As a student of Makerere University, his dream was to write about his life and family
- ❖ The miseries of a big family with numerous children living on a meagre income
- ❖ His father had no land, but had four wives and the family use to have a single meal late in the evening

Key Points of Focus

Speaks about his own childhood days and the miseries of his family during colonial days

- ❖ Describes the songs of the women singing for bright days with hope
- ❖ Appreciates the political stand of the common women in the face of an oppressive enemy, the Britishers

Gist of the Song

**And there will be great great joy
When our land comes back to us
For Kenya is the country of black people.**

**And you our children
Tighten belts around your waist
So you will one day drive away from this land
The race of white people
For truly, Kenya is a black man's country.**

Brutalities of the Europeans on protesters

- **Describes the incident happened in 1923 in Nairobi in which 23 people were killed in the protest demanding the release of their leaders**
- **Mentions the another incident happened in 1952 – a violent peasant resistance against the British occupation**
- **Says that these real situation was not known to him as he was been taught in school and college only about the western education**
- **Thus describes theses educational institutions as monuments of lies and half-truths**

Struggle of African Masses

- Feels sad about the apathy among the educated people for the sacrifices made by the peasants for 'Uhuru' (Swahili word for Freedom)
- Critical of the middle classes for living in luxuries (buying positions and enjoying in mansions) on the sweat of millions
- Also speaks about the Biafran-Nigerian Conflict (for share of land) supported by the Western powers
- Opines that today's African reality is grim because of self seekers as rulers

Conclusion

- Hopes to see a change in Africans' lives by the contributions of the African intellectuals and writers
- Says that African intellectuals must align themselves with the struggle of the African masses for a meaningful national ideal
- Opines that African writers can help in articulating the feelings behind the struggle of Uhuru