CHAPTER-I

INTRODUCTION

"Literature is indeed a powerful weapon. I believe that we in Africa or anywhere else far that matter have to use literature deliberately and consciously as a weapon of struggle in two ways: a) first by trying as much as possible to correctly reflect the world of struggle in all its stark reality, and (b) secondly, by weighting our sympathies on the side of those forces struggling against national and class oppression and exploitation say, against the entire system of imperialisms in the world today. I believe that the more conscious a writer is about the social forces at work in his society and in the world, the more effective he or she is likely to be as a writer. We writers must reject the bourgeois image of a writer as a mindless genius". -Ngugi wa Thiong'o


Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1938-) , formerly known as James Ngugi, the Kenyan novelist, playwright, poet, teacher, filmmaker and critic, has become one of the most widely read African writers. He has been in exile for more than two decades because of his sharp and satirical writings unfolding the bitter reality of Africa in general and Kenya in particular. He is a true spokesman for his people and a chronicler of Kenya’s modern history. Really, he is regarded as one of the most significant writers of East Africa.

Ngugi wa thiong’o was born on January 5, 1938 in Kamiriithu, near Limuru, Kiambu District in the Gikuyu Highlands of Kenya. He was born to Thiong’o wa Nduucu and
Wanjika wa Ngugi. He was the fifth child of the third of his father’s four wives. Ngugi was one of the twenty eight children in the family. His family belonged to Kenya’s largest ethnic group, the Gikuyu. His father, Thiong’o wa Nduucu, was a peasant farmer who was forced to become a squatter after the British Imperial Act of 1915. When Ngugi was born, Kenya was under British rule which ended in 1963. His village Kamiriithu is just 12 miles north of Nairobi, the capital of Kenya.

Ngugi as a sensitive child was able to observe a number of conflicts and divisions within his family because of the struggle against the British colonial government in the Emergency period from 1952-1962. After his parents separated, he and his siblings lived with his mother. Ngugi has said of his early life:

“ My parents were not Chritians. But at the same time they did not practice much of the Gikuyu forms of worship. My father was sceptical of religious and magical practices that went with rites of passages and rhythms of the seasons. He believed in land and hard work. “


In the Preface to *Secret Lives*, Ngugi wa Thiong’o recalls the problems and conflicts within his own family:

“ As I write to remember the nights of fighting in my father’s house, my mother’s struggle with the soil so that we might eat, have decent clothes and get some schooling; my elder brother, Wallace Mwangi, running to the cover and security of the forest under a hail of bullets from colonial policemen; his messages from the forest urging me to continue with education at any cost; my cousin, Gichini wa Ngugi, just escaping the hangman’s rope because he had been caught with live bullets; uncles and other villagers murdered because they had taken the oath; the beautiful courage of
ordinary men and women in Kenya who stood up to the might of British imperialism and indiscriminate terrorism. I remember too some relatives and fellow villagers who carried the gun for the Whiteman and often became his messengers of blood. I remember the fears, the betrayals..., the moments of despair and love and kinship in struggle and I try to find meaning of it all through my pen.” (Ngugi, *Preface to Secret Lives*, p-ix)

Actually, Ngugi’s elder brother, Wallace Mwangi, was involved in the Land and Freedom Army (“Mau Mau”), so his village Kamiriithu was destroyed. Ngugi describes his reaction to the rubble that was once his village home and to the construction of a “New Kamiriithu” within the structure of the colonial government strategic hamlet policy in 1955:

> “I came back after the first term and confidently walked back to my old village. My home was now only a pole of dry mudstones, bits of grass, charcoal and ashes. Nothing remained, not even crops, except for a lone pear tree that swayed in sun and wind. I stood there bewildered. Not only my home, but the old village with its culture, its memories and its warmth had been razed to the ground....

> All around me, I saw women and children on rooftops with hammers and nails and poles and thatch, building the new homes because their men were in detention camps or away with the people’s guerrilla army.”


Ngugi first attended the mission run school at Kamaandura in Limuru till his eleven years. He also studied at Karinga Independent School in Maanguu. Later he entered
Alliance High School, the country’s most prestigious secondary school, in Kikuyu. Ngugi was the first student from his area of the country to be admitted and he excelled in his studies. He would finish 2nd in the entire school in his school-leaving examinations. During these years Ngugi became a devout Christian. His experiences at Alliance High School are reflected in his novels. The Christian teaching at Alliance High School gave him a thorough Knowledge of the Bible.

He accepts:

“Gikuyu society is lacking in mythological background. The Bible provides a convenient framework. For example, the idea of destiny with regard to the Israelites and their struggle against slavery. Gikuyu people have had similar experiences”.


When he was 12, he witnessed the thrashing at the missionary school. The teachers at the colonial school in the “White highlands” of Kenya caught one of his school chums speaking Gikuyu. The indigenous language was not allowed at school. Only English was to be spoken or punishment was in order. In front of a students assembly, two teachers held the boy down. They called him “Monkey” while other teacher lashed him. The whip cut his skin and blood appeared. Ngugi was very much frightened. He registered, even then, that Gikuyu was not a forbidden but a thing that brought pain and humiliation. Only much later he feels how he realized those screams and the shouts of “monkey”. He calls it “linguistic prison” into which generations of colonized Africans were thrust. (Washington Post Staff Writer, September 17, 2006: D-01.)
Ngugi was the only student from the region of Limuru to attend Alliance High school. He found that the school was a training ground for colonial administrators:

“In his lectures (Carey Francis, the Principal of the school)... would always emphasize that we were being educated to rule... as responsible human beings who would not become political agitators. What he actually meant was that we were being trained to become obedient servants of Her Majesty, the Queen of England, to serve her and the British Empire, and never to question the Legitimacy or Correctness of that Empire, Therefore, politics were frowned upon. African nationalists were castigated, they were seen as irresponsible agitators, as hooligans.”


One humiliating memory for Ngugi was the punishment of students who were caught speaking Gikuyu instead of English:

“The culprit was given corporal punishment three to five strikes of the cane on bare buttocks or made to carry a metal plate around the neck with inscriptions such as I AM DONKEY or I AM STUPID. Sometimes the culprits were fined money they could hardly afford. And how did the teacher catch the culprit? A button was initially given to one pupil who was caught speaking his mother tongue. Whoever had the button at the end of the day would sing who had given it to him and the ensuing process would bring out all the culprits of the day. These children were turned into witch hunters and in the process were being taught the lucrative value of being a traitor to one’s immediate community.”

(Ngugi: Decolonizing the Mind:p- 11)

The core of rebellion against the existing order surfaced early life, an example if which was his part in a school debate on the motion that Western education had done more harm than good. Describing this incident, Ngugi says:
Although I was new in the school, I remember quite vividly standing up and trembling with anger saying that Western education could not be equated with the land taken from the peasants by the British. And I remember holding up a fountain pen and giving the example of someone who comes and takes away food from your mouth and then gives you a fountain pen. I asked the audience: Can You clothe yourself with a fountain pen or shelter yourself with it? 

(Cox, C. Brian, 1997. p.537)

Thus, during his school days he learned about the Gikuyu values and history and underwent the Gikuyu rite of passage ceremony. Later he made up his mind to reject both Christianity and his Christian name James Ngugi. He changed his original name in 1967 from James Ngugi to Ngugi wa Thiong’o. To him James Ngugi was a sign of colonialism while Ngugi wa Thiong’o was in honour of his Gikuyu heritage. His name Ngugi wa Thiong’o means Ngugi, son of Thiong’o

In an interview in 2003 he confessed:

I wrote Weep not child, A River Between, and A Grain of Wheat and published the three novels under the name James Ngugi. James is the name which I acquired when I was baptized into Christianity in primary school, but later I come to reject the name because I saw it as part of the colonial naming system when Africans were taken as slaves to America and were given the names of the plantation owners. Say, when a slave was bought by Smith, that slave was renamed Smith, This meant that they were the property of Smith or Brown and the same thing was later transferred to the colony. It means that if an African was baptized, as evidence of his new self or the new identity he was given an English name. Not just a biblical, but a biblical and English name. It was a symbolical replacing of one identity with another. So the person who was once Ngugi is now James Ngugi, the
one who was once owned by his people is now owned by an English naming system. So when I realized that, I began to reject the name James and to connect myself to African name which was given at birth, and that’s Ngugi wa Thiong’o, meaning Ngugi, son of Thiong’o.

(Sander Reinhard & Bernth Lindfors, eds. *Ngugi wa Thiong’o Speaks*. p-35)

Ngugi’s high school years (1955-59) were full of troubles. During those years, many of his family members were involved in the Mau Mau rebellion. It was an insurgency by Kenyan freedom fighters against the British colonial administration, 1952 to 1960. During the struggle, Ngugi’s stepbrother was killed by the government forces. His parents were arrested and his mother was tortured. He was one of the few students from Limuru to attend the elite Alliance High School. Once he participated in a debate in which he contended that western educations were harmful to African students. The headmaster subsequently counselled Ngugi against becoming a political agitator.

After his studies at Alliance High School, Ngugi went to earn a B.A in English at Makerere University College in Kampala, Uganda where his creative power got inspiration. He began writing short plays as a part of competition in the University in 1962. Here Ngugi also found the partiality or bias of the white teachers to the black students. He recalls his college days, especially the competition of play writing:

We used to have an inter-college drama competition and I wrote a one-act play set in Kenya during the Mau Mau war. In it, a Mau Mau detainee returns home and finds his wife has been raped by a white colonial officer.

Although the play was passed, the judges,
who were British teachers, said it was exaggerated. They told me a British officer would not do that. Normally the play that comes first would automatically become part of a drama competition organised by the British council at the Uganda National Theatre, but my play was filtered out- it was never performed.

(Ngugi: An Interview with Michael Pozo, 2004)

Ngugi married Nyambura in 1961. He has six children from her during his married life of seventeen years with her. Ngugi burst into the literary scene in East Africa with the performance of his first major play, *The Black Hermit*, at the National Theatre in Kampala, Uganda in 1962. Ngugi also published his first short story “The Fig Tree” among others in the literary magazine, Penpoint in 1960. His other short stories were published in 1961 and 1962 in the conservative settler magazine, Kenyan Weekly News as well as in the *Sunday Post* and *Sunday Nation*.

During this creative period, Ngugi also began writing plays and novels criticising Kenyan society and politics. He wrote his first novel, *The Black Messiah*, renamed *The River Between*, published in 1965. The second novel *Weep Not, Child* was the first to be published in 1964. It was the first novel in English to be published by an East African Writer.

The conference of African Writers held at Makerere in June 1962 proved to be very helpful to Ngugi. He met for the first time other African literary figures of significance. They were Chinua Achebe, Gabriel Okara, Christopher Okibo, Wole Soyinka and many others. Ngugi accepted that his readings of Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*, George Lamming’s *In the Castle of My Skin*, and Peter Abraham’s *Tell Freedom* were instrumental in stimulating his reading of West African, Caribbean
and South African Literature.

After graduating from Makerere, Ngugi worked as a columnist for the Nairobi Daily Nation. He wrote various articles under the heading “As I See It”. According to David Cook and Michael Okenimpke, these articles can be seen as “A chronicle for us (of) the early stages in the formulation of his ethical and political viewpoint” (Cook and Okenimpke: Ngugi wa Thiong’o : An Exploration of His Writings, 1983. p-4) In the 1960 Ngugi was a reporter for the Nairobi Daily Nation and editor of Zuka from 1965 to 1970. In 1964 he left for England to pursue graduate studies at the Leeds University in England. He decided to earn M.A in Caribbean Literature under the supervision of Douglas Grant. Instead of his thesis work, he continued work of his third novel, A Grain of Wheat.

Ngugi was exposed to a radical environment at Leeds. He credits Grant Kamonju with introducing him to West-Indian born social theorist Frantz Fanon’s The Wretched of the Earth in 1964. Political conditions at Leeds and the world at large were sources of radicalization for Ngugi. He became influenced by the writings of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. He, thus, developed an ardent opposition to colonialism, Christianity, and other non-African influences in Kenya. Cook and Odenimpke call this phase in Ngugi’s writing “… a period of Maturing vision… a focus on events such as “Mau Mau” capitalism, socialism and nationalism…” (Cook and Odenimpke: p-13)

During this period, Ngugi emerged as an essentially moralist & humanist in his
attitude to human affairs. According to Ngugi,

The Vietnamese people’s struggle had a lot of impact on the students at Leeds... The beginnings of a student’s movement all over Europe also had an impact on us at Leeds. As for socialist writers, my first exposure to Karl Marx’s works and ideas was at Leeds University. Reading novels like Robert Tressell’s *The Ragged, Trousered Philanthropists*, and Brecht’s works was also important to the development of my ideas.

(Anmoiti: p-22)

At Leeds Ngugi’s art of writing novel achieved technical growth. His *A Grain of Wheat* has not the simple linear plot structure of his earlier novel, *Weep Not, Child*. Ngugi experimented with variations in narrative voice. He acknowledges the influence of Conrad’s use of “Multiple voices” that brought more “evidence” or “information” on an “event”. (Ngugi, *Decolonizing the Mind*: pp-75-77)

Lemming’s work was also inspiring for Ngugi, especially the use of: the omniscient narrator, drama, the diary, reportage, third person narration and direct authorial intervention. The role of personal conversations also influenced Ngugi, especially in the areas of “interventions, digressions, narrative within a narrative and dramatic illustrations” (Ngugi, *Decolonizing the mind*: p-77). Thus, Ngugi’s *A Grain of Wheat* is a new novel form by him because it contains a variety of various techniques and influence of other writers.

In 1967, Ngugi became a lecturer in English Literature at the University of Nairobi, eventually becoming Associate Professor and Chair of the Department of Literature. He also served as Fellow in Creative writing at Makerere in 1969-1970. At the University of Nairobi, Ngugi was deeply involved in a debate over the creation of a
new World Literature Department. It was designed to replace the outmoded curriculum left over from colonial Kenya. Ngugi, Henry Owuor-Anyumba and Taban Lo Liyong proposed that African literature be the core study area. (Ngugi, *Homecoming*, pp-145-150)

The proposal to replace the English Department was not accepted. The result was that a university crisis ensued. It divided the academic community and the students. Ngugi resigned because of the suspension of the five students. His not being successful in reorienting the English Department at the University of Nairobi in 1968, he found his new role as Fellow in Creative writing at Makerere. To Ngugi, it was more satisfying because there the African literature programme had already entered at an advanced stage.

Ngugi had asked in an article, “*On the Abolition of the English Department,*” 1986:

> If there is need for a ‘study of the historic continuity of a single culture’, why can’t this be African? Why can’t African literature be at the centre so that we can view other cultures in relationship to it?

Acknowledging the influence of European literatures on African writing, Ngugi and his co authors emphasized the importance of the oral tradition, Swahili literature and the Caribbean novel and poetry. They felt:

> We have eyes, but we don’t see. We have ears, but we don’t hear. We can read, but don’t understand what we read.

Ngugi did not return to Nairobi, but he went to North Western University in the
U.S.A at the end of 1970. He became visiting Associate Professor during 1970-71. A year later Ngugi had begun writing his fourth novel, Petals of Blood at Evanston, Illinois. It took five years to complete it, encompassing time spent at Northwestern, at home in Limuru, and later at Yalta in the Soviet Union as a guest of the Soviet Writer’s Union.

In 1976 Ngugi chaired the cultural committee of the K C E & C C.( the Kamiriithu Community Educational and Cultural Centre ). It ran a public theatre where Ngugi had also become increasingly involved in active participation with the Kamiriithu Community Educational and Cultural Centre where, along with Ngugi wa Mirii, he prepared a script for community participation in a self-help scheme to promote literary activities. This defence was to change his relationship with the masses.

Ngugi came to realise,

You can’t possibly write for a peasant -worker audience in the same way (or perform the same things) as you would for the parasitic jet set -age in Africa.

(Ngugi, Writers in Politics :p-54)

Ngugi was compelled to rethink the relationship between authorial ideology (that is, ideas repressed in his novels thus far) and the imaginative expression of that ideology with in the novel form (that is, the novel as a work of art).

At the launching of Petals of Blood in July 1977, Ngugi bluntly explains his motive for writing the book.
He confesses:

… I came to realize that Kenya was poor, not because of anything internal, but because the wealth produced by Kenyans ended in developing the western world… Their aid, loans, and investment capital that they gloat about are simply a chemical catalyst that sets in motion the whole process of expropriation of Kenya’s wealth, with, of course, a few leftovers for the ‘lucky’ few…

This was what I was trying to show in Petals of Blood: that imperialism can never develop our country or develop us, Kenyan. In doing so, I was only trying to be faithful to what Kenyan workers, peasants and workers have always realized as shown by their historical struggles since 1895.

(Ngugi Writers in Politics, 1981: pp-96-97)

This public display of resistance to the established political order of Kenyatta must have contributed to Ngugi’s detention without trial six months later. Earlier in October 1976, Ngugi had publically criticised the Kenyatta Government in an article in the Daily Nation for cramming The Trial of Dedan Kimathi. It was a radical play written jointly by Ngugi and Micere Githae Mugo.

Brian Crow sees it as under:

Dedan Kimathi is an expression of radical left wing nationalism, vociferous in its denunciation of neo-colonialism and the Kenyan bourgeoisie’s collusion in it, and its overt aim is to stir up the Kenyan masses to fight, by violent means if necessary, against it…

(Brian, Crow, “Melodrama and the Political Unconscious” in Two African plays, 1983:p-25)

Thus, the year 1977 forced dramatic turns in Ngugi’s life and career. Since his novel Petals of Blood painted a harsh and unsparring picture of life in neo-colonial Kenya, it was received with more emphatic critical acclaim in Kenya and abroad. The Kenya
weekly review described as “this bomb shell” and the Sunday Times of London as capturing every form and shape that power can take. The same year Ngugi’s controversial play, *Ngaahika Ndeenda (I Will Marry When I Want)* written with Ngugi wa Mirii, was performed at Kamiriithu Educational and Cultural Centre, Limuru in an open air theatre. It was performed with actors from the workers and peasants of the village.

Since Ngugi was sharply critical of the inequalities and injustices of Kenyan society, publicly identified with unequivocally championing of the cause of imaginary Kenyans, and committed to communicating with them in the languages of their daily lives, he was arrested and imprisoned without charge at Kamiti Maximum Security Prison at the end of the year, December 31, 1977. to December 1978. An account of those experiences is to be found in his memoir, *Detained: A Writer’s Prison Diary* (1982). It was at Kamiti Maximum Prison that Ngugi made the decision to abandon English as his primary language of creative writing and committed himself to writing in Gikuyu, his mother tongue.

Ironically Ngugi’s detention, designed to ostracise and punish him for challenging the establishment, had the opposite effect. In jail he produced two important works, *Detained: A writer’s prison Diary* and *Caitanis Mutharaba Ini (Devil on the Cross)*. The detention order was signed by Daniel Arap Moi, the minister of Home Affairs and later Prime Minister of Kenya. Yet, Ngugi has been careful not to blame individuals for his imprisonment, but the ideological system of “dependent capitalism”. (Ngugi, *Detained*, pp- XI ,XIV)
Detained adds clear insight into the nature of political detention and repression in Kenya as Ngugi was not the first at last to be imprisoned for political and cultural activities by either the Kenyatta or Moi governments. (Anyang’o, Nyeng’o, “The Decline of Democracy and the Rise of Authoritarian and Factional Politics in Kenya,” Horn of Africa 6-3. 1983-84, pp-24-34.)

After Amnesty International named him a prisoner of conscience, an international campaign secured his release a year later, December, 1978. However, the Moi Dictatorship barred him from jobs at colleges and university in the country. He resumed his writing and his activities in the theatre and in doing so he continued to be an uncomfortable voice for the Moi dictatorship. When Ngugi was in Britain for launching and promoting his novel Devil on the Cross, he came to know about the Moi regime’s plot to eliminate him on his return by giving a red carpet welcome on his arrival at Jomo Kenyatta Airport.

Such plotting forced Ngugi into exile, first in Britain (1982-1989) and then U.S. after (1989-2002). During the time the Moi dictatorship hounded him trying to get him expelled from London and from other countries he visited. In 1986, at a conference in Harare, an assassination squad outside his hotel in Harare was thwarted by the Zimbabwean Security. His next Gikuyu novel Matigari was published in 1986. Thinking that the novel’s main character was a real living person, Dictator Moi issued an arrest warrant for him, but on learning that the character was fictional, he had the novel arrested instead. Undercover
police went to all the bookshops in the country and the publishers warehouses and took the novel away. So between 1986 and 1996 Matigari could not be sold in Kenyan bookshops. The dictatorship also had all Ngugi’s books removed from all educational institutions.

Writing in Gikuyu became a political commitment for Ngugi. The popular response of the publication of Caithaani Mutharaba Ini (Devil on the Cross) and Ngahika Ndeenda (I Will Marry When I Want) encouraged him to continue to write in Gikuyu. He decided to work independently and it continued with the kamiriithu Peoples Theatre Production of Maitu Njugira (Mother Sing for Me). (Ngugi, Detain, p-164)

Internationally Ngugi began a debate to reassert the value of writing in traditional languages. In December 1986, Ngugi, in a talk at the African Centre in London, attacked the African writer as “a petty bourgeoisie product of colonial nad neo-colonial imperialism whose production was an “Afro- Saxon” literature a perpetual of cultural and linguistic oppression”. (Kojo, Niik and Bentil Enchill, “Interview with Ngugi wa Thiong’o” West Africa. December 22-29:2004,p-5.)

The Kenyan government never allowed Ngugi’s play Mother Sing for Me to be staged at the National Theatre. Even a licence was not given. Again as in the case of Ngugi’s detention, no official reason was given for not allowing the play to go ahead. Instead, Mother Sing for Me was performed in rehearsal for 10 days at the University of Nairobi. It is said that about 10000 people saw
it in February, 1982. Yet by March 11 the government had banned Kamiriithu performances and closed the centre. The very next day the centre and theatre were torn down by police. Even a request to take the play to Zimbabwe was denied. (Ngugi, ‘Women in Cultural Work: The Fate of Kamiriithu People’s Theatre in Kenya,’ Development Dialogue. 1-2 (1982):115-133.)

Ngugi returned to London soon after this set-back. After each difficult struggle in his life, he spent a short period in exile. However, after the destruction of the Kamiriithu Cultural Centre and rumours of his arrest in August, 1982 if he returned to Kenya, he made up his mind to remain in exile in London. Actually his exile in London had some rewards. A new Pan-African production of The Trial of Dedan Kimathi was performed by the Wazlendo Players in November 1984. Rehearsals were performed in different parts of London in the same way the Kamiriithu Cultural Centre used to do them in Limuru and Nairobi. Critical acclaim for the play had brought protests from the Kenyan High Commission in London who attempted to stop the performance of the play. (Hall, Richard. ‘Kenya Protest at Play’ The Observer October, 21, 1984:p-14)

and Comparative Literature at Yale (1989-1992). He also enjoyed the post of The Five Colleges (Amherst, Mount Holyoke, New Hampshire, Smith, East Massachusetts) Visiting Distinguished Professor of English and African Literature. Then he became Professor of Comparative Literature and Performances Studies at New York University (1992-2002). There he also held the Erich Maria Remarque Professor of Languages. Finally he moved to his present position at the University of California, Irvine.

Ngugi wa Thiong'o has also written non-fictional works such as: *Writer in Politics* (1981 & 1997), *Decolonising Mind* (1986), *Moving the Centre* (1994), and *Penpoints Gunpoints and Dreams* (1998).

*Moving the Centre: The Struggle for Cultural Freedom* examines some social issues such as the importance of language to national identity, the effects of globalisation, and his hope for a strong and united Africa. Ngugi’s *Penpoints Gunpoints and Dreams* is a collection of a series of lectures delivered by Ngugi at Oxford University in 1996. The collection deals with the role of the writer in contemporary African society and the complex relationship between art and the state.

As a distinguished speaker Ngugi has delivered lectures around the world at various universities. They include: the 1984 Robb Lectures at Auckland University, New Zealand, the 1996 Claendon Lecture at Oxford University; the 1999 Ashby Lecture at Cambridge, and the 2006 MacMillan Stewart Lectures at Harvard.
Ngugi is also the recipient of many honours including the 2001 Nonino International Prize for Literature. To add to Ngugi’s fame, he is also the recipient of Seven Honorary Doctorates such as D.Litt (Albright), Ph.D.(Roskilde), D.Litt. (Leeds), D.Litt. & Ph.D. (Walter Sisulu University), Ph.D. (Carlstate), D.Litt. (Dillard) and D.Litt. (Auckland University). He has also received an honorary doctorate in Literature and Philosophy from the University of Transkei.

Ngugi has been awarded the Medal of the Presidency of the Italian Cabinet. In addition, he delivered the Fourth Memorial Steve Biko Lecture in South Africa in September 2003. Recently Ngugi has been inducted as a foreign honorary member at the American Academy of Arts and Letters. In December 2003, he was given honorary life membership in the Council for the Development of Social Sciences Research in Africa (CODESRIA). He was inducted in Dakar, Senegal.

As mentioned in the beginning, Ngugi married his first wife, Nyambura in 1961 with whom he had six children. After Nyambura’s death he is now married to Njeeri and has two children with her.

2002 is a year of political change in Kenya because in that year Daniel Arap Moi, the president of Kenya was ousted in the Kenyan national elections and Mwai Kibaki was elected the president. In 2004, Ngugi and his wife, Njeeri, made a joyous trip to their beloved country, Kenya. He received a hero’s welcome, complete with processions of traditional singers and dancers.
“I have come back with an open mind, an open heart, and open arms. I have come to touch base, I have come to learn”, he told the crowds of well-wishers. Actually Ngugi wanted to launch the first volume of Murogi wa Kgogo, the Gikuyu version of Wizard of the Crow. It was a 1000-page novel he had been writing since 1997. (Pandurang, Mala., Ngugi wa Thion’o: Recent Criticism:p- 20)

Ngugi also wanted to hold lectures, to tour the country and to have traditional marriage ceremony with Njeeri. Unfortunately the celebration of his returning to Kenya turned into great troubles. All over the world the scholars were shocked to know about the brutal attack on Ngugi and Njeeri in his rented appartment in Nairobi. Three intruders armed with guns and a machete invaded their apartment. Ngugi and his wife were brutally assaulted. The attackers beat Ngugi and burned his face with cigarettes. They raped his wife and stabbed her. They robbed them of money and jewellery and others and then fled. The celebrated author and his wife were hospitalised and the entire Kenya was in shock. All over the world the newspapers denounced the attacks and lamented the couple’s suffering, especially the rape -about which Njeeri spoke publicly, breaking a cultural taboo. Ngugi believes that the attackers were “hired hands” representing the agenda of someone more powerful, though he has no definitive proof.

“There were those who attacked us, and some others from outside.” it is how he described the alleged conspiracy. But the case became more mystifying
when one of the suspects turned out to be a nephew of Ngugi from his first marriage.

Both Ngugi and Njeeri returned to their adopted home in Irvine. But they had to travel back and forth to Kenya to tend the legal issues surrounding the ongoing trial. Ngugi longs to live in his beloved Kenya. He is optimistic about it because there is now democratic space under Kihaki; Moi’s successor. Putting aside the attack on him, he sees reasons to be hopeful. Ngugi says,

Nobody is being imprisoned for disagreeing with the government. Nobody is being killed or having their family harassed.

Ngugi’s major fictional work written in Gikuyu and published in English is *Wizard of the Crow* (2006). It is a huge novel and the epic of Modern Africa presented in comic manner.

Really, Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s life is full of struggles, troubles, pains, challenges, enthusiasm and achievements. At present he lives in the U.S.A. and teaches as Distinguished Professor of English and Comparative Literature at the University of California. He is also the joint director of the Restoration Project at the International Centre for Writing and Translation at Irvine. Other than teaching, Ngugi edits “Mutiiri”, a New York University based Gikuyu Journal through which Ngugi offers an opportunity for new writers to express themselves. (Pandurang, Mala: *Ngugi wa Thiong’o: Recent Criticism*: p-21.)

Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s biographical and literary assessment can be concluded
with the words of Mala Pandurang:

Ngugi wa Thiong’o is one of Africa’s most prolific intellectual activists. A versatile novelist, playwright, essayist, journalist, film maker and academic, Ngugi has inspired an entire generation of Indian Postcolonial scholars by his undeterred commitment to the processes of cultural and linguistic decolonisation; his consistent interrogation of the ambivalent position of the postcolonial writer-in-English; his persistent call for a radical reinterpretation of Kenyan ‘nationalist’ history; and his insistence on the power of the story as a weapon against multiple structures of oppression. Ngugi has led the way in questioning of the epistemological criteria of Western scholarship, and the pressers of international capital and neo-colonial forces on cultural formations within the third-world milieu.”

(Pandurang,Mala,p-11)

Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s literary output is very huge as he has written novels, dramas, essays, short stories and so on. Ngugi’s latest creations include Remembering Africa (2009) and his autobiography entitled Dreams in Time of War (2011). Ngugi has written a book that is far less grim than the period of history he lived through might have produced. The portrait of Gikuyu society as seen by a bright and thoughtful boy does not allow the undertones of war to dominate the narrative. If Ngugi points out that Kenya’s contribution to the war economy meant strict government controls of the production and internal movement of food, which in turn led to shortages and famine in some areas, he also gives an affectionate account of what small-town East African society was like in the middle of the last century.
Here is a brief survey of Ngugi’s literary works.

**Novels**

5- *Devil on the Cross* (English trans.) Heinemann, London, 1982
7- *Wizard or the Crow*, (English translation), Pantheon Books, New York, 2006

**On Literature and Culture**

4- *Decolonising the Mind*, James Currey Ltd, London, 1986
5- *Moving the Centre; Struggle For Cultural Freedoms*, James Currey Ltd, London1993
6- *Penpoints, Gunpoints and Dreams*, Oxford University Press, 1998

**Memoirs**


**Short Stories**

Plays


*This Time Tomorrow*, Kenya Literature Bureau, Nairobi, 1970

*The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*, (with Micere Mugo); Heinemann, London, 1976

*Ngaahika Ndeenda*, (Gikuyu with Ngugi wa Mirii); Heinemann, Nairobi, 1980

*I Will Marry When I Want*, (English trans. of the above); Heinemann, London, 1982

**Brief introduction to Ngugi wa Thiongo’s Novels.**

Since the thesis in mainly based on Ngugi Thiongo’s novels, we shall have a brief look at his novels.

(1) **Weep, Not Child:**

*Weep, Not Child* (1964) is the most autobiographical of Ngugi’s novels. It focuses on the period at the end of World War II and examines the causes of the Mau Mau struggle. The novel portrays a society that is oppressed by loss of its land and its livelihood and the consequent militant reaction to these humiliations.

Njoroge is the protagonist who is a bright student, a self-centred youth with mission-school education and messianic ambition. His hopes are destroyed when his brothers’ involvement in Mau Mau forces him out of school. His father Ngotho has religious attachment to the land of his ancestors taken from him by Mr. Howlands. Ngotho is the only a tenant farmer who works for the White settler Mr.
Howlands. His son, Boro, who had fought the British in the World War II, returns home embittered by his experience, the death of his brother Mwangi in the war, and the loss of their ancestral land. He despises the passive attitudes of the elders and resolves upon action, joining the Mau Mau guerrillas. Jacobo is a betrayer of people who is killed by Boro. Ngotho offers himself to the authorities and confesses to the murder. He is tortured and dies. Howlands is killed by Boro and finally he surrenders. The novel depicts all Ngugi’s major themes – land, religion, leadership, and the travails of a people struggling against colonialism.

(2) The River Between

*The River Between* (1965) is Ngugi’s first novel, but it was published after his second novel *Weep, Not Child* (1964). Like Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*, it focuses on the conflict between Christianity and traditional beliefs. It also displays how colonialism creates situations that can destroy traditional societies. The novel mainly displays the conflict between two cultures on the two sides of the river. The river is also symbolic because it stands for the conflict between the Christians and the non-Christians, the natives of Kenya.

(3) A Grain of Wheat

In *A Grain of Wheat*, Ngugi challenges the reader by using different voices within the narrative as different characters relate their views of the story, though the controlling narrative is in the form of the omniscient third person. What is really striking here is the dislocated chronology of the novel. Though at its centre it has
Kenyan Uhuru, or Independence Day, the narrative repeatedly switches to different moments in the past. The narrative, though, gives no direct indication that the time focus is changing, as it does not only between chapters but also between paragraphs, which can sometimes leave the reader momentarily disorientated. This demands an alert reading, which pays rewards as at times the same event is returned to from a different angle at a different place in the novel, or the reader's response to event is colored by their prior knowledge of what the consequences will be. Most crucially, it means that the day of Uhuru itself is inextricably linked with Kenya's painful and violent past, where courage and betrayal have been evident in equal measure.

The novel is an important retelling of history from an African perspective, directly challenging British colonialism in Kenya by charting the resistance to it which led up to independence, (or Uhuru, the Swahili word for freedom). His novel questions the imperial view of Kenya's history by presenting the Kenyan perspective, where the Mau Mau movement is sympathetically portrayed as a band of courageous freedom fighters, rather than as insurgents or terrorists. The novel describes the decline in imperial idealism as well as the brutality of the British military regime in Kenya in the face of resistance. However, he is equally uncompromising about the prospect for independent Kenya, describing 'a feeling of inevitable gloom' as Uhuru approaches because of the pain of Kenya's past and the corruption which is already evident in the new independent government.
(4) **Petals of Blood**

*Petals of Blood* is Ngugi wa Thiong'o’s fourth novel first published in 1977. Set in Kenya just after independence, the story follows four of the novel’s major characters - Munira, Abdulla, Wanja, and Karega - whose lives are all intertwined due to the Mau Mau rebellion. In order to escape city life, each retreats to the small, pastoral village of Ilmorog. As the novel progresses, the characters deal with the repercussions of the Mau Mau rebellion as well as with a new, rapidly modernizing Kenya.

The novel largely deals with the scepticism of change after Kenya's liberation from the British Empire, questioning to what extent free Kenya merely emulates, and subsequently perpetuates the oppression found during its time as a colony. Other themes include the challenging of capitalism, politics, and the effects of modernization. Education, schools, and the Mau Mau rebellion are also used to unite the characters, who share a common history with one another.

(5) **Devil on the Cross:**

Ngugi wa Thiong'o’s *Devil on the Cross* is more remarkable in his life as it was written in Gikuyu. Its original title was in Gikuyu as *Caitaani Hultharaba Ini*. It first appeared in 1980 and later in English in 1982. When he was in prison, he wanted to express his emotions regarding the neo-colonial exploitation of ordinary Kenyan people. The novel was written on toilet papers. Ngugi as a sensitive writer is worried about corruption that prevails in the Kenyan society. He believes that
capitalism is a systematic robbery of peasants and workers. It is a robbery protected and sanctified by large courts, parliament, religion armed forces, police and educational institutions. The novel opens at a crush in a realistic society. There is a journey in a taxi from Nairobi to Illmorog. During the journey the driver and five passengers discuss social issues which are the most central to the novel. They are going to attend the gathering in Illmorog. The scene in the mini-bus, simply melts into the voice of the meetings of the masters of ceremonies. The seven representatives are the neo-colonial powers indulging in the most heinous corrupt practices and exploitation. Each one wears shirts made of paper money of their respective homelands and reveals his grabbing of the Kenyan economy. They take away the natural resources of Kenyans and also indulge in exploitation of the workers and peasants. Gitutu is a big-bellied person who fattens on land. He proudly relates how he has taken over vast estates from the White settlers, subdivided into plots and sold them at high prices to the citizens. Indeed, the novel artistically renders how the Kenyan bourgeois elite exploited an army of workers, peasants, petty traders and students. The Kenyan capitalists are described as the thieves, robbers, hypocrites and criminals.

(5) Matigari:
Ngugi’s Matigari (1989) as a novel resonated so deeply with average Kenyans partly because he wrote in his native Kikuyu, has received scant attention outside Kenya. It is written partly as an allegory and partly as a cat-and-mouse adventure. After he emerges from the woods, Matigari finds that his country has been sold, that his new
leaders have been corrupted, that his war has been for nothing, and that John Boy Junior, the son of Settler Williams's cook, has taken over his house. Matigari then sets off on a quest for truth and justice. He asks students and teachers, shoppers and shopkeepers, shepherds and priests where he can find them. No one can tell him, so he decides he has to take back his house, and his country, himself.

In places Matigari is a mystical journey and in others an antineocolonial tract, woven into Matigari's powerful voice. He is an unmistakable incarnation of both Christ and Moses, who has risen to lead his people out of darkness. Matigari is both a great story and a powerful metaphor for what is needed in African politics today: the honesty and equality, truth and justice that Matigari tirelessly seeks. That may be how Ngugi dreams of going home—as a hero and messiah, making one last attempt to bring down the systems he's fought against all these years. From reading his work, there can be little doubt that Ngugi, too, dreams of emerging from the woods to roam his country again, as defiant and free as Matigari.

(6) **Wizard of the Crow**

Ngugi's latest novel *Wizard of The Crow*,(2006) is nothing less than an attempt to sum up Africa of the twentieth century in the context of 2,000 years of world history. The novel begins in the present time and is set in the “Free Republic of Aburiria” .*Wizard of the Crow* dramatises the corruption and power struggles between the dictator-state and the people. The story unfolds through a tale of a
young educated man in search of a job. His quest for work turns into something far more revealing, as he struggles against losing hope. From this *Wizard of the Crow* is born and becomes a saviour to all.

Throughout the novel there is corruption and despair. The Ruler has absolute power, and his birthday gift is an idea called Marching To Heaven, in which Aburiria will build the steps to heaven, of course with the help of the Global Bank, who in the end refuse to support the idea because of the country's unrest and political instability. This sparks off the queuing mania, in which the citizens of Aburiria begin queuing for jobs, change and hope. This queuing mania is representative of many truths of modern history. After a diplomatic visit to the US, The Ruler contracts a strange malady of words, which has also affected other characters in the book. *Wizard of The Crow* is sent to cure The Ruler's ailment. The nature of *Wizard of The Crow* is that of someone who is genuine and far removed from corruption, this often leaves the Wizard feeling isolated. He is only consoled by his companion Nyawira, who is a leader in the *Movement For The Voice of The People*. She is an archetypal modern woman, with many admirable convictions, the most poignant being freedom. The novel uses humour and revelation to underscore its powerful meaning. Ngugi wa' Thiong'o has written a compelling novel, which will fissure the truths that fiction holds.