

Ngugi: Makerere's Dream Weaver

Ngugi wa Thiong'o one of Makerere University's most esteemed alumnus was a versatile writer, theorist and activist who over the years strongly popularized the language question debate in African Literatures. He attended Makerere University College of East Africa from 1959 to 1964. It was at Makerere that Ngugi the writer was born, and he has made this very clear in his Makerere memoir titled *Birth of a Dream Weaver: A Writer's Awakening*. The English Department, which was his home department as an undergraduate, was very proud of him and one of the reports about him written on 3rd September 1963 stated: "He will certainly do the College honour in the future", a prediction that has proved so true over the years.

Ngugi at the time of his passing on 28th May 2025 was a Distinguished Professor of Comparative Literature and English at the University of California, Irvine. He also previously taught at Northwestern University, Yale University, New York University, University of Nairobi and held a Creative Writing Fellowship at Makerere University. He is famously celebrated for his novels: *Weep Not Child* and *The River Between* which he wrote while an undergraduate student at Makerere University College of East Africa, *A Grain of Wheat*, *Petals of Blood*, *Devil on the Cross*, *Matigari* and *Wizard of the Crow*. He is also recognized for his plays among which is *The Black Hermit* written and produced during his student times at Makerere and staged to mark Uganda's independence in 1962. The play was widely advertised in Uganda's leading paper *The Uganda Argus* as the first play by an African to be staged at the Uganda National Theatre. He also, together with another alumna from Makerere, Micere Mugo, produced the play, *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*. He then produced with Ngugi wa Miiri the play *Ngahiika Ndeenda* which led to his detention without trial in 1977, the play was translated into English and published as *I will Marry when I want* in 1982. The most discussed of his collection of essays is *Decolonising the Mind* which is regarded as a watershed publication of Ngugi's ideological stand on identity and political independence and in which he categorically states his stand for the development of African languages and literatures. He also was relentlessly proud of the work that was being done under his leadership at the International Centre for Translation Studies in the University of California at Irvine and his founding of *Mutiiri* (A Gikuyu Language Journal) at New York University. Ngugi was the recipient of numerous accolades for his creative writing and intellectual work. He was an outstanding advocate of examining the problematic interaction between dominant and marginalized languages in postcolonial contexts. He made the significant decision to write in Gikuyu in 1977 and steadfastly pursued the promotion of mother tongues particularly in Africa until his demise. He is widely acclaimed as one of Africa's most prolific and influential literary figures who consistently spoke truth to power and is so urgently relevant to our times even when physically absent.