

Introduction to Crime Fiction

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Office hours: Wednesdays, 12–1 p.m. or by appointment

April 6, 2023. Ngũgĩ (6).

review: the city

- ▶ shifting modes of critique: different subjects / targets call forth different techniques
- ▶ ambiguities even in the broadest satire
 - ▶ focalization can shift to even the most unsympathetic character
- ▶ framing of clear “messages”: what can’t discourse do?
 - ▶ the villagers’ “success” is discursive
 - ▶ ...and therefore transient

review: *Decolonising the Mind*

- ▶ “spiritual subjugation” / “mental control”
- ▶ “colonial alienation” manifests in the gap between spoken and written languages
 - ▶ colonial language comes to stand for modernity, sophistication
 - ▶ ...and *literariness*
- ▶ African languages remain literarily deprived
 - ▶ and this is a correlate of cultural and economic subjugation
- ▶ Europhone literatures face a problem of audience

not all bad

It [the Europhone African novel at decolonization] was inspired by the general political awakening; it drew its stamina and even form from the peasantry...It was shot through and through with optimism. But later, when the comprador section assumed political ascendancy and strengthened rather than weakened the economic links with imperialism in what was clearly a neo-colonial arrangement, this literature became more and more critical, cynical, disillusioned, bitter and denunciatory in tone. It was almost unanimous in its portrayal, with varying degrees of detail, emphasis, and clarity of vision, of the post-independence betrayal of hope. (*Decolonising the Mind*, 21)

“critical, cynical, disillusioned”

All looked to Karega to take up the broken thread. (249)

‘Now it [Theng’eta] has turned out to be a drink of strife. I suppose this had to be, though I still don’t understand it.’ (286)

We did not then know that within a year the journey, like a God who cannot let his generosity be forgotten, would send its emissaries from the past, to transform Ilmorog and change our lives utterly, Ilmorog and us utterly changed. (289)

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She [Akinyi] looked shy and she spoke in Swahili. (408)

surprise! Not! (or...?)

- ▶ Whodunit?
- ▶ So what?

He was suddenly very lucid, calm inside. A sixteen-year mist had cleared. He was not jealous or anything. It was only that deep inside he knew that tonight, this Saturday, Kimeria would die. Only then would he regain the right to call himself a man. (375)

solved!

‘And I’ll now formally charge you with burning Wanja’s house and causing the deaths of three men. I may warn you that anything you say may be used against you in a court of law. Tell me: why did you do it?’

‘I—I wanted to save Karega,’ Munira said. (394)

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So she edited the story as she went on. After all, a coherent narrative depended on knowing what details to tell and what to leave out. (382)

title drop (almost)

- ▶ What are the ingredients of Theng'eta?

title drop (almost)

- ▶ What are the ingredients of Theng'eta?

The plant was very small with a pattern of four tiny red petals. It had no scent.

Theng'eta. The spirit. (251)

'Look. A flower with petals of blood.'

It was a solitary red beanflower in a field dominated by white, blue and violet flowers. No matter how you looked at it, it gave you the impression of a flow of blood. (26)

it's definitely a symbol

He walked away toward Ilmorog Hill. He stood on the hill and watched the whorehouse burn, the tongues of flame from the four corners forming petals of blood, making a twilight of the dark sky. (395)

debate form

'Kimeria, who had ruined my life and later humiliated me by making me sleep with him during our journey to the city . . . this same Kimeria was one of those who would benefit from the new economic progress of Ilmorog. Why? Why? I asked myself? Why? Why? Had he not sinned as much as me? That's how one night I fully realized this law. Eat or you are eaten.'
(347)

'No, no,' he found himself saying. 'There is another way: there must be other ways.' And suddenly in that moment, remembering in a flash all the places he had been to, he was clear about the force for which he had been searching, the force that would change things and create the basis of a new order. (349)

a usable past?

'It is remarkable how you have changed. You used to argue that the past was important for today, things like that.'

¶ 'True . . . but only as a living lesson to the present. I mean we must not preserve our past as a museum: rather, we must study it critically, without illusions, and see what lessons we can draw from it in today's battlefield of the future and the present. But to worship it – no. Maybe I used to do it: but I don't want to continue worshipping in the temples of a past without tarmac roads, without electric cookers, a world dominated by slavery to nature.' (384)

'That is the kind of lesson we can learn from our past . . . as a guide to action . . . but also learn from your grandfather's tendency to act alone—'

The magic string between them was finally broken.

He wished he could swallow back the words. He had hurt her less by the didactic triteness than by a combination of tone and gesture. (387)

what about Wanja?

She remained sitting in one place, truly queen of them all under the electric light. (349)

next

- ▶ articles
 - ▶ A–H: Carter
 - ▶ J–Na: Gikandi excerpt – Ni–Y: Roos
- ▶ exercise