

Introduction to Crime Fiction

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March 24, 2025. Ngũgĩ (1).

(font change forced by diacritics)

ANACHRONY

- ▶ **fabula:** (virtual) chronological sequence of events
- ▶ **sjužet:** the way the narrative presents those events

midterm grades

Q1	2.96
Q2	3.57
Q3	3.75

Q2	3.57	that means half of you got A's
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Q3	3.75
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backward glance

who	what	when
Poe	"Rue Morgue"	1841, 1845
Conan Doyle	"Scandal"	1891
Pirkis	"Redhill"	1893
Conan Doyle	"Six Napoleons"	1903
Anthony	"Sinking Sands"	1917
Smith	" 'Snitch' "	1917
Daly	"Knights"	1923
Hammett	"Crooked"	1923
Chandler	<i>Big Sleep</i>	1939
Borges	"Death"	1942, 1954
Hawks	<i>Big Sleep</i>	1946

overview thoughts on detective fiction so far

- ▶ What's wrong with the world?
- ▶ What, if anything, does the investigation put right?

wrong	fixed?
incompetent law	case solved
aliens/others	no
women	no
corrupt elites	no

Petals as diagnosis

- ▶ What's wrong with the world in the opening of *Petals of Blood*?

Petals as diagnosis

- What's wrong with the world in the opening of *Petals of Blood*?

school trouble The pupils were mostly shepherd boys, who often did not finish a term but followed their fathers in search of new pastures and water for their cattle. (7)

economic trouble A few roads and a reliable water system would have improved their lives. A dispensary might have been a useful addition. (29)

[Nyakinyua:] “The young men also. Some go and never return...” (9)

postcolonial trouble Stretching for a mile or so outside Ruwa-ini was a golf course of neatly trimmed green lawn. Three Africans were laughing at a big-bellied fourth who kept on swining the stick without hitting the ball. (14–15)

sex and patriarchy: trouble (for all)

For those titillating minutes of instant victory and glory often left behind an emptiness, a void, that could only be filled by yet more palliatives of instant conquest. Struggling in the depths of such a void and emptiness, she [Wanja] would then suddenly become aware that in the long run it was men who triumphed and walked over her body....And then she thought she knew. A child. Yes. a child. (68–69)

finding ourselves...in space



“Kenya,” *The World Factbook*, March 17, 2026, cia.gov.

<https://osm.org/go/l9wVq--?m=>

finding ourselves...in language

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FOXqc-8zCPE>

Ngũgĩ, interviewed by Tania Adam, CCCB Lab, September 10, 2019.

CLASS	PREFIX	EXAMPLE	EXAMPLE GLOSS
1	<i>mū-</i>	<i>mūndū</i>	'person'
2	<i>a-</i>	<i>andū</i>	'people'
1a	--	<i>tata</i>	'aunt'
2a	--	<i>tata</i>	'aunts'
3	<i>mū-</i>	<i>mūaki</i>	'fire'
4	<i>mĩ-</i>	<i>mĩaki</i>	'fires'
5	<i>rĩ-/i-</i>	<i>ihūa</i>	'flower'
6	<i>ma-</i>	<i>mahūa</i>	'flowers'
7	<i>kĩ-/gĩ-</i>	<i>kĩrĩma</i>	'mountain'
8	<i>ci-/i-</i>	<i>irĩma</i>	'mountains'
9	<i>N-</i>	<i>mbata</i>	'duck'
10	<i>N-</i>	<i>mbata</i>	'ducks'
9a	--	<i>batĩ</i>	'party'
10a	--	<i>batĩ</i>	'parties'
11	<i>rū-</i>	<i>rūĩgĩ</i>	'eagle'
12	<i>ka-/ga-</i>	<i>kanua</i>	'mouth'
13	<i>tū-</i>	<i>tūnua</i>	'mouths'
14	--	<i>cukari</i>	'sugar'
15	<i>kū-/gū-</i>	<i>gūtū</i>	'ear'
16	<i>ha-</i>	<i>handū</i>	'place (definite)'
17	<i>kū-/gū-</i>	<i>kūndū</i>	'place (indefinite)'

Robert Englebretson, ed., with Wambūi Mūringo Wa-Ngatho, "A Basic Sketch Grammar of Gĩkũyũ," *Rice Working Papers in Linguistics* 7 (July 2015), 18.

language, refracted

The children sang *a e i o u ĩ ũ* in loud voices. They also sang: *Kamau wa Njoroge ena ndutu kuguru*: and thought of their own jiggers eating their toes and scratched them against the floor in earnest. (13)

He became a daily feature in Ilmorog, a guardian knight of knowledge for part-time pupils. Standard II or what he called the English beginners' class met in the morning; Standard I in the afternoon. (20)

They literally translate into "Kamau son of Njoroge has jiggers on his foot."

Evan Mwangi, "The Gendered Politics of Untranslated Language and Aporia in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Petals of Blood*," *Research in African Literatures* 35, no. 4 (Winter 2004): 68, [Project Muse](#).

She shrieked out, *auuu-u, Nduri ici mutiuke muone*, and fled in fright. (10)

The words the old woman uses in reaction are taboo, designating a woman's sexual organ.

Mwangi, 69.

what language again?

“Even her gait and the way she held up her chin as she spoke, had ‘staili.’”
(76)

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“Karibu, Mwalimu, karibu,” Wanjia called. (71; Google it!)

what language again?

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Abdulla asked her if it was true that some Arabs could change themselves into women or cats she only laughed and asked him: but what kind of Mswahili are you to believe such things? (39)

“My real is not Abdulla. It is Murira. But I baptized myself Abdulla. Now everybody calls me Abdulla.”

“You mean, you thought Abdulla was a Christian name?” Wanjia asked. (73)

“Karega . . .” she said aloud. “What a funny name!”

“Ritwa ni mbukio,” Karega quoted the proverb. “Somebody a long time ago asked the question: What’s in a name? And he answered that a rose would still be a rose even by another name.”

Talking as if from a book, again thought Munira. Wanja countered:

“Oh, then it would not be a rose. It would be that other name, don’t you think? A rose is a rose.” (73)

Consider, then, the meaning of these narrators and narratees' names: Munira is a stump; Karega connotes a rebel, but a rebel in Gikuyu society is also one confined to the margins of his community; and Wanja is the outsider.

Simon Gikanda, *Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o*, 155.

Rose is a rose is a rose is a rose.

Gertrude Stein, "Sacred Emily," in *Geography and Plays* (Boston: Four Seas, 1922), 187, [HathiTrust](#).

Ritwa ni mbokio [sic]. The name is a useless thing.

"Gikuyu proverbs: 1000 in total," *African Manners*, July 7, 2012, [africanmanners.wordpress.com](#).
Someday I will find a better source.

finding ourselves...in time

- ▶ When does the novel take place? (trick question)

finding ourselves...in time

- When does the novel take place? (trick question)

Twelve years later, on a Sunday (50)

But this is the 1960s, not the 1860s, Munira reflected, a little disappointed.
(13)

[Wanja:] This was also the years preceding independence when there was a lot of talk of how different life would be he . . . Aah, you see how I talk as if all this was ages ago. yet only a few years . . . Yes, a few years.” (46)

[Munira:] Siriana: you should have been there in our time, before and uring the period of the big, costly European dance of death and even after (32–33)

It reminded him of similar scenes of rocking, lullaby-singing children on his father’s pyrethrum fields before the Mau Mau violence. (30)

“I am sorry about what happened . . .” (60)

Munira [was] really shocked when in 1953 or so he heard that Mariamu’s son had been caught carrying weapons for Mau Mau and was subsequently hanged. (18)

“In 1954 or ‘55, anyway the year that we were moved into the villages and others into ‘lines.’” (76)

how far back should we go?

The movement away had started after the second Big War...No...before that...No, it was worse after Mau Mau War...No, it was the railway...all right, all right...even this had always been so since European colonists came into their midst, these ghosts from another world. (23; ellipses in original)

In my mind I now put this wretched corner beside our cities: skyscrapers versus mud walls and grass thatch; tarmac highways, international airports and gambling casinos versus cattle-paths and gossip before sunset. Our erstwhile masters had left us a very unevenly cultivated land: the centre was swollen with fruit and water sucked from the rest, while the outer parts were progressively weaker and scaggier as one moved away from the centre. There is a story of dwarf-like Gumbas who lived long, long before the Manjiri generation, before the iron age in Kenya, and whose heads were over-huge and so sat precariously on the rest of the body. Whenever a Gumba fell, so goes the legend, he could not lift himself without aid from outside. (58)

[

Nyakinyua:] “What should we call them? The new Uhere and Mutung’u generation: for was it not the same skin diseases and plagues that once in earlier times weakened our people in face of the Mzungu invasion?” (9)

She sang in a low voice in praise of Ndemi and his wives, long long ago.
(38)

finding ourselves...in genre

MZIGO, CHUI, KIMERIA MURDERED. (6)

Crime for him was a kind of jigsaw puzzle, and he believed that there was a law to it—a law of crime—a law of criminal behaviour—and he believed that if you looked hard enough you could see this law operating in even the smallest gestures. (52)

- ▶ How does the novel's perspective compare to Inspector Godfrey's?

next

- ▶ Finish Part One (1–141).