

# Mid-America Alliance for African Studies Conference

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University of Kansas

“Europhonism, Universities and the Magic Fountain: The Future of African Literature and Scholarship”

by Ngugi wa Thiong’o

New York University

## **John Janzen:**

Now I want to introduce our keynote speaker for the conference, Ngugi wa Thiong’o. Like so many of you, Ngugi’s work has been an inspiration to me. I have used some of his early novels as textbooks in courses I have taught on Africa. For better or worse, his fiction is awfully good ethnography, and that may say something about the fictionalness of ethnography, but I think that good writing is good writing, whatever genre it is in. In his recent years, since those early ethnographic works in Kenya, Ngugi has come very far in a direction that he can describe best. Some others of you know this pilgrimage better than I do. There is a page-and-a-half biographical sketch of him and a presentation of his major writings in your packet which we assembled for this occasion. I will not say any more than that, he is a Professor at New York University, the title of his keynote presentation is “Europhonism, Universities, and the Magic Fountain: The Future of African Literature and Scholarship.” Ngugi wa Thiong’o.

## **Ngugi wa Thiong’o:**

I’d like to express my appreciation for the invitation, particularly the assistance of Professor Janzen who kept up the correspondence between myself and him, and I was so absorbed in writing my new novel that I did not always respond to his messages really in time, but he kept the faith, so to speak. \*\*\*\*\* got me here, also because of connection with so many people I’ve already met, friends, old friends and new ones, and I have been particularly impressed by the fact that many scholars here seem to know not only English and French, but also African languages. I was very impressed at the dinner I had last night to hear at least one lady who was speaking French and English of course and Wolof. She kept changing from one to the other quite freely, and that was quite impressive for me, I remember that. I had a very nice personal encounter last night with a lady from Kenya, her name is Irungu, it was after her presentation last night that she and I talked. She reminded me that she was the daughter of a student I was with in the elementary school in Kenya, and she was wondering whether I would remember her father, but because I remembered him immediately although I had not seen him for the last 50 years or so, and I’d been wondering what happened to him because I remember that he had very nice handwriting, which was the envy of everybody, and so it was a very nice encounter for me last night.

Now, in thinking about this conference I was torn between two possibilities for a speech. I was very tempted to actually come and read from the new novel which I'm writing, have been writing for the last three years, or two years, if I remember, and which really deals with I believe the kind of issues which this conference is really about. I'm looking at Africa, particularly post-Cold War Africa, but going over literally this twentieth century and probably beyond. An African novel, it's a novel which keeps on, it's a kind of runaway train, it keeps on getting bigger and bigger, and I don't know what to do about it just now. About 1,147 pages, but it keeps on asking me to be with it all the time and just now I'm working on a fifth draft. So I was thinking about reading an extract from the novel. So I came with two speeches, one was literally an extract from the novel and the other is the topic I am going to speak on today, which was announced at the introduction. This particular lecture is actually a variation on a lecture I gave recently at Cambridge University, it's called the Ashbee(?) lecture, which was given at Claire(?) College at Cambridge University in May in this year. So this is a variation on that, because especially after last night talking to people I thought that this particular lecture would be more relevant to this particular situation, especially with the presence of so many scholars from Africa I thought this would be the perfect situation to have a dialog, so this speech is in a sense in its present form more aimed as a kind of dialog between me and many of the African scholars who are here, so that is kind of how it is angled, but it is for everybody.

Now, when I was think about that lecture given at Cambridge, it is named after someone in education in Nigeria, I remember, but anyway, when I was preparing for that lecture I came across his own book on the issue of African universities, and it was called African Universities and the Western Tradition. The book itself was actually the 1964 Godkin Lectures he gave at Harvard University, and in reading it I was struck by the irony in the way the Godkin lectures had crossed my own life, so I became fascinated by the lectures given by the same person in connection with whom I was going to give this formal lecture at Cambridge. The lectures were given and published 1964, the year I graduated from Makerere University College with a University of London Honors degree in English. It was also the year that William Heinemann brought out a hardcover edition of my novel Weep not child written in English, obviously a product of my five years at Makerere. My novel and I were products of the kind of universities which Eric Ashbee was talking about, and whose social function was as quoted in his book "to produce men and women with the standards of public service and the capacities for leadership which self-rule requires." In short a governing elite in the expected neo-political disposition following the end of the second World War. Now because the elite produced by these universities is to a large extent the one in control of the post-colonial state, any discussions of democracy and the state would be incomplete without a look at the role of universities in the creation and I hope also in the cure of the current crisis of democracy in Africa. Democracy in the Lincolnian sense, as the government of the people by the people, for the people, assumes a knowledgeable populace, and universities are centers of production and distribution of knowledge. To what extent have the universities produced an elite capable of producing knowledge in a manner that reaches and empowers the people in the spirit of the saying that knowledge is power? And that's why I've entitled my talk "Europhonism, Universities, and the Magic Fountain: The Future of African Literature and Scholarship," because literature and scholarship has a role to play in the evolution of a democratic Africa, an Africa accountable to the people. The colleges, and I'm going to use the English, my examples will largely

come from the English-speaking world because of familiarity with that tradition, but I hope what I say will apply equally well to those colleges which were part of the other colonizing traditions in Africa. The colleges were established in the fifties, the combination of a series of committees and recommendations going back to the 1925 advisory committee that years later metamorphosed into the Asquith Committee and the Inter-University Council for Higher Education. But the evolution of a modern university in Africa did not begin in the twentieth century with these official committees, but rather in nineteenth century with first James Africanos Beale Horton in 1868 and with Edward Blighdon in 1872. Both Horton and Blighdon were of African descent, both from Sierra Leone, and they clearly wanted the best for Africa. Nevertheless, their two versions were different. According to Ashbee, Horton wanted to introduce into Africa undiluted Western education, and there was no place in his scheme of higher education for the incorporation of African languages, history or culture. The way to African modernity lay by a way of the Classics and European languages and culture. Blighdon, on the other hand, wanted to free higher education in Africa from what he calls "despotic Europeanizing which had warped and crushed the Negro spirit." Writing in 1883 he said "All our traditions and experiences are connected with a foreign race. We have no poetry but that of our task-masters. The songs which live in our ears and are often on our lips are the songs we heard sung by those who shouted while we groaned and lamented. The song of the history which was a history of our degradation, they recited triumphs which contained the record of our humiliation. To our great misfortune we learned their prejudices and their passions and thought that we had their aspirations and their power." He wanted a system of education which rejected all of the errors and falsehoods about Africa, and while he wanted the Greek and the Latin classics as part of the curricula for his visions of an African university, he also wanted African languages to be an integral part of it. J.E. Kaisley Hayfort(?) of Ghana, then Gold Coast, was to go further than Blighdon and in his "Ethiopia Unbound" of 1911 he articulated visions of an African university in which the medium of instruction would be an African language, and in this case he proposed that scholars would be employed to translate books into African languages. When eventually universities were set up in Africa following the recommendations of the Asquith Committee, like the Blighdon in 1948, University of Gold Coast in 1948, Makerere University College in 1950, it was the Horton vision which triumphed, except that where Greek and Latin had been envisioned as the foundation of excellence, English took over as the foundation of that excellence, and at the risk of simplification, I shall call the Horton-Asquith model to contrast it with the Blighdon-Hayfort model. What divided the Horton-Asquith model and the Blighdon-Hayfort vision of an African university was clearly not a disagreement about the need for excellence in the passage of higher education, but rather their way of achieving it, and the question of African languages was central. In the Horton-Asquith model African languages were relegated to the periphery, and in the Blighdon-Hayfort model they would occupy a central place in the scheme of things. Periphery or the center... that was a great divide, and the implications of the model which triumphed and the one which failed to make the grade still haunt African scholarship, and in particular African literature, with even more enormous implications for democracy in the Africa of the 21st century. In short, the question of whether African languages occupy center stage or the periphery is a number one priority as Africa struggles for a more equitable place in the economic and political map of the global community of the 21st century. Language, as I have argued in several places, occupy a significant position in the entire hierarchy of the organization of wealth, power and values in a society. Language is the product of a community in its economic, political, and cultural evolution in

time and space. Humans give birth to a system of communication whose highest expression and development is a science which we come to give the name of language. And I thought last night, language for me is also a way of organizing space which we have in common, but different languages organize that space slightly differently. So language is also the producer of a community, for it is language which enables humans to negotiate effectively their way into and out of nature, and that which makes possible their multi-faceted evolution. It is in that very negotiation that a community comes to know itself as a specific community, different from others. This is because in being similar things, our similar natural environment with similar regulations, we govern what is extracted from nature, how it is extracted, and how it is shared out. Such communities develop knowledges which are passed from generation to generation and which become the basis of their future actions and the stuff of their way of life. Every community has a way of life, a way of what, how and when it negotiates nature with one another and other communities. Language carries the cultural universe of the community, and in that universe also resides the entire body of values held by that community. Every community of humans with a given particularity has notions of what is right and wrong, bad and good, ugly and beautiful, in short system of ethics and aesthetics the entirety of which, with associated feelings emotions and attitudes, forms the basis of identity and their being for themselves. Let me explain a little bit about this being for themselves. In his Science of Logic and in The Phenomenology of the Spirit, as indeed in all his works, Hegel, the 19th century German philosopher, often talked of the notions of being and becoming, making the distinction between being in itself and being for itself, notions which Jean-Paul Sartre also talks about in his book Being and Nothingness, further talking about possibilities of being for others. We can think of being in itself as when an entirety exists objectively and undifferentiated, as opposed to being for itself when it becomes aware of itself as an entity. We can think of language as that which helps in the movement of a community from the state of being in itself to a state of being for itself, and this sense of self-awareness is what gives the community its spiritual strength to keep on reproducing its being as it continually renews itself in culture, in its power relations, and its negotiations with its entire environment. It is a culture which enables a community to imagine and re-imagine itself in history, and that's why a culture is to a community what a flower is to a plant. A flower is very colorful. It is the flower which often readily defines the identity of so many plants. A flower is also very delicate. But most important, it is the flower which carries the seeds which make possible the reproduction of the roots and trunks of that plant. Kill the tree trunk, and even the roots, but retain the seeds and the tree can reproduce itself. It can, if you like, re-imagine itself. Language, which is the carrier of culture, is the ultimate and the most primal means of imagination. Now we know that empire builders have always known that, and in trying to shape how the dominated imagined their future they clearly saw the importance of de-linking the elites of the dominated communities from their languages and literally transplanting the minds in the languages of the imperial center, and where the traditional elite resisted the transplant because they were too rooted in their languages and cultures, the empire builders simply manufactured a new elite through a massive cultural surgery carried out in the theatres of their new schools and colleges. The aim, realized or not, was to turn them into beings for others, even in their conception of themselves. Examples abound, and we do not even have to go to the special case of plantation slavery, where whole communities were de-linked from the languages of their original homes. We can also cite Colonial British India, because the centrality in the making of modern Britain became a social laboratory with the result later transplanted to other colonies. When I was doing research for my novel, some of

the action takes place in India, in Africa, in the New World, New York also. I did some research on Madras because my character went for education in Madras University. That was the first setting of the British India Company, I believe. Now one of the early governors of that particular area was somebody called Elihu Yale, and the money that he made in Madras that went into the foundation of Yale University, so Yale University is somewhat connected with colonial India. And so, because of the centrality of India in that whole situation, the words of Thomas Babbington McCauley, who as a member of the Supreme Council of India, helped reform the colonies and nuclear system as well as the penal code have a special significance for us today. You remember that in the famous minute on Indian education he had visions of the English language producing, I quote "a class of persons Indian in blood and color, but English in taste, opinions, in morals, and intellect." Here we can note that this was not for the aesthetic pleasure of disinterested cultural engineering, but rather the hope was that this class of persons, and I quote, "may be interpreters between us and the people we govern." Exactly 87 years later McCauley's words were to be repeated in colonial Kenya by then British governor Sir Philip Mitchell, in outlining a policy for English language dominance in African education literally as a moral crusade to supplement the armed crusade against the Mau Mau guerrilla army. He saw this new language education as bringing about, and I quote, "a civilized state in which the values and standards are to be the values and standards of Britain in which everyone whatever his origins has an interest and a part." In both instances, McCauley's India in 19th century and Mitchell's Kenya in 20th century, the context was colonial and the aim was clear, but just as in the military realm the colonial powers had carved out a native army, simultaneously alienated from the people whence they came and collaborative with the forces of their own conquest, the same would be true in the realm of the mind. Create from the governed an intellect both alienated and collaborative, you create a being not for itself, but being for others, and therefore in some ways against its own being. The Horton-Asquith model had a whole colonial tradition and theory behind it, and the model was inherited almost unaltered in the era of independence. It was the products of the McCauley system of education who spread out to fill the vacant places of white judges, prosecutors, defense lawyers, lawmakers, governors, military leaders, and heads of departments of education in most parts of Africa, and what an inheritance for Africa. It was an interesting twist of fate that those nurtured in the colonial mode would hold the key in molding the new nations in the military, educational, and economic realms. It is ironic also, but very interesting, to compare the position of elites who, before the set up of Asquith-type colleges in Africa, were educated in London, Paris, and Washington. These lit the fires of nationalism and Pan-Africanism and the politics of cultural identities as in the concept of Negritude and African personality. Whether they spoke African languages or not, they still paid homage to them, as in the case of Nyerere translating the words of Shakespeare into Kiswahili, or Kwame Nkrumah setting up the Bureau of African Languages, or \*\*\*\*\* Diup and Shek Diup(?) stressing the centrality of African languages in the self-emancipation of Africa, but the products of the Asquith-type colleges embraced English language with an almost religious fervor as the language of modernization and respect in the global community. In various ways they argued and sought to convince themselves that English was now and African language. In other words I am trying to make a distinction between elites who were produced after 1940s roughly speaking by colleges within and those others who were educated in many universities here, the ones who lit away then to Africa and raised high the banner of African nationalism. The result is really a paradox. Systems of education entrusted by the new nations to research ideas of emancipating and modernizing Africa

and for which process the new nations invest a good percentage of GNP now brings up brilliant intellects in every field of modern learning, and yet they cannot put even a summary of what they have acquired in their native African languages. There is no doubt that these colleges, particularly in their heydays, have produced remarkable scholarships. African scholars whose first degrees were often acquired in the colleges of the Horton-Asquith model in major universities in Africa and abroad, but they are clearly alienated intellectuals, exiles at home and abroad, or rather exiles in search of a place they can truly claim as their own. In the sense of the collective social body they become beings for others, but not beings for themselves, or at the very least beings against themselves, against the very soil that gave birth to them. African language communities pay for intellectuals which cannot put a single idea, even about Agriculture, or health, or business, or democracy, or finance, into the very languages which gave them birth. This paradox of African scholarship in general is best mirrored in the particular case of the production of African literature. Because English was so central to all aspects of learning in the new colleges the English departments were very prestigious, and quite frankly it is difficult to quite express in words the tremendous prestige with which a good performance in English was held. Students of English were the elite of the elite, and a first class degree in English was the simply the first among equals. The history of English literature, what J.P. Clark describes as reading from Spenser to Spender, although after making this statement I was corrected and I understand that the person who coined this phrase was actually Abiola Irele(?), now professor at Ohio University. At any rate, the history of English literature, what they call Spenser to Spender, was at the center of that curriculum. Since all the new colleges were largely external affiliates of the University of London, they virtually offered the same history, the same orders, whether one went to the English department at Makerere in Uganda or Ibadan in Nigeria. That's why in the Ashbee description of the rise of these universities I could see myself so clearly. I was definitely a product of the Horton-Asquith model, as were indeed nearly all the pioneering writers of the 50s and 60s. They were products of the English department, and often their initial inspirations were triggered by the admiration or disagreement with the models they read. A practice J.P. Clark once again described as the example of Shakespeare in one of his texts. Now I cast a glance at some of the early titles of African fiction, tells a story. Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and *No Longer at Ease*, from Yeats' "The Second Coming" and Eliot's "Journey of the Magi." The title of my own first published novel, *Weep Not Child*, was taken from Walt Whitman. I'm sure within the narratives of poetry it's possible to hear the echoes of Thomas Hardy, Dickens, D.H. Lawrence, Conrad, Eliot, Ezra Pound and so on. In his essay named for Victoria Queen of England, Chinua Achebe tells us that his initial motivation to write came from his encounter with some appalling novels about Africa including Joyce's *Cary's Mr. Johnson*(?), and he decided, I quote, "that the story we had to tell could not be told for us by anybody else, no matter how gifted or well-intentioned." But here, in this lecture, I am not so concerned with the impact of the models as much as the language in which we produced our reactions to those models. One of the biggest achievements of the Horton-Asquith model was therefore the production of an African literature in English, but ironically one often motivated by the Blydenian vision of a positive affirmation of the African image. In 1883 he had written, I quote, "In all English speaking countries the mind of the intelligent Negro child revolts against the descriptions given in elementary books, geographies, travel novels, histories of the Negro, but although he experiences an instinctive revulsion from the misrepresentations he is obliged to continue as he grows in years to study such pernicious teachings. After leaving school he finds the same things in newspapers, in quasi-

scientific works and after a while they begin to seem the proper thing to say about his race, and he accepts what at first his unbiased feelings naturally and indignantly repelled, but of repetition he tends to accept. Such, he says, is the affect of repetition. Having embraced what is \*\*\*\*\* , he concludes that his only hope of rising in the scale of respectable manhood is to strive after whatever is most unlike himself and most alien to his taste." Now these words are really not much different from those of Chinua Achebe where he wrote in his famous essay "The Novelist as Teacher": "If I were a god I would regard as the very worst our acceptance, for whatever reason, of racial inferiority." And he went on to define his role as a writer as that of an educator trying to help, and I quote, "my society regain belief in itself and put away the complexes of the years of denigration and self-denigration." Hence, this literature had two contradictory tendencies. It was often motivated and driven by the nationalistic and racial pride inherent in the assumptions of the Blighdon model, and yet it's models were often the English authors read in class. Written in English it has nonetheless come to be the nearest thing to a common Pan-African heritage. When Wole Soyinka won the Nobel Prize for Literature his achievement and recognition were celebrated in many parts of Africa, Kenya for instance. Names of writers like Chinua Achebe, Amata Aidoo, Kwei Ama(?), are known and respected in the four corners of the continent. Because of the models of its inspiration, the 19th century Victorian novel with its natural realism and linear narrative structure, the literature and particularly the narratives tend to be conservative, almost imitative in form, and yet very pertinent in their descriptions of the concerns of 20th century Africa. Even in that form it feels different and innovative compared with the models of its imitation. And these are some of the contradictions we find, very positive and negative elements combined together. But what gives this literature its innovative sense? It cannot be the models which are pirated either in anger or in pleasure. And this brings us to the major paradox, for what gives it that innovative difference is surely its relationship to African languages and the good heritage of origins in those languages. These languages are a reservoir of images, proverbs, riddles, ballads, stories from which this literature in English grows freely and often creatively. Among the Ibo(?), Achebe wrote in Things Fall Apart, "the proverb is like the palm wine with which words are eaten." These languages, the African languages, are really the magic fountain from which African literature in English or French or Portuguese rose, and which gives it a perpetual youthfulness. The paleness arising from its imitation and the use of English to represent the realized speech of the characters is immediately refreshed in color by the stamina and blood it draws from African languages. All this, its Pan-African reach, its racial pride, it's champion of human and democratic values, is the most positive side of what I now call Europhone African literature. Its Europhonity is of course a direct product of the Horton-Asquith model, and so whatever is positive in it would justify Horton's hope that the great achievement of the Classics and Western Civilization would generate excellence in the African recipients. But Europhonism has no language or a cultural \*\*\*\*\* of its own. The literature that it generates, Europhone literature, is given identity in the marketplace of all writings in European tongues by the reservoir of images in African life and languages. It is therefore also a negative, almost parasitic side to it. So in a way like a leech it sucks blood and stamina from the African languages and it never gives anything back to the people who created those languages in the first instance. The two tendencies inherent in Europhone African literature are actually true of all scholarship produced by the Horton-Asquith model. They take away from the African heritage and produce great scholarly works on many aspects of African landscape and history which are now to be found in libraries all over the world. There is also a parasitic aspect in this scholarship which only knows

how to take away and never to give back to the languages and the people on whose behalf it makes its claim in the global community of scholarship in the arts, sciences, and technology. It's a fact that knowledges of Africa, the results of extensive research, inventions, and discoveries about Africa, even by the scientists and doctors of the continent, are actually stored in European language granaries. We can now see the implications of the Horton-Asquith model. A people can be deprived of wealth and even power, but one of the worst deprivations is a means of achieving all that, articulating it, and therefore developing a vision and a strategy for fighting it out. We cannot of course blame it on colonialism, and believe me, I've done my share of blaming in many of my publications, but remember, we cannot accuse colonialism of failing to do what it was clearly not meant to do. Colonialism and colonial models were never meant to develop colonies for the benefit of the colonized. So we cannot accuse them of failing to do that, and that's why I think it's time that African scholarship and universities begin to question that kind of model and its legacy of language, policy, and practice. I've said elsewhere how I find it contradictory in Africa today and elsewhere in the academies of the world to hear of scholars, and here I must say, I was very impressed by what is happening here, so let me not apply it to here, but anyway, I have sort of been alarmed of scholars of African realities but who do not know a word of the languages of the environment of which they are experts. And my question has been do you think that any university outside Africa, or outside the cultural African universities, or even within Africa itself, would give me a job as professor of French literature would give me a job if I confessed that I did not know a word of French? I'd be kicked out. I wouldn't even be given an interview. The schools in Africa and abroad are people by experts, whether African or not, whether sympathetic to the African cause or not, whether progressive or not, who do not have, to demonstrate, and acquaintance, let alone an expertise in any African language. They hold chairs and produce PHD's without the requirements of an African language. But its difficult to blame it on these institutions abroad when they are merely taking the lead from the practice of African universities on their own soil. The result is the marginalization of African languages in the academy at home. So African languages, this is the most amazing thing, African languages have no place in their own home. Imagine you go home and you do not find a bed in your own home. Where do you go to? It's a most devastating situation. African languages have no place at home. They do not control their home base because their home base is ruled by tongues from Europe. But the same holds true for African languages at the global level. The culture and thought of the 20th century global community is largely dominated a handful of European languages. Even the United Nations organization and its agencies assume the centrality of European languages in international relations. In fact, apart from Arabic, there is no other African-based language in all its agencies. In this respect I find the words of Hounani K. Trask(?), she is a lady from Hawaii, she has a book called From A Native Daughter. In her book she argues that indigenous languages replaced by colonial ones result in the creation of dead languages, but what is dead or lost is not the language but the people who once spoke it and transmitted their mother tongues to succeeding generations. Everywhere it's received European languages come shouting the often quoted words from Bhagavad Gita, "I am become death, the shatterer of worlds." Now we think of death too narrowly in terms of physical disappearance. Death comes in many forms. There is an equal diversity of cultural deaths, and we Africans already provide a good example of such a possibility. This is in terms of naming systems and other areas, over the last 400 years we've seen Africans in the west lose their names completely, so that our existence is in terms of Jones, James, Jones, James, etc. Now today every achievement in sports, academia,



in the sciences and the arts, goes to reinforce the European naming systems and cultural personality. Language of course is the most basic of naming systems, and with the loss of our languages will come the loss of our entire naming system, and every historical intervention, no matter how revolutionary, will then be within an European naming system, enhancing its capacities for ill or good. Thus, in whatever she or he does, they will be performing their being for the enrichment of the cultural personality of white Europe. For me then the question of languages goes to the heart of the very being and existence of the African, or for that matter any community deprived of its languages. That's why I now regard Europhonism as the most dangerous intellectual system for the development of Africa. Its logical development is the complete wiping off of African personality on the global cultural map and it becomes simply one of several branches in the European language system, and the only struggle is for the recombination of the equal worth of all the cultural branches of a European global whole. Perhaps it is time that African scholars seriously took another look at the Blighdon vision. The Blighdon-Hayford model rejects the assumptions underlying the relationship of Africa to the world, which equates knowledge, modernity, modernization, civilization, progress, development, democracy, whatever the name, to the acquisition of European languages. There are hundreds of languages in Africa and the world each of which is a unique store of memories and thoughts and experiences which are of benefit to human life. It is true that the current revolutions in information and technologies daily shrink the globe into McLuhan's "global village," but they also quite frankly open possibilities for expansion of the human community. Academic and other cultural institutions should be among the first to sensitize the world community to the existence and reality of knowledges in diverse languages of the world. There are of course practical difficulties in implementing policies that realize fully the plurality and diversity of languages. There needs to be conscious effort by various disciplines to recognize the existence of knowledges in languages from places other than Europe, and find ways of tapping into the knowledges thereby contained and in the process help in a dialog among languages. Dialog between languages is definitely one way of giving back to the languages from which we draw sustenance, and there are moves in that direction. In 1996 I attended a conference in Barcelona, Spain organized in part by the International Pen(?) which came with a declaration of universal linguistic rights based on the recommendation of the need for equality and dialog among languages. But for Africa the question goes beyond that of simply sensitizing the world and it goes back to the very heart of our being and existence. That's why the challenge is to African scholars and writers and universities to act as path finders. It is this consciousness that made me turn to the Gikuyu language for critical endeavors, and now I know it has reached a point where I cannot go back. I work at New York University, and there I have just finished, or rather I'm in the 5th draft, of the novel I was talking about and it's currently 1142 pages, and it's roughly called The Wizard of the Crown. I've also founded a journal with the help of New York University in the Gikuyu language, it's called Mutiri, in which I've published papers in every aspect of development, hoping that the journal will act as an inspiration for other journals in African languages. Then I see a very exciting possibility for me to exchange among such journals through translations a genuine dialog among African languages. There is also the conference on literature and African languages to be held in Asmara, Eritrea at the beginning of the new millennium. The conference it is hoped will bring together writers from every country in Africa who are writing in African languages, but it is also hoped that many scholars will attend the conference to confront the question of African languages and knowledge in scholarship. The conference is being organized by Africa World Press with

the support of many universities including NYU and various foundations, because African languages have been invisible we hope that this conference will raise their visibility, and we hope that this conference will be the first of many because what has been happening in the past is that African languages have had no visibility whatsoever. You now can have a writer who has been writing in African languages and then you get a writer who writes one book in English and that one becomes better known internationally, and ones who have been writing several books in African languages get little or no visibility. But the conference will also put a challenge to African scholarship in Africa and the world, but most importantly will be a celebration of the continued writing in African languages despite all the odds stacked against them. I started by quoting from the Godkin lectures which Eric Ashbee gave in Harvard. The book he published in 1964 opens with two quotations one of which is taken from a dispatch to the governor general of India in 1954 in which he declares that the education they intend to impose on India is that of the sciences, art, philosophy, and literature of Europe. In short, European knowledge, again the same kind of model. The other quotation is from the 1959 charter of the University of Ghana. By then Ghana was independent and the charter saw the University as taking its place among the foremost universities of the world. "As a great seat of African learning it shall give leadership to African thought, scholarship and development." And I'm sure that ideal would still be shared by many African institutions and scholars, but a question of African languages is primary to that leadership in thought, scholarship and development, and I hope that all the African scholars and writers present will heed that call and we are very lucky that in this conference there are some heads of institutions in Africa and even members of parliament, so we will be sure that after this conference there will be a complete change in the direction we are taking.

So let's go back to the magic fountain and drop that which gives power and knowledge to the real agents of social change in the continent, the ordinary man and woman who probably only knows and speaks their own language. When African writers reject Europhonism as the only way of performing their being, you bring about genuine revolution in their literature in both content and form and then we can draw from whatever sources elsewhere to add to the fountain. Instead of always drawing from it and taking away we shall link with the globe without de-linking from our world. It is then that Africa will say with Martin Krata(?) of Guyana, in one of his poems "I come from the nigger yard of yesterday, leaping from the oppressors of hate and the scorn of myself, I come to the world with scars upon my soul, wounds on my body, fury in my hands, I come to the histories of man and the lives of the people, I examine the shower of sparks, the wealth of dreams, I am pleased with the glories and sad with the sorrows, rich with the riches, poor with the lovers, from the nigger yard of yesterday I come with my burden, to the world of tomorrow I come with my strength."

I believe now more than ever that Africa must use its languages and peoples as a strength with which it can link into tomorrow and African scholars and writers can lead the way as we enter the 21st century. At the very least they should make easier access to knowledge and information by the population, and access so necessary for the workings out of the Lincolnian version of democracy in Africa.

Thank you.