**UNIT II**

**Ngugi wa Thiong’o**

**On the Abolition of the English Depatment**

**Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, born 5 January 1938, is a**[**Kenyan writer**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Literature_of_Kenya)**, formerly working in English and now working in [Gikuyu](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gikuyu_language" \o "Gikuyu language). His work includes novels, plays, short stories, and essays, ranging from literary and social criticism to children's literature. In the United States, he taught at**[**Yale University**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yale_University)**for some years, and has since also taught at**[**New York University**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_York_University)**, with a dual professorship in**[**Comparative Literature**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Comparative_Literature)**and**[**Performance Studies**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Performance_Studies)**, and at the**[**University of California, Irvine**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/University_of_California,_Irvine)**. Ngũgĩ has frequently been regarded as a likely candidate for the**[**Nobel Prize in Literature**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nobel_Prize_in_Literature)**.**

**In 1972, nine years after Kenya declared its independence from England, Ngugi published a paper forwarding the restructuring of the departments of the University of Nairobi. In "On the Abolition of the English Department," Ngugi argues simultaneously for replacing a traditional English department with a Department of African Literature and Languages. To place Africa in the center requires a curriculum that teaches from an African perspective, in which African literature is an essential component.**

**Ngugi's emphasis that Africans should use their own literature both to understand their culture and to create continuity with their past also appears in the writings of post-colonial authors. Literature is essential in creating a truly historical consciousness. The articulation of history can empower the present, strength can be found in the myths of the past. The telling of these inspired stories has the power to establish a bond between the reader and the past, through the recognition of common goals, common obstacles, and common solutions.**

**As the concerns were focused on the developments in the Arts Faculty which practically involved the English Department, Ngugi has given a plausible proposal that not only supports the traditional forms of art in Africa but also diverts the focus, instead of English and other western writings, toward the study of African culture, history, language and literature. They proposed that the English Department be abolished and that the Department of African Literature and Languages be erected as replacement. Ngugi, in his paper, has clearly stated that they do not reject other cultures as these have been the primary source of modern African literature. With this concerned improvement, they have recommended to study on languages and linguistics as these make up literature. In this sense, the old and the new are merged in the course to produce a new form of study in the department that enriches the roots and acknowledges the contemporary. From a Eurocentric program, they propose to put Africa as the center. Education has been used as an avenue to retrieve lost national identity.**

**Primarily, the concern of the paper criticized by Ngugi and his colleagues are on the possible developments in the English Department which are the following as stated in the commentary paper: i) the place of modern languages, especially French; ii) the place and role of the Department of English; iii) the emergence of a Department of Linguistics and Languages; and lastly, iv) the place of African languages, especially Swahili. These are all centered in the influential western practice in literature and language that has been implemented for a long time in Africa. It is quite saddening to only have African languages as a supplementary study in the course. Yet, the neocolonialist embraces the language used in the modern writings in Africa. It is essential to open a department which focuses on language and linguistics as these are inseparable and that, when put together, greatly affect literature. However, English would have subtly become the primary essential language needed by Africans and would eventually overtake all the African languages as they are deemed unimportant. Hence, the mother tongue would be a foreign language in form of English. In an institution, it is rightful that one chooses to establish and build up the language and literature that is used by the nation it serves for its learners to better understand as they are familiar to such.**

**English asserts its power over the academe as it degrades the chance of having a separate study on the nation’s very literature. The Abolition of the English Department will pave the way to unmask the colonized Africa. It will not fully regain its former identity but it will reveal a new one as it has a mixture of languages and literatures.**

**In the abolition of the English Department, there has to be a more promising replacement for the university. It is their very own Department of African Literature and Languages that clearly represent what is valued in the educational community, in the society. The literature department primary represents what writings should be esteemed by the learners as anchored on their very culture and history. In turn, through the materials produced by their very own challenge their current status which is that of the western influence. Interestingly, they do not only develop the existing works but they also involve to immerse with the new ones. Through this establishment, the lens used in studying in an African university is that of a legitimate African. To be able to understand other forms of literature, one must understand first one’s own. In the language department, none is fully eliminated but all are acknowledged and enriched. First, the modern African literatures are in English, French and Portuguese; geographically, in East Africa, Swahili, Arabic and Asian are used; and, most significantly, the oral African tradition is very much alive. Since these are already the languages the students and the university are accustomed, there is incorporation in the department. However, all other languages that are not African should only be considered as an elective subject as they should not be mandatory. The university has an obligation to address the needs of the society in East Africa, so, this should also be given more attention. Without neglect for the emerging forms of literature, the department adds on selected courses in European literature so as to see through another lens that is rampantly used in today’s time. Literature taught should be writings that mirror what is happening in the real context of Africa.**

**Conclusion**

**The commentary paper of Ngugi is a representation that one should first assert one’s identity to be recognized in the world. Through the educational system, one may embed the culture and values of a nation. A nation’s language, as a means to understanding literature, will represent one’s views and ideas about life based on how they use it as part of their lifestyle. Educational institutions should embody the ideals of the country they are serving. Through the assimilation of the old practices to the new innovations in education, it is possible to build a fresher form that may support seemingly lost traditions and mix up with contemporary ones.**