

Ngugi wa Thiong'o Named 2014 American Academy of Arts & Sciences Fellow



Ngugi wa Thiong'o, UC Irvine Distinguished Professor of English and Comparative Literature

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, University of California, Irvine Distinguished Professor of English and Comparative Literature, has been named a 2014 fellow of the American Academy of Arts & Sciences.

Ngũgĩ is among 204 new fellows and 16 new foreign honorary members elected to AAAS this year. The 234-year-old academy is one of the nation's most select societies and includes scholars, scientists and business leaders. Members of the 2014 class include winners of the Nobel Prize and National Medal of Arts. Fellows and foreign honorary members are nominated and elected by current members.

“It is a privilege to honor these men and women for their extraordinary individual accomplishments,” said Don Randel, chair of the academy's board of directors. “The knowledge and expertise of our members give the academy a unique capacity – and responsibility – to provide practical policy solutions to the pressing challenges of the day. We look forward to engaging our new members in this work.”

Ngũgĩ, whose name is pronounced “Googy” and means “work,” is a prolific writer of novels, plays and essays, many exploring the harsh sociopolitical conditions of his homeland. He came to UC Irvine in 2002 to teach literature and direct the then-new International Center for Writing & Translation. He is the author of the highly praised *Wizard of the Crow*, which won a 2006 California Book Awards gold medal for fiction. In 2010, he published *Dreams in a Time of War*, a memoir of his childhood in Kenya, which was followed in 2012 by *In the House of the Interpreter*, shortlisted for the 2013 National Book Critics Circle Award. In 2013 he was awarded the UCI Medal, the highest honor conferred by the university.

Ngũgĩ taught literature at the University of Nairobi from 1967 until 1977, when he was arrested by state authorities because of his powerful anticorruption novel *Petals of Blood*. Imprisoned for a year without trial at the nation’s maximum security prison, Ngũgĩ wrote *Devil on the Cross* on toilet paper – the only medium available to him.

Released after Amnesty International identified him as a prisoner of conscience, Ngũgĩ fled Kenya in 1982. He has since held faculty positions at several U.S. institutions of higher education, including Yale University and New York University.