



Wizard of the Crow

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o

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In exile now for more than twenty years, Kenyan novelist, playwright, poet and critic Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o has become one of the most widely read African writers. Commencing in "our times" and set in the fictional "Free Republic of Aburiria," **Wizard of the Crow** dramatizes with corrosive humor and keenness of observation a battle for control of the souls of the Aburirian people. Fashioning the stories of the powerful and the ordinary into a dazzling mosaic, this magnificent novel reveals humanity in all its endlessly surprising complexity.

Wizard of the Crow Details

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Author : Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o

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From Reader Review Wizard of the Crow for online ebook

Bakari says

Well, finally finished the nearly 800 page novel, *The Wizard of the Crow*, by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o. I read much of Ngũgĩ's novels and other works during my political activists days in college. I wrote a paper about one of his most respected novels, *Devil on the Cross*. The professor who helped me with the paper wanted me to present it at an African literature conference at Stanford Univ. (this was in the mid 1980s), but I was too shy to do it. I wasn't very good at speaking in front of large gatherings of people.

But Ngũgĩ's works really raised my political and cultural left consciousness back then, as did the works of Kwame Nkrumah and Franz Fanon. *The Devil on the Cross* was such a powerful piece of satire and political tale because it captured eloquently, at least from my understanding, the colonial and post-colonial history of Kenya, and many other nations in Africa during the sixties through eighties.

Wizard of the Crow is a larger more expansive tale of the political corruption and dictatorial culture of the Keynian political elite. But it's really unfair for me to assess this book because I honestly have not been reading novels for last four or five years. I'm not sure why I stopped reading them, but this one is among the few I've read. So while most of the novel was interesting to read, I started to lose track of the narrative in the last hundred or so pages.

Wizard of the Crow is also part tale and part satire, and even if you're not Keynian, you know that it's a political track against the leaders of Kenya like President Daniel arap Moi who led a corrupt regime in Kenya back in the eighties and nineties.

One of the novel's main characters is The Ruler and he is no doubt a personification of Moi. Ngũgĩ makes the life and politics of dictatorship visceral in his novel. I almost ached at reading those parts because in so many ways, the cultural of political corruption and lack of real democracy is so very much a part of this country. It would be fascinating for Ngũgĩ to write a similar novel about the U.S.

Well, I'm not going to say much more about it. I read it all the way through, and though I don't think it's better than *Devil on the Cross*, I'm glad I read it. I probably would not have gotten around to reading it if I were not doing this 52 books in 52 weeks project. I bought book in 2006 when it was first published, but it sat on one of my book shelves for nearly four years.

I'm looking forward to perhaps reading Ngũgĩ's soon to be published memoirs.

#end

James says

I have a thing for books that create their own mythologies, and *Wizard of the Crow* has risen to the top of that list. Set in a fictional African country, this novel takes a serious romp through a stretch of land containing a Postcolonial dictatorship at odds with its people, hysterically played out through a young couple claiming to be *The Wizard of the Crow*, a sorcerer capable of knowing even The Ruler's deepest secret, the guilt of "white envy," by divination through a mirror. I realize this review sounds like bad jacket copy, and

fails to capture even the slightest amount of subtlety, truth, or the vast geopolitical landscape at work here. This is an amazing book, and like so many of the best, is funny and sad simultaneously. There is a wonderful kind of magical realism at work here, a world I was happy to occupy while reading it, one that often seemed more real than the political surrealism we're surrounded with everyday.

Nathan "N.R." Gaddis says

If you love Dictator Novels you'll love this one.

Also, there's just not that many long books I've come across from the African Continent. There's *The City of God* of course, but that's not really what we're talking about. So of course you offer me an 800 page brick of a book from The Continent, sure, I'm going to go after it. And in a day and an age like this, if you reside in the USofA and you're curious about LeClair's call for a Rump=Age novel, well, here you'll have a pretty good model to work from. Because of course the problem is, How to write an over the top satire of Evil when Evil is already so over=the=top self=satirizing. [given how RealPolitik concludes this novel however it's not all just a question of over the top Evil, but also of banal NeoEvil politics]

At any rate, to make a distinction, I find in my reading of BIG books there's a difference between the FAT and the simply long/KittenSquisher/Chunkster. FAT is a lot of languagelanguagelanguage on a lot of pages. Simply long/etc of course is just a lot of pages, and if the book is good, a lot of storystorystory. FAT is like *Fado Alexandrino*, only five hundred pages but two weeks' of reading. Long is a lot of what I've been reading recently ; this, *In the Eye of the Sun*, *We*, *the Drowned*. 800 pages, sure, but reads like a breeze, the reading mind forging ahead of the words rather than trailing behind trying to catch up with syntax with rhythms melodies jokes allusions. FAT books usually elude your easily capturing the What I'm About ; the long have a thesis readily stateable.

At any rate, whaddy know, when I opened my daily opening of aldaily, there right at the top was this piece on Ng?g? wa Thiong'o. How's that for timing? ::

"Ng?g? wa Thiong'o and the Tyranny of Language"

by Francis Wade

<https://www.nybooks.com/daily/2018/08...>

Reviewed ::

"Decolonise the mind :: Maya Jaggi applauds a vivid satire on an African kleptocracy from Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Wizard of the Crow*"

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/200...>

Reviewed again ::

"The Strongman's Weakness"

By Jeff Turrentine

<https://www.nytimes.com/2006/09/10/bo...>

Again Reviewed ::

"Yes, that's right, fun. You might be thinking: "a 700-page novel about an oppressed African nation from a professor of English literature who was himself exiled; must be one of those highfalutin dutiful reads full of

clever turns of phrase and onion layers of symbolism that you fight through like quicksand so that you can finally achieve some understanding of its Meaningful Message about the Human Experience, or maybe just feel self-righteous for finishing it, right?" Well, let's just shelve that attitude right there. Wizard of the Crow is part satire, part comedy, part farce, and wholly absurd. It is an angry book, yes, but even at its most furious, it is never not funny."

<https://www.tor.com/2009/10/20/fury-a...>

And what nr=non=Review would be complete without the complete review?

"....the result is a surprisingly breezy read that's enormously entertaining and almost incidentally provides a broad picture of the African condition in the early 21st century."

<http://www.complete-review.com/review...>

Bjorn says

There are quite a few legends in this world. One of the oldest tells of how the people of Babylon decided to build a tower all the way up to Heaven. But to no one's great surprise, The Lord disapproved, and not only did he tear the tower down but by making everyone speak different languages he also made sure that nothing like it would ever happen again.

Bah humbug, says the dictator of the compleeetely fictional African country of Aburiria (really, it has absolutely nothing to do with wa Thiong'o's native Kenya. Really.) He's ruled the country with an iron fist almost since the day the English left, he's both the ruler and the lord of everyone, and nobody's going to tell him that there are limits to his power. No, he's going to build a modern Tower of Babel and march all the way to the stars to show the world that Africa can do things the West can't even imagine. All he needs to get it going is to a) use both whips and carrots to convince the people that this is much more important than nonsense such as democracy, jobs and food, and b) convince the World Bank to finance it since Aburiria doesn't actually have much money of its own. How difficult can it be? Thanks to the English language there's a common lingua franca again, just like back in the day, and in these neo-colonialist days borrowing money shouldn't be a problem as long as you're prepared to pay interest. As one character notes, it's funny how "independence" came to mean "dependence."

But of course, the Ruler hasn't taken the wizard of the book's title into account. Which is one of the few things he can be excused for, since the wizard hasn't taken himself into account either; he's just an out-of-work academic who, while running from the police together with a woman from the resistance, makes up a story based on an old folk tale to make himself scarier than he really is. But before he knows it, the legend of the magic of the crow has spread and everyone – politicians, businessmen and the huddled masses – want his help to get ahead in the world. And somewhere around that time the magic, which began as a hoax, starts to gather real power.

wa Thiong'o's huge novel has enough dashes of magical realism and modern-day fairytale to be compared to both Márquez and Rushdie (as indeed it has), but for my part, I keep thinking that this is more like an African take on Bulgakov's *The Master And Margarita*. It's got the same wildly disrespectful and bawdy sense of humour, coupled with a pissed-off, clear-sighted social critique that seems to want to kick over the whole damn tower of power hunger, nepotism, sexism, racism and faceless structures, all set to notes of both ancient myths and modern thinking that sometimes collides wildly and sometimes fuses into something completely new.

For a parallel, consider this. A somewhat younger legend than the Tower of Babel concerns Great Zimbabwe, the very real and ancient stone city in Southern Africa, which the newly colonized Africans back in the day claimed to be have been built by their ancestors. Their new rulers, of course, laughed at this idea (even when their own archaeologists confirmed it); since the white race was superior, something this big must have been built by white people, ergo they were simply reclaiming their rights to rule Africa. The logic of the victorious can often seem a bit weird in hindsight, when all the evidence has been twisted to serve the purpose of the one with the power to enforce his interpretation on others.

Aburiria is clearly based on Kenya and the Ruler on Daniel Arap Moi, but Wizard of the Crow is bigger than that; it's a furious satire on all sorts of oppression, whether based on political, economical or physical power, and the Ruler echoes both Pinochet, Honecker and Putin. The West uses Africa, whose dictators use the military and police to use the people, where the men turn to the only outlet that remains and use the women. Lick up, kick down, shit flows downhill. wa Thiong'o constantly plays around with language; hardly a surprise, since he was one of the first African writers to refuse to write in English and instead write in his native tongue – something which cost him a year in jail and eventually exile when the regime didn't like what he wrote. The value of language seeps through everything here; all old sayings, Bible verses, and English platitudes are twisted by those in power until the language itself becomes a trap the powerless must find their way out of. (In one scene, our hero remembers an old girlfriend who told him the story of how Jesus asked his disciples to become fishers of men – only to spot her on a street corner in a miniskirt, wasting away from HIV, still fishing for men. On a lighter note, there's a misquote of Descartes that eventually turns into a linguistic virus that almost overthrows the government by itself.) And the way out turns out to be through storytelling; the legend of the people's wizard, who can hold up a mirror and change the world, causing those in power to panic and become ever more paranoid. Just like in Bulgakov everything turns upside down, roles reverse and re-reverse, laughter goes from the bitter to the uproarious and back. wa Thiong'o's language is a fantastic mix of colourful folk tale and modern novel, complex without being too complicated, hilarious without dropping its serious undertone, and it's one of the most rewarding novels I've read all year. At 768 pages it might be a bit longer than it needs to be, but even the bits that aren't strictly necessary are simply too much fun to want gone.

The world keeps creating new legends, and they don't necessarily need to be true to be strong enough to tear down towers. One of the newest is about an African grass roots movement where men and women work as equals, unite old truths with education and new ideas and only demand to control their own future. I don't know how true that one is or can be, but it makes a cracking good read.

Libby says

Set the fictional dictatorship of Abruria, this 2006 novel chronicles the decline of the corrupt Ruler and the rise of the resistance, which is inextricably linked with a powerful figure known as the Wizard of the Crow.

Sounds very grand, doesn't it? And it certainly is, with a broad and varied cast of characters from all walks of life and a powerful message of hope. The label "magical realism" gets tossed around a lot these days, nearly invariably referring to a nonwhite author's mixing of the oral tradition with western literature. I would describe this book more as "magical satire," and it is as uproariously funny as it is clever, imaginative, moving, and poignant.

The narrative is delivered with a raconteur's skill at drawing the reader in and keeping him or her mystified as to how the preordained events will come about until the moment the veil is snatched away, revealing

something new and fascinating.

The story's firm grounding in the precise and occasionally tragic particulars of everyday life in Abruria keep it from floating off into the clouds of fantasy, and the well-rounded characters, especially the strong females, keep it from being a pulpy "one man against the world" political thriller. Yet these attributes succeed in making the story all the more thrilling because it's not just lives at stake; it's an entire nation.

I enjoyed this immensely and would recommend it to anybody, particularly those who like Joseph Heller, Thomas Pynchon, and Gabriel Garcia Marquez.

Zanna says

In *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*, Ngugi wa Thiong'o complained that African neo-colonial leaders behave so ridiculously that it's hard to satirise them (similarly, my Dad recently quoted to me from an interview about Bremner Bird & Fortune 'it's getting easier to make fun of politicians. Lots of our later sketches mainly consisted of reading out government policy') but he manages to do it here to painfully funny effect. At the same time he completely demystifies power by revealing the thought processes of the Ruler and his scheming ministers.

I remember reading in *Decolonising the Mind* about how his books were read by the Kenyan people he wanted to reach once he started writing in Gikuyu. Since in many villages literacy was not widespread, literate folks would read aloud in public places like bars. The whole time I was reading, I was imagining that space, where newcomers would need to ask questions and be appraised of background detail; where someone would forget an earlier plot point and explanations would be necessary, where jokes were repeated and howled over, and where politics expanded into discussion.

Of course, Ngugi wa Thiong'o has translated his own book (affirming his expression of hope in *Decolonising the Mind* that the art of translation would help him continue dialogue with people everywhere), so it's perfectly expressive, but the translated-ness has its own interesting consequences for how the book's humour works. More than that, it provokes me to mindfulness of the Kenyan village & the knowledge that he wrote this book for the people there first, and for me last. And I love this, that my gaze is the least relevant, the humblest. In reading *The Famished Road*, I felt Ben Okri created an inhospitable surface to break the colonising gaze of Whiteness (of course, that probably wasn't his intent at all!), but in *Wizard of the Crow* there is no such disruptive confrontation – I simply feel myself a benign eavesdropper listening at the back, hearing imperfectly, missing some references.

On references though, Ngugi wa Thiong'o doesn't assume much prior knowledge; he takes care to contextualise and inform about things he wants to bring into the tale, like the Ramayana. The experience he assumes familiarity with to play on is of living in a neo-colonial state under the gaze of a one-track international media. He shows a lot of love to fellow writers, placing literature as a source of knowledge and wisdom among folktales, songs, proverbs and political analyses. It's extra nice that African and Indian women novelists are mentioned; in such a strongly feminist book, it's super of Ngugi to send the reader to hear from the horse's mouth.

The role of White Euro-American influence, gaze and individuals is sent up exquisitely. I particularly love this quote about an organized political process made by a group of women:

Some foreign diplomats laughed out loud, thinking that this was a humorous native dance, but

when they saw that state officials and ministers were not laughing, they restrained themselves and assumed that, pornographic as the act might have seemed, it was actually a solemn native dance.

Some of the White people have ridiculous names; (sweet revenge?) Gabriel Gemstone is my favourite. For all the broad strokes though it's full of subtlety. The Ruler calls the Global Bank officials racists because they deny a loan request, but himself articulates all manner of vile anti-Blackness.

One of my students asked me what this book was about and I said 'it's about a very clever, brave woman and a very kind, spiritual man'. It's about so much more than the central couple, but I love how they complement, balance and complete each other. I also loved the ideas about renewal and healing in nature, self-awareness, contemplation and visionary exploration. I can honestly say that every time I opened this epic I entered book heaven. It was never hard going, never dull, always delightful and enthralling.

If there were no beggars in the streets, tourists might start doubting that Aburiria was an authentic African country

[the Ruler] was baffled by anyone not motivated by greed. he could never understand the type who talked of collective salvation instead of personal survival. how was one supposed to deal with these recalcitrants? a fisherman puts a work at the end of the line, but if the fish ignores it, how is the fisherman to catch the fish?

Calzean says

This is the African classic novel. Probably as good as any novel gets in depicting Africa's post colonialism culture, politics and problems.

It depicts a fictitious country with a despotic Ruler.

His two closest aides jostle for attention and one-upmanship.

Everyone in power are corrupt.

Everyone not in power are poor.

The USA and IMF/World Bank take a hammering in trying to ensuring the now independent African nations remain dependent on US dollars.

The Churches are hammered as not matter what they say the real power remains with ancient traditions and beliefs.

Blacks who want to be white are derided.

The gullible are derided.

Greed knows no bounds.

There is a lovely love story.

Satire and cynicism are used brilliantly to depict man-power being frightened by women with rights and talents challenging the status quo.

So many things covered that even at 700 plus pages this is a book to saviour.

Nnedi says

Best book ever.

Margitte says

Wizard of the Crow

FROM THE BLURB

Commencing in "our times" and set in the "Free Republic of Aburiria," the novel dramatizes with corrosive humor and keenness of observation a battle for control of the souls of the Aburirian people. Among the contenders: His High Mighty Excellency; the eponymous Wizard, an avatar of folklore and wisdom; the corrupt Christian Ministry; and the nefarious Global Bank. Fashioning the stories of the powerful and the ordinary into a dazzling mosaic, Wizard of the Crow reveals humanity in all its endlessly surprising complexity."

To make sense of the book I had to list the characters as they appeared in this geopolitical satire. There is a vast cast of characters, but the most important ones, including the main, as well as supporting personalities, are mentioned here.

1)The angry Second Ruler of the Free Republic of Aburiria, the Father of the Nation,

2)Rachel his wife - locked up in solitary confinement

3)His four sons:

Rueben Kucera: three-star general in the army;

Samwel Moya: two-star general;

Dickens Soi: one-star general;

Richard Runyenje: army captain.

They were all on the board of directors of several parastatals closely linked to foreign companies, particularly those involved in the exploration of oil and the mining of precious minerals. They were also on several licensing boards.

The chambers of the State house-the walls and ceilings- *were made from the skeletons of the students, teachers, workers, and small farmers he(the Ruler) had killed in all the regions of the country, for it was well known that he came into power with flaming swords, the bodies of his victims falling down to his left and right like banana trunks. The skulls of his most hated enemies hung on the walls and others from the ceiling, bone sculptures, white memories of victory and defeat.*

4) Dr. Wilfred Kaboca: his personal physician,

5)Markus Machokali: Minister of Foreign Affairs - cosmetically enlarged gigantic eyes, the size of electric bulbs - to enable him to spot The Ruler's enemies, no matter where they hid; The Ruler's Eye.

6)Silver Sikiokuu-Minister of State - with the cosmetically enlarged ears, larger than a rabbit's, with which he could hear all conversations in the country: M5, the spying ring, was under his directions. The Ruler's Ear.

7) Benjamin Mambo - Minister of defense: his tongue cosmetically elongated, looking like a dog's, so that he could echo the Ruler's commands to the soldiers, or threats to enemies before they could reach the borders of the country. His new name would be Big Ben, now the minister of information, due to a slight misunderstanding with the cosmetic surgeon and the outcome of the surgery.

8)Dr. Yuniste Immaculate Mgenzi (formerly known as Dr. Yuniste Mgeuzi-Bila-Shaka): second deputy to the ambassador in Washington. Information officer(read spy).

8)**Kamiti wa Karimiri(Comet Kamiti)**: BA and MBA degreed, jobless, homeless and hungry, who would

become the Wizard of the Crow

9) Grace (Engenethi) Nyawira: Member of the underground Movement for the Voice of the People.

10) Her ex-husband Kaniürü: work as a teacher at the Ruler's Polytechnic at Eldares; member of the Ruler's glorious youth wing.

11) Dr. Luminous Karamu-Mbuya-Ituika: The Ruler's biographer. He was appointed to protect the country against malicious rumormongers, so-called historians, and novelists, and to counter their lies and distortions. The Ruler's biography, according to the Ruler, was the true history of the country. One historian, who dared to publish a book called *People Make History, Then Ruler Makes It His Story* was jailed for ten years without trial, together with hundreds of political prisoners, and a few authors and journalists.

12) Maritha and Mariko - faithful church members of All Saints Church.

13) Titus Tajirika - Chairman of the Building Committee. Shook the Ruler's hand and decided never to wash the hand again. CEO of the Eldares Modern Construction and Real Estate company.

14) His wife: Vinjina. His children three boys, two girls. P.140

15) Arigaigai Gathera (A.G.) - policemen who spun tales - member of the special forces of the Ruler who was intent on capturing the Wizard of the Crow. He would become an important narrator in the book.

The nation's birthday gift to the Ruler, was the Marching to Heaven project.

Aburiria could now do what the Israelis could not do: raise a building to the very gates of Heaven so that the Ruler could call on God daily to say good morning or good evening or simply how was your day today, God ...?

Minister Machokali was waxing ecstatic about how the benefits of the project could trickle down to all citizens. Once the project was completed, no historian would ever again talk about any other wonders in the world, for the fame of this Modern House of Babel would dwarf the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, the Egyptian pyramids, the Aztec Tenochtitlan, or the Great Wall of China. And who would ever talk about the Tah Mahal?

According to Minister Machokali, nothing would ever come close to this building such as had never seen before in human history, *except once by the children of Israel, and even they had failed miserably to complete the House of Babel.*

Praise thundered down on the crowd at the Ruler's birthday bash. Even the old men wanted to praise the Ruler, as one old senior citizen tried when it was his turn at the microphone. (view spoiler)

(hide spoiler)]

The story is told by the different characters, repeating the same event from different angles. It serves as a way of introducing the characters and building them as the story unfolds.

Tongue-in-cheek, the author jerks the chains of the world, Africa, politicians, philosophies, politics, religion and cultures. Nobody escapes his observations.

Sometimes the police raided the beggars, but just for show, for Aburiria's prisons were already full. Most beggars would have been quite happy to be jailed for the meal and a bed. The governments also had to be mindful not to upset tourism by sweeping too many beggars off the streets. Pictures of beggars or wild animals were what many tourists sent back home as proof of having been in Africa. In Aburiria, wild animals were becoming rare because of dwindling forests and poaching, and tourist pictures of beggars or children with kwashiorkor and flies

massing around their runny noses and sore eyes were prized for their authenticity. If there were no beggars in the streets, tourists might start doubting whether Aburiria was an authentic African country.

The narrative is brilliant, but tedious at times. The story is characteristic of modern African governments.

"There are not moral limits to the means that a ruler can use, from lies to lives, bribes to blows, in order to ensure that his state is stable and his power secure."

The previous paragraph basically summarizes the entire book of 766 pages. I skipped 150 pages, just did a quick-touch-down-read-a-few-lines-and-go!- exercise over them. It simply was too exhausting. The constant repeats enabled me to catch up again on the part I missed.

Overall the author uses magical realism to portray the two thousand year history of Africa, ending in the modern post-colonial era in which fear and laughter becomes the mainstay of its inhabitants in one sentence.

It is a brilliant introduction to the real Africa, disguised as a fictional tragicomedy. For Africans it is disturbingly familiar and not so funny, sadly. But one endearing characteristic of Africans is our outrageous sense of humor. If you read this book you will understand why.

Introduce yourself to the grotesque and bizarre truths of Africa by reading this book. This is an excellent wordsmith at work. I am glad I bought it.

WordsBeyondBorders says

Ngugi wa Thiong'o is an exiled Kenyan writer. Born in Kenya he was baptized as a Christian. He renounced it, even English, changed his name to 'Ngugi wa Thiong'o' and writes in his native tongue. He then translates them back himself to English. This is how his novels are published. He is also an opponent of the oppressive Kenyan government and has suffered a lot due to that. More on that later. His novels do not focus on the effect of colonization and conversion to Christianity in Africa as is the case with several African writers, but more on that post-colonial effects of them, when the tin-pot dictators take over tiny countries and let loose a reign of terror. 'Wizard Of The Crow' is not a completely heavy and tragic novel like his 'Petals Of Blood'. It is a political farce, a sprawling tragicomedy of epic proportions running to over 700 pages, full of dark humor, funny, sad and even heartbreaking at times. The novel need not be taken as an indictment of current political situation in Kenya alone, it is relevant for all places where people with power lord over those who are without it. (Heck, even a Councillor of a small place does indulge in absurdities matching up to his reputation isn't it?)

What is the novel about. It is set in the imaginary country of 'Abruria'. It is being ruled by a person termed as 'The Ruler'. No one knows much else about him, expect that he has powers to do anything he wants. For instance he can even stop time. If he says a day is 'Saturday' it will remain so until he himself relents and changes it (shades of 'The Autumn Of The Patriarch' by Marquez at times). He can even simulate time. For instance he has exiled his wife to solitary confinement, since she had offended him. What has he done there? The time and the situation in that place is exactly the same as the exact moment when she offended him (i.e) the clock is always at a particular time, the rooms are in the same state, the radio plays the same song etc.

The Ruler is now engaged in building the biggest tower in the world a la Tower of Babel.

The main protagonist in the novel is Kamiti. He is an educated but unemployed person from one of the inner villages. During one of his interviews, he meets 'Grace' a woman with whom he strikes up a friendship. Grace is part of an underground movement which opposes the government. They try to disrupt and cause chaos by letting loose plastic snakes in a meeting and stuff like that. The Ruler wants all snakes to be banned from the country :). Slowly Kamiti gets involved with it. One day, he and Grace are being chased by government officials. Both are disguised as beggars and run from the officials. To escape, they enter an uninhabited house and take refuge there. Kamiti hangs a sign at the front of the house that says 'Warning! This property belongs to a wizard whose power brings down hawks and crows from the sky. Touch this house at your peril. Sgd. Wizard of the Crow.'. This is where the novel actually starts to kick off. The government officials and other people who see this sign take it seriously and start coming to Kamiti to solve their problems. Ministers come so that they can succeed over the other ministers, business men come so that they can top their competitors, ordinary persons come for their day to day problems. For Kamiti it becomes a case of catching a tiger by the tail, he cannot let go of it and whatever solution he gives somehow seems to click and he becomes very famous. Enormous queues start to line up outside his place. Kamiti has unwittingly started something that he cannot control and that which has taken a life of its own.

This sprawling novel cannot be summarized more since it would spoil the ending, but suffice to say that it has lots of twists and turns, caustic political commentary on nearly all its pages. We get an idea of the dysfunctional way in which the country is operating as we read through the novel. For e.g. there is a 'Help Needed' sign put up in front of an office. Due to unemployment, people start lining up before it, after sometime, people start standing in it without even knowing that that line is for. It becomes such a huge line that its end cannot be seen. People get lost while trying to search for it. The government instead of just dispersing the line, puts forth a news item saying that the queue is a sign of support for the Ruler. The underground movement then hijacks the idea, but organizing protests where people stand in queue to decry the government. The Ruler then bans 'queues' everywhere, which as we can infer causes a lot of problems. There cannot be queues for buses, stalls etc. People have to be standing in random and when a bus comes they just have to get into it as quickly as possible.

Ngugi wa Thiong'o has suffered a lot at the hands of the government and has been writing against all odds. His novel 'The Devil on the Cross' was written in toilet paper while in prison. When he and his wife came back to Kenya some years ago after their exile, his wife was sexually assaulted by some unidentified persons, ostensibly at the orders of the government. With so much suffering, it would be perfectly normal if a person turns cynical. But no, Ngugi wa Thiong'o has not become fully cynical, he has not lost his sense of humor, 'Wizard Of the Crow' has a lot of dark humor, but is never heavy, cynical or gives an impression of being world weary. It is almost as if all his suffering and pain has been channelled into this terrible, funny farce for all ages. For that alone Ngugi wa Thiong'o deserves the greatest respect. In a world where a lot of writers live in pretty comfortable conditions, in a fairly democratic set up and decry their governments, here is a man who has faced the utmost adversity and has always held his head high, always fighting against it. If you come across his books, don't hesitate buy it.

Ngugi wa Thiong'o was one of the contenders for this year's Nobel prize along with Mario Vargas Llosa and Cormac McCarthy. All there were deserving candidates, but Mario won this year. Well, here's hoping that Ngugi wa Thiong'o wins it in the future and reaches a far wider audience. His life and his works deserve a much wider appreciation.

Leslie Reese says

This book is ambitious and over-the-top!

Can science, psychiatry, and moral political activism resolve brutal abuses of political power or must spiritual values and practices of global religions (ancient and contemporary) be employed as well?

So many storytellers in this tale---many are corrupt and greedy liars merely trying to save their own asses but the tales they come up with! Their utterances and praises! Convincingness to the Nth degree! Call-and-response, repetition, cues from the audience, and other collaborative storytelling methods are all employed.

Up until about page 585 or so I would have given the book a 4-5 star rating. For me, the tone and overall flavor of the narrative shifted quite a bit after that. Sometimes big books are difficult for their authors to wrap-up!

I do look forward to reading some of Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's shorter works.

Aubrey says

These weapons are to protect our right to political struggle and not a substitute for political struggle.

I'll have this book be the closing point to 2017 because firstly I'm tired and secondly a massive political satire seems a good way to end on of the most baffling political years in recent US history. Much as I probably should, I can't seem to avoid cutting my teeth on new authors via their biggest books, so when I desired to explore Nobel Prize for Lit potentials, Ng?g? wa Thiong'o came to mind, and this work was all I had. While the plot did get a tad repetitive at times and certain points of lack of nuance in story and prose (including a few grammatical errors) made my interest flag around the 550 page mark, there are so many good ideas and ideals and realities wrapped up in this that it knocks many a fellow literary behemoth out of the park. This also, more than I've seen in ads and other white Neo-Euro constructs, earns the title of 'modern classic', and while it's not the prettiest prose around, it certainly doesn't romanticize the unromanticizable, or make the excuse that taking down the Man means forgoing the intersectional.

The thing about this book is that reading it is easy. Characters come and go, but there're less people than in the average Ferrante novel with its family table of contents, and there's also a portended meaning for every appearance and disappearance. Absurdities abound, but the reader is usually so deep in the mind of whoever is propagating the absurdities that the hyperdrive instincts of those living under a dictatorship keeps one in suspended disbelief. It is only when one tries to explain this in summary to someone else that the satire reveals itself for what it is: no more than what reality, with all its cults of capitalism and leadership, hands to us on the daily. This is confirmed by what Trump news gives to me in my own country, and this will be the case, "African" or "Western", communist or capitalist, so long as we are all individuals tearing each other down with niceties and lack of critical thinking until the evil are free to grow rich and the good are free to die in the streets. Life does not give us the part-vitality, part-revenge, part-miracle that is the Wizard of the Crow. Individual incidents here and there make for memes and headlines, but it is the protests that follow when these individuals disappear that cross the borders of ethnicity, gender, race, class, academic status, queerness, and so forth. Ng?g? wa Thiong'o gives us no solutions, and frankly, he doesn't owe us any. What

he gives us is a good time and a potential revolutionary framework for those with the wherewithal to commit to it.

Take away ten, make a firm stand on not giving any back, then, under pressure, relent and give back one, and the result is all-around applause, of victory from foe and congratulations from friend. So far [the Ruler] had closely followed the tenets of the theory, with amazing results.

2017, for me, was the year of anticipation. I won't know the results of this year's efforts for a while more now, and thinking about things beyond control has never done me much good. Whichever path is chosen for me, it will be an uphill struggle for both dignity and the means to put food on the table, and three more years of a self-satisfied cheeto backed by howling bigots and know-nothing liberals will not help at all. A racist pedophile losing a senate race in Alabama shows that the usual demographics know what's up, but it's white people who are the majority still in the US of A, and it's the white people who think they won't be negatively affected. As obtuse as Ngugi's satire gets sometimes when it comes to whiteness, I'm sure there are people out there who actually think like that or, worse, think they should think like that. The results, as attested to by a little more than a year ago's fallout, are the same. What is yet to be resolved is whether the Russian investigation will prove a Wizard of the Crow, or simply more of the same.

[The Wizard of the Crow] should stay in America and acquire the sorcery that invented the fax and the Internet and e-mail and night vision and labs that grow human organs and even clone whole animals and humans, the magic of objects that propel themselves and other worlds, the sorcery by which the dollar rules the world! Amen, some would say, and even this would sometimes generate more arguments among them: Why would you say amen? Amen to what?

Paul Dembina says

I don't have to say other than I thoroughly enjoyed this satire about a fictitious (?) African dictator

Jeff Van Campen says

This is a fantastic piece of satire. If you enjoyed *The Master and Margarita* or *Gulliver's Travels*, you're almost certain to appreciate this book. On the other hand, if you're a fan of Gabriel García Márquez and Salman Rushdie, you will find a familiar voice in Ngugi Wa'Thiong'O.

I can not recommend this book highly enough. I couldn't put it down, and I loved every minute of it. You should read it.

Gumble's Yard says

Epic, satirical, magical-realism account of the fictional African country of Aburiria. Aburiria is an African dictatorship run by a typical African big-man "The Ruler" whose control over the country remains strong but who increasingly struggles to find his way in a post Cold-War world where his previous allies in the West

now criticise the very actions for which he was once praised and who increasingly finds himself a puppet of the American led Global Bank. He is surrounded by sycophantic ministers – the two most prominent of which had plastic surgery – Machokali with eyes "enlarged to the size of electric bulbs", Sikiokuu with ears "larger than a rabbit's" (both the better to spy on the Ruler's enemies). Meanwhile beneath them there is a struggle for power, influence and the money (especially Dollars) that this brings in the ability to request bribes.

Kamiti is an unemployed graduate and herbal healer with a nose sensitive to the stench of corruption. At the start of the book he is lying on a garbage heap, having an out-of-body experience as a bird. Trash collectors mistake him for a corpse and are terrified when the dead apparently arises and believe him to be the Devil (a misunderstanding which continues throughout the novel – each of which section headings is about a different form of Daemon).

Kamiti applies for a job at the Eldares Modern Construction and Real Estate company, where he encounters the beautiful Nyawira but is humiliated by her boss, Titus Tajirika. Deciding to give up his job search and resorts to begging outside a meeting between the Ruler and the Global Bank to discuss the plans proposed by the sycophantic ministers to erect a modern day Tower of Babel. Chased by a policeman AG he and another beggar take refuge in her house for him to discover the other beggar is Nyawira who was part of a group of protestors disguised as beggars from the underground Movement for the Voice of the People.

Kamiti scares away the policeman by putting a charm outside the house and a note saying it belongs to the terrible "Wizard of the Crow" only to find that the policeman returns seeking help from the wizard and then publicises what he sees as the Wizard's incredible powers (AG's later bar-stories of the various happenings of the time of the book are a constant source of narrative through the story).

Kamiti and Nyawira between them assume the identity of the Wizard all the time struggling between them over the best way to cure the country. A main theme of the book is language and identity (particularly the way in which the West did and continues to steal the identity of Black Africans). The book sets out to sum up Africa of the 20th century in the context of world history.

The central themes of the book are summed up in Kamiti's musings following a vision where he traced the history and sources of black power, and incidentally gave rise to rumours that the Ruler is pregnant – which the Ruler turns around to claiming that he has given birth to Baby Democracy (a Multi-party democracy with he as the head of each party).

Around the 17th century Europe impregnated ... Africa with its evil ... (giving) birth to the slave driver of the slave plantation, who mutated into the colonial driver of the colonial plantation, who years later mutated into the neocolonial pilots of the postcolonial plantation ... So I said to myself: Just as today is born of the womb of yesterday, today is pregnant with tomorrow. What kind of tomorrow was Aburiria pregnant with? Of unity or murderous divisions? Of cries or laughter? Our tomorrow is determined by what we do today. Our fate is in our hands.

The book is similar in approach to *Midnight's Children* – with physical manifestations of the characters standing for political issues or events.

The book is definitely easier to read than Rushdie, despite its length: mainly as it is based on a series of short chapters and was originally designed to be performed aloud in a native African language and was then

translated by the author to English (so that as English readers we receive the author's voice directly).

Overall an excellent even outstanding read.

Kirstine says

As a look into Africa, African culture and African Literature this book is excellent. It's satirical and deeply serious, and clearly written by someone who understands and is passionate about it.

The characters are incredibly layered and complex and even the ones you assume are the "bad guys" you end up understanding and sympathizing with. This is very important, because while it's very clear whose side you ought to be on, real life is never that black and white. This is something the book conveys very well.

But it also appears Ng?g? wa Thiong'o couldn't quite decide what style or genre he wanted for the book. It's an odd mix of realism, magical realism, satire and fantasy. It meant I never quite knew what to believe and what not to believe. Did the magical/supernatural happenings only take place inside those particular character's heads? Did it reflect the individual character's level of comprehension or self-awareness? Or was it simply a satirical tool to fully explain and explore the depths of African Culture, or perhaps to convey something completely different? I never quite found out.

The ending didn't sit right with me either. It seemed as though very little was actually resolved, and that we simply started over again, on the same story, with minimal change in anything. Our two "wizards" undergo big changes, but everyone else seem to move very little, which I found rather unsatisfying for so long and complex a book.

I'd still recommend it, though, to anyone with any interest in Africa and it's political system and culture. Actually, having some knowledge of those things before reading this might be good. I didn't, but I believe I might have enjoyed it more if I had. I'm also very curious to find out more about the authors intentions in writing the book, because I'm quite lost as to what he might have wanted to say with it.

This review is messy and I apologize if it made no sense, but it goes to show how confused I've been by this book. However, if it catches your eye I can only urge you to give it a try.

Cheryl says

While I enjoyed the first part of this satire of political unrest, economic hypocrisy and social upheaval, I was distracted by too much going on: too many pages, characters, sub stories, and more. Three hundred pages in and it was all so much, that I couldn't stay with Kamiti as he morphed from graduate student, to unemployed man, then homeless beggar, and then Wizard of the Crow. I wondered if a few more pages could have been edited out, the narrative arc tightened, and the country...well, which African country is it, for Africa is too big a continent to tackle in one novel, as the blurb on my hardcover copy suggests. Admittedly, I'm a fan of Wa Thiong'o's; I found his memoir, *Dreams in a Time of War: A Childhood Memoir*, singular and stunning. Yet while I'm grateful that he is a feminist who in his fictional plot has reminded me to reread African women writers like Emecheta and Dangaremba, and to try Indian women writers like Arundhati Roy and Meena Alexander, I do think it best that I save this book until the time when I can truly appreciate its

ambitious sprawl. For now, I'll look for a shorter Thiong'o read.

Lizzy says

Wow, an astonishing book. So much is encompassed within the poetic prose; Wa Thiong'o speaks eloquently about the effects of colonialism in African countries, about the violence against women across the globe, and about the poison that seeps into governments that are entangled in capitalist campaigns. Wa Thiong'o is able to tell a history that makes you question the importance of facts, dates, and names. His characters stand for many men and women, his country stands for many countries, and the injustices in his books stand for countless injustices committed across the globe. Definitely a favorite, if I didn't have to take it back to the library I would read it again.

Yuko Shimizu says

If anyone is intimidated by 750+ page length, you certainly shouldn't. It was definitely the main reason why I had to put this off for so long (like, years!), as I am an ESL after all and read much much slower in English compared to my first language of Japanese. However, as soon as I started reading I got sucked in, and didn't even think about what page I am on.

The novel is written in simple language that is easy to understand and entertaining to read, but also deep and rich with history and politic lessons, colorful characters, important moral and philosophical teachings that definitely make you stop and deeply think about race, gender, freedom, and just how we should live to be a good human.

The book is full of magic (both in actuality and metaphorically) along the lines of popular books and styles by Garcia Marquez, Junot Diaz or Haruki Murakami. I don't know why not as many people are reading this or talking about it. Hope you would pick this up too. Mini book club anyone?

Hugh says

This is a monumental, epic book that encompasses most of Africa's post-colonial history, and one which I feel hopelessly unqualified to review.

It was originally written in the Gikuyu language, for local consumption in Kenya, and was translated into English by the author himself. It is an outrageous mixture of fantasy, farce and social commentary which draws on history, religion and local mythology. At different times I was reminded of Bulgakov, Rushdie and Marquez, but it occupies a truly unique space of its own. It is surprisingly easy to read for such a big complex book and is often very funny.

At its heart is the fictional Free Republic of Aburiria, which has been ruled seemingly in perpetuity by a brutal despot known simply as The Ruler. From the start it becomes clear that there are outrageous and supernatural elements at play. The Ruler's principal advisers are Machokali, whose eyes have been surgically enlarged for his role as the eyes of the ruler, and Sikiokuu, who has done something similar with his ears. Their latest scheme to aggrandise the Ruler is a grandiose project called Marching to Heaven, which involves building a new wonder of the world, a tower to surpass the Biblical Tower of Babel, and the building project aims to draw funding from the Global Bank.

Meanwhile a young man Kam?t? is trying to find a job after returning from India with a degree. In the process, he meets Nyaw?ra, who is working as a secretary for a construction company run by Titus Tajirika, but is also involved in a resistance group largely composed of women. While they are fleeing from police after a demonstration, Kam?t? successfully reinvents himself as The Wizard of the Crow.

This is just the start of an epic good and evil struggle, full of outrageous imagination.

Thiong'o never entirely loses track of the hope that Africa's corrupt elites can be defeated by the unified will of its people. The storytelling owes much to local narrative traditions and normal ideas of what is plausible and rational do not apply, but at the core is a strong moral parable and some telling ideas on the sources of Africa's problems and its perennial exploitation by the Western powers and particularly America.

Thanks to **The Mookse and the Gripes** group, whose inclusion of this book in their Mookse Madness discussion/competition earlier this year prompted me to read it. A unique and powerful book, and one I expect to remember long after reading it.
