

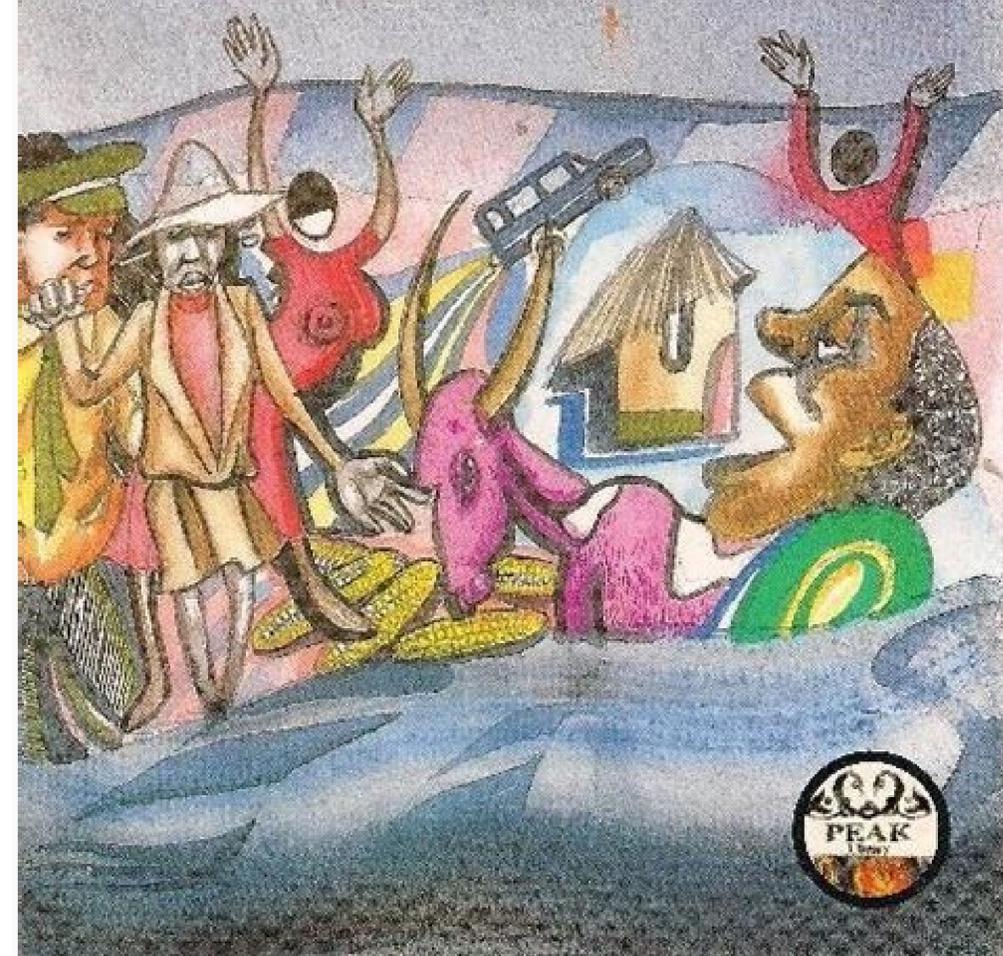
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Petals of Blood

Ngugi wa Thiong'o

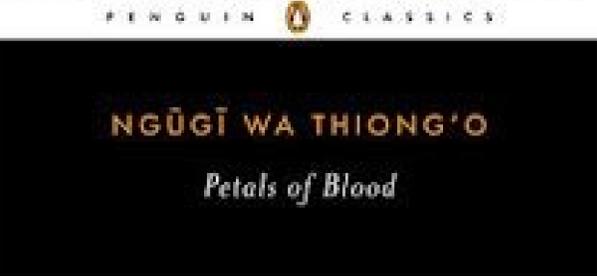
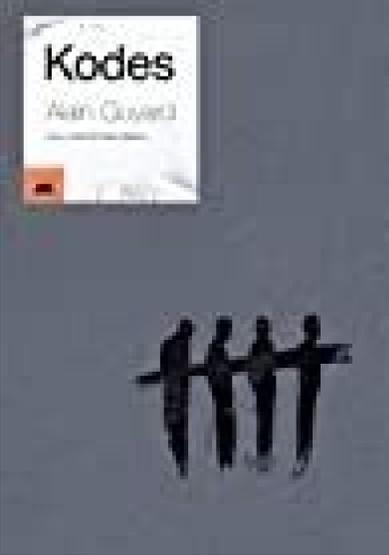


Petals of Blood

The controversial new novel by East Africa's most celebrated writer—imprisoned for his outspoken views.

Ngugi
wa Thiong'o

Petals of Blood



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Munira had worked out a routine answer: That place . Money anyway was saved only to buy other articles for use. Money or food or an item of clothing: any of these would do as a basis of exchange. Abdulla protested against the deception. After leaving Siriana in 1946, he had taught in many schools around Limuru: Rironi, Kamandura, Tiekunu, Gatharaini and for the last six years or so at Manguu. Yet another was in Makerere doing medicine. There were of course who had devilish spirits which drove them to demand higher wages and create trouble on the farm and they would be dismissed. The children sang a e i o u i u in loud voices. Most had only tattered calicoes for clothing. But transcending this absurdity was the care they had for one another. his rather missionary posture and fervour: 'I can't speak for everybody – but it seems that there is still enthusiasm and a belief that we can all do something to make our independence real . On the wall hung a map of Chiri District with the location of the various schools marked in with drawing-pins. 'How goes your school?' Mzigo asked and, swaying ever so slightly on the swivel chair, he glanced at the pin-dotted map. 'You sent me to an empty school. They anxiously watched him, at the end of every month, prepare to go to Ruwa-ini to fetch his salary, but they saw that he always came back, and they said amongst themselves: 'This one will stay. ' Now they brought him eggs, occasionally a chicken, and he accepted this homage with gratitude. I also did some drills only done by boys. They could see his readiness to stay in his eyes, which did not carry restlessness; the others had always carried wanting-to-run-away eyes and once they had the slightest complaint they always went away in a hurry and never returned. She is still in a delirium and keeps on shouting. " Fire . They leaned a bit too heavily on their walking-sticks, eyes a little red, voices a little blurry; he is all right, they told the others who had gathered in Nyakinyua's hut: he's all right, they said, and looked at one another with knowing eyes. He became one of us. She had vanished. Strange, mysterious, he muttered to himself. For a week or so Munira galloped his horse the length of the hills and plains in pursuit of the disappearing pupils. hell . What had happened to her? memories, curses and all . He got off the bicycle. Some could not remember his name. And why? . ' repeated Munira. But the crowdng had retained the fire and at night the wind fanned it into flames which would have licked up the whole barn had it not been discovered in time. But why had he needed votes? No, it was worse after Mau Mau War . The foreigner from Europe was cunning; he took their land, their sweat and their wealth and told them that the coins he had brought, which could not be eaten, were the true wealth! And so the debate would go on. They settled disputes not only between the various families but also between this community and that of the herdsmen of the plains. You are only doing your duty in this world. He picked flowers and taught them the names of the various parts: the stigma, the pollen, the petals. Nderi wa Riera-aa, that was the name, somebody remembered. You are wanted at the station. "Now?" "Yes." "Will it take long?" "I don't know. Daughters he had none; and what use were they nowadays? Maybe Ilmorog . don't you know her? Hence he felt his heart quicken at his return to a seat of his past. He crashed through into a room full of dead spiders and the wings of flies on cobwebs on all the walls, up to the eaves. Another one has come into the village, went the news in Ilmorog. A policeman slapped him on the face. He liked it especially when the herdsmen from the plains came to Abdulla's store. He came from over there and what did he bring us? He shrank a little but he was glad that Nyakinyua was now not hostile. He resumed his teaching, now warming to their apparent acceptance of him. Copyright © 2005 Ngugi wa Thiong'o. A donkey. You see anything?" "Yes," cried the boys. Ha! ha! ha! Joseph – you lazybones – have you ever met a little nigger that was so lazy?" In time, even Abdulla came to accept him and he would curse Joseph into bringing a chair for Mwalmu at the sight of Munira in the distance. "Those are good words," Munira now seized this chance to elaborate on the future prospects of the school and begged their co-operation. He had come late from an all-night executive meeting of Ilmorog Theng'eta Breweries Union. He got off and stood still, his right hand akimbo, his left holding the horse, his reddish lined eyes surveying the grey, dry lichen on a once white-ochred wall. He would often meet them, a handsome trio: one rocked a crying baby strapped on the back; the third would pat-pat the crying baby to the rhythm with a rocking lullaby: Do not cry, our little one, our little one, May he be cursed with thorns in his flesh. If you stop crying, child of our mother, She will soon come home from the fields And bring you giteete-c calabash of milk. Their voices – two, three or more – raised in unison emphasized the solitude he associated with his rural cloister. Within a month Abdulla had added bar services to his supply of Jogoo Unga and pepper and salt. Freewheeling. He had visited the area to ask to be given votes. like the flowers with petals of blood and questions about God, law . He did not want anyone to interfere with his teaching rhythm, and with his world. But he kept on hoping. 'We did not get enough rains last mwere season,' Muturi was explaining, they now would have to find a way of avoiding those taxes . You should know. You are therefore promoted to the English beginners' class. You should know that this world is not our home and we should be preparing them and ourselves for the next one. "Don't worry, I myself have never belonged to this world . But is it really true? And the crippled fellow would laugh at Munira's discomfort. The laughter, other memories, and now the return to Ruwa-ini, capital of Chiri District, did not improve Munira's humour. Tell me: what then brings you to a deserted homestead? He got off his horse, letting it fall to the ground, and ran after the pupil. 'What is your name?' he asked, holding him by the shoulder. 'Muruki. "Son of?" 'Wambui. "That's your mother?" "Yes. "What about your father?" He works far away. "Tell me: why don't you like school?" The boy was drawing marks on the ground with his right toe, head bent to one side, holding back laughter with difficulty. 'I don't know, ' he said, making as if to cry. A flower can also become this colour if it's prevented from reaching the light. 'He was pleased with himself. But out in the fields, outside the walls, he felt insecure. So, Njgunna, like the other peasants in all the huts scattered about Ilmorog Country, had to be contented with small acreage, poor implements and with his own small family labour. All rights reserved. He heard a knock at the door. A deed without a name. I want to see that school grow. She could have been beautiful but too much righteous living and Bible-reading and daily prayers had drained her of all sensuality and what remained now was the cold incandescence of the spirit. 'You should be ashamed, blaspheming to the children. One or two workers sustained serious injuries and were taken to hospital. Workers were waking to their own strength. He stropped to the acacia bush and started breaking its thorn-tips. These said that both were important: a person paid goats for a girl, true: but he looked for the one who was not afraid of water. 'He had heard of him during the last elections. Cattle were wealth – a real wealth. Oh no, the other side would argue: the white man first took the land, then the goats and cows, saying these were hut taxes or fines after every armed clash, and only later did he capture the youth to work on the land. I would like to see all the classes going. 'He stayed the night at Furaha house in Ruwa-ini. And another horse came forth, a red horse: and in him thatsat thereon it was given to take peace from the earth, that they shouldslay one another; and was there given unto him a great sword . He was amused by their ndunyu which was more of a social gathering of friends than a place for exchanging commodities and hagglng over prices. He wanted to spend a day or two at his home in Limuru before pedalling back to Ilmorog. He had until now practically lived all his life at Limuru. I know that water is like thababu in these parts. "It has rained recently, evil, don't you think? But I have never seen him. The following day he crossed over into Kiambu District. . But the sweetness of mercy brew'd destruction, and the frighten'd monarchs come back. Each was in state, with his train – hangman, priest, tax-gatherer, Soldier, lawyer, lord, jailer, and scyophant. Walt Whitman Chapter One! – They came for him that Sunday. A dispensary might have been a useful addition. The children especially were often a nauseating sight: flies swarming around the sore eyes and mucus-blocked noses. No matter how you looked at it, it gave you the impression of a flow of blood. And had it not been known for people to hire themselves as ndungata in the hope of one day getting a goat? Now imagine, a donkey! What have you really come to fetch from our village? Let her spy on him, on his doings, the defiant thought gave him momentary relief: what did it matter? Standard II or what he called the English beginners' class met in the morning. Standard I in the afternoon. He now missed their idle gossip, their anecdotes, and even their comments and debates on unsettling issues. He walked or cycled to his house, an outsider to their activities on the land, and he felt sad and a little abandoned. The women only threw him hurried greetings as they rushed to the fields between bouts of heavy downpour. But he tried to understand and he even made a lesson out of it all: "There is dignity in labour," he told the children. They greeted Munira and started talking about the weather. 'Where you come from: is it as dry as this place?' "It is . He would ask yet other questions hoping for a conversation that would not make demands on him to choose this or that position in politics. Later, after dusk, the three peasant farmers staggered back to their homes, but not before reporting their findings to Nyakinyua. It was as if there was a big break in the continuity of his life and of his memories. They met on the ridge whenever the need arose on an evening before sunset. Do you have good roads? Children spied on him, on his frantic efforts to trim up and weed the place, and they reported everything to the old men and women. Her words and voice lingered in the air, caressing the heat-filled silence between them. 'Come into the house,' he said. The water was beside him, but he was shown his homestead hedged round with thabai, and he was grateful to know this, for in future he would avoid passing anywhere near the place. A challenging place? "No pupils even. "I honestly don't know what's wrong with that school. 'You have too much of the Foreigner's maneno maneno in your heads. Ha! ha! Joseph, Gatutu Gaka, bring another beer for Mwalmu. What was an MP? '2 – Abdulla sat on a chair outside his novel in the section of Ilmorog called the New Jerusalem. Yet he never rebuked her or dismissed her. And why did the colonial settler and his policeman capture the youth? 'He went back and changed. She saw the Land Rover drive away. He watched the flames and he felt truly purified by fire. He would go away with the wind, said the elderly folk: had there not been others before him? Politics! Couldn't one escape from these things, Munira thought impatiently? He developed a working pattern: classes all day; a walk to the ridge; then a stroll to Abdulla's place. 'She is not in a position to answer questions. Karega is here for routine questioning. Was there nothing that could cleanse him from doubts, this unknowing? Hands untouched by soil, it's as if they wear none. 'Njgunna's ambition had always been one day to wear none on his fingers' knuckles as a sign that he had said kwaheri to soiling his hands. Munira was aware of the many eyes that laughed at his failure behind the hedges. But he was suddenly shaken out of this mood by her vigorous laughter. Flowers are of different kinds, different colours. we tended to leave the struggle for Uhuru to the ordinary people. That's why . "I'll shortly be coming there, I'll shortly be coming round. No, it was the railway . put out the fire, put out the fire!" and such things. "Record her words. He argued that there was no difference between African and European employers of labour. He turned his face aside to hold back another sneeze. everything about his past since Siriana was so vague, unreal, a mist . law . It cannot bear fruit. He had made several promises. The smell from the rotting fermenting kei-apple hit into his nostrils. And suddenly, remembering the lorries and the matatu drivers who had forced him into the bush on his way here, he saw great wit in Mzigo's condescending compliment on bicycles. He had even collected two shillings from each household in his constituency for a Harambee water project, and a ranching scheme. And why did nations go to war, if not to secure these things of blood? He contrasted their direct approach with this pomposity; the air behind the faces that sat in the back corners of sleek Mercedes Benzes, behind the walls of the once-for-Europeans-only mansions and private clubs; their sincerity with the bellies pregnant with malice and cunning that walked the length of a golf course negotiating business deals, and recalling Abdulla's words he felt kindly toward Ilmorog. Maybe he had not understood Nyakinyua, Abdulla, Njgugu, Njgunna, Ruoro and all the others, he now reflected. No sooner had he started drinking than three strongly built but elderly folk joined him at the table, disband the tyranny of foreign companies and their local messengers? "Out with foreign rule policed by colonized blacks! Out with exploitation of our sweat!" The crowd was getting into an angry, threatening mood. It's about murder – murder in Ilmorog. "Murder of the workers!" somebody retorted. "Murder of the workers' movement!" "Long live the workers' struggle!" "Please disband!" appealed the officer, desperately. 'Disband yourself. ' Further in the fields women mockingly sang to a gitiro tune of another horseman long ago, when Ilmorog was truly Ilmorog, and they chorused: Sons of Munoru we see; where now the stock of Ndemo? He did not care. OK, I will read you something from the Bible, he told them, and his wife's face beamed with pleasure. the hands of a Msoni are themselves a book. No teacher wants to stay there. But occasionally Abdulla would get into one of his vicious moods and would remind him of his first reception in Ilmorog. He told them about Ilmorog. It was at one of their meetings that Munira once during his holidays from Siriana had felt a slight trembling of the heart and a consciousness of the enormity of the sin he had earlier committed, his very first, with Amina, a bad woman, at Kamiritho. Look at Muturi, Njgunna, Ruoro and even old man Njogu: they don't like my donkey. He got off the metal horse, the song I should say. Actually he has a reputation. Didn't they know the saying that wealth was sweat on one's hands? ' he said. "That's the way to talk," said Muturi in compliment. The first two sisters had successfully completed their high schools: one was in England training as a nurse; the other was at Goddard College, Vermont, USA, taking a BA in Business Administration. Sometimes he made them sing nonsense songs like: Mburu ni indo; ngombe ni indo; ng'ombe ni indo; ng'ombe ni indo; ng'ombe ni indo. Even such a talk would make Munira fidgety. If you should find a teacher, even UTs, we shall certainly employ them. "But . It can even eat roots, you see: it can find water where no cow or goat will find any. It's strange, he muttered to himself again, recalling the encounter with the old woman as he waited for Joseph to bring him a Tusker beer. The eyes of the elders beamed with expectation of new life over Ilmorog; their wrinkled faces seemed to stretch and tighten with sinews of energy. Have you any water to spare? Was he a carrier of evil? Caddy boys, in torn clothes, stood at a respectful distance weighed down by bags of golfsticks and white balls. Wealth was in the soil and the crops worked by a man's hands. he felt his six months' security threatened: what did they really say about him in the village? 'I am not really a farmer,' Munira hastened to explain, all this talk of njahi, themithu, gathano and mwere, confusing him. 'We know, we know . The workers, in a hostile mood, marched toward the police station demanding his release. They say: there in the city there is room for only one . Sometimes too . I sometimes too . And I saw, and behold, a black horse; and he that sat thereon had a bow; and there was given unto him a crown; and he came forth conquering, and to conquer . ' They called him Brother Ezekiel, our brother in Christ, and they would gather in the yard of the house after work for prayers and thanksgiving. Have you seen their anxious faces raised to the sky? They bought some of the produce. Chapter Two! – But all that was twelve years after Godfrey Munira, a thin dustcloud trailing behind him. Sometimes he would give the children addition or subtraction sums and go out into the sun. He would watch the peasants in the fields going through motions of working but really waiting for the rains, and he would vaguely feel with them in their anxieties over the weather. Aamen. When the children had gone to bed she immediately turned to him with half-severe, half-reproachful eyes. 'And you don't have another?' "I have never asked; maybe I should. So be it. 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