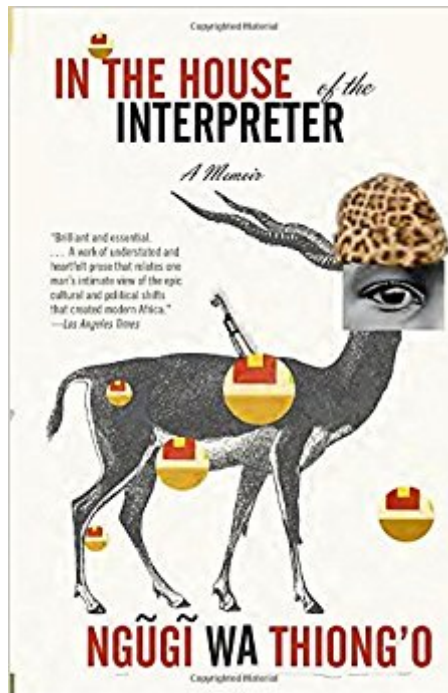




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# In The House Of The Interpreter: A Memoir



## Synopsis

Renowned novelist, poet, playwright, and literary critic Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o was a student at a prestigious, British-run boarding school near Nairobi when the tumultuous Mau Mau Uprising for independence and Kenyan sovereignty gripped his country. While he enjoyed scouting trips and chess tournaments, his family home was razed to the ground and his brother, a member of the insurgency, was captured by the British and taken to a concentration camp. But Ngũgĩ could not escape history, and eventually found himself jailed after a run in with the forces of colonialism. Ngũgĩ richly and poignantly evokes the experiences that would transform him into a world-class writer and, as a political dissident, a moral compass to us all. A winning celebration of the implacable determination of youth and the power of hope, here is a searing account of the history of a man and the story of a nation.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Following *Dreams in a Time of War* (2010), acclaimed Kenyan writer Ngũgĩ, in this second volume of his memoirs, remembers his four years in boarding school in the late 1950s in Kenya's first high school for Africans, modeled on Tuskegee in the U.S. His brother is a guerrilla in the mountains with the anticolonial Mau-Mau (terrorist or freedom fighter?), and the teens' dual viewpoint will hold readers, both the wry commentary on the literature curriculum (he loves Shakespeare but doesn't get Wordsworth's daffodils) and especially his growing political awareness of the savagery of empire building ("King Solomon's Mines was full of adventure but clearly at the expense of Africa"). His

inspiring role models include Garvey, Du Bois, and Nkrumah, and he joins the call for whites to "scramble" from Africa. The A-student wins a scholarship to prestigious Makerere College, but, even though he is no activist, he narrowly escapes prison. The personal detail dramatizes the farce of the colonial land grab and of Christianity as liberation of the natives. --Hazel Rochman --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

National Book Critics Circle Award Finalist "Brilliant and essential. . . . A work of understated and heartfelt prose that relates one man's intimate view of the epic cultural and political shifts that created modern Africa." --Los Angeles Times "Extraordinary. . . . Among the major works of history and literature of our time." --The Washington Post "Elegantly written . . . a testament to the power of education." --Chicago Tribune "Ngũgĩ's memoir eloquently telegraphs the complicated experience of being simultaneously oppressed and enlightened at the hands of a colonial regime." --The New York Times Book Review "More than 60 years later, Ngũgĩ continues to wrestle with the greater significance of each event in his formative years, searching for resolution but often only discovering more questions. . . . A useful firsthand look at circumstances which have played out, and continue to play out, on countless stages around the world." --The Boston Globe "Richly moving. . . . [Ngũgĩ's] reconstruction of the era is lucid, the incidents he records from these years are vividly recorded; it's very easy to see the young man slowly changing directions as he becomes one of Africa's great writers and thinkers." --Counterpunch "Strong and memorable. . . . Ngũgĩ has a remarkable lightness of touch. . . . A document of a remarkable writer's political coming-of-age." --The Independent (London) "Luckily there was such a sharp mind present at this time and place to record with such perspicacity the confluence of race, politics, war, and literature." --The Daily Beast "Amazing. . . . The author easily keeps the balance between the whimsical, political, spiritual and personal." --Ebony "A particularly powerful indictment of British colonialism and a lasting testament to the healing power of literature. Never bitter or one-sided, tempered throughout by a love of language that cuts across deep cultural divisions, including inter-tribal rivalry. . . . There's much to ponder here." --Times Higher Education (London) "A fine and fiery book. . . . A compelling memoir." --The Scotsman "An inspiring story of a young man determined to excel and escape." --Kirkus "Alternately youthfully

innocent and politically savvy, this is a first-rate telling of that African revolutionary elite who determined the future of their continent. — Publishers Weekly

I bought this book to help my daughter with her review and comparison of it with another! I read the book and it opened the door into the colonial past! My knowledge of colonialism and its evil was limited to the context of Caribbean history. This book gives me immeasurable insight into the horror of this uninvited dominance of evil into the lives of my ancestors. The author has an indomitable spirit. It goes to show that the roots of colonialism and its deviant partner, slavery, has had a lasting and deleterious effect on the hearts and souls of people of African descent all over the globe. His story is a shared experience by our people all over. Very great read and a means of reflection on the present state of affair in global history and how the present is married to the past!

With the same extraordinary sensitivity to people and clear-headed justice as he used in the first volume of his memoir, Ngugi focuses on his high school training in a British colonial school. Without needing to editorialize, he can let the deep prejudice of some of the white teachers come through in scenes and quotations. At the same time, Ngugi is surprised to eventually learn of the white principal's protection of the students, no matter what their families' position on independence. Though Ngugi fears that disclosure of his brother in the Mau Mau might get him kicked out of school, it turns out that the principal already knows that many students fear retaliation and quietly protects all them. When N. gets a scholarship to university but, on the way, is arrested in a mass sweep of the whole busload, N. refuses a fine and defends himself, using the techniques of cross-examination that he learned in school, modeled on British back-benchers in British parliament. The scenes of arrest, imprisonment with others, and his shrewd questioning of the policeman in court are impressive and satisfyingly dramatic.

It isn't that there's no violence, it's just that this is a memoir and, although the author writes about awful things that human beings do to one another, the violence isn't graphic. Yet you can't help but be affected. Same for sexual content. He writes about the awakening of sexual interest among teenagers without any graphic descriptions. It's a terrific book. It's written deceptively simply. It tells a fascinating story about colonialism, its effect on many people and the fight for freedom in Kenya. I strongly recommend this book. It's a good read for anyone -- especially people who are interested in history. It's a great way to learn about Africa -- and lots of other places, including Great Britain.

You can never go wrong with Wa Thiong'o books. Great insight on his upbringing. Definitely a great read and present for a Wa Thiong'o reader. Must read for anyone who loves African lit.

A very clear and vivid reminiscence of our past. Wa Thiong'o's simple narrative techniques flow very easily and educates/informs the reader without dazzling with 'written theatrics'. A must read for all interested in the-not-so-recent-recent history of the peoples of Kiambu, Kenya.

I would recommend this book to anyone interested in Kenya. I would also recommend to anyone who is interested in the greatest writer out of Kenya, Ngũgĩ Thiong'o.

This was a good book. I knew very little about African literature and history. This opened my eyes to the civil wars that are occurring in Africa.

Very readable account of the author's school days that highlights both the advantages and the contradictions of his colonial education.

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