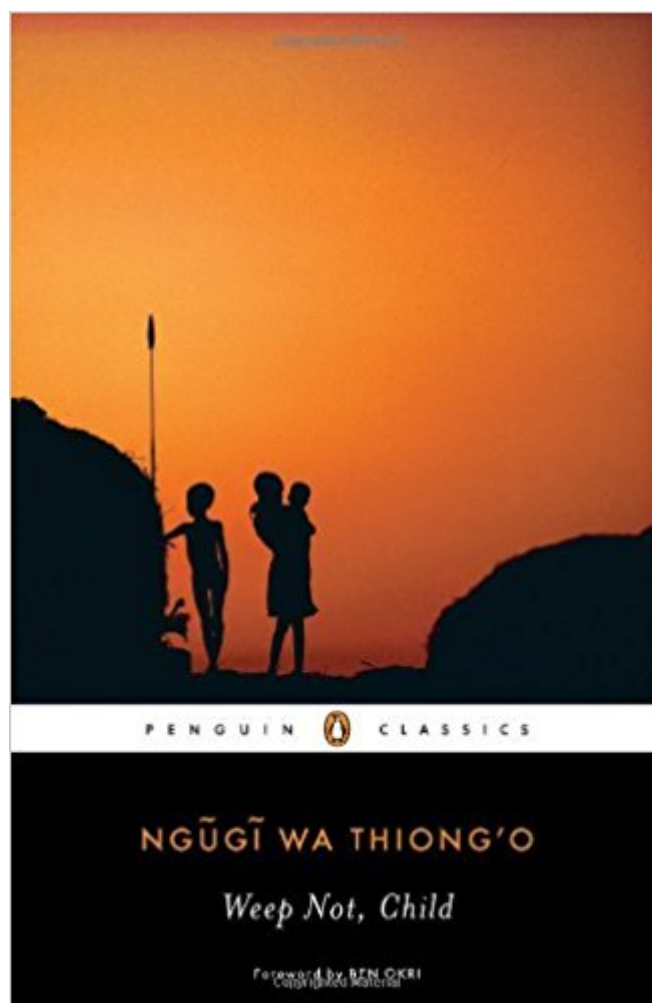


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Weep Not, Child (Penguin African Writers)



Synopsis

The great Kenyan writer's powerful first novel—his best-known work—Two brothers, Njoroge and Kamau, stand on a garbage heap and look into their futures: Njoroge is to attend school, while Kamau will train to be a carpenter. But this is Kenya, and the times are against them: In the forests, the Mau Mau is waging war against the white government, and the two brothers and their family need to decide where their loyalties lie. For the practical Kamau, the choice is simple, but for Njoroge the scholar, the dream of progress through learning is a hard one to give up. First published in 1964, *Weep Not, Child* is a moving novel about the effects of the infamous Mau Mau uprising on the lives of ordinary men and women, and on one family in particular. For more than seventy years, Penguin has been the leading publisher of classic literature in the English-speaking world. With more than 1,700 titles, Penguin Classics represents a global bookshelf of the best works throughout history and across genres and disciplines. Readers trust the series to provide authoritative texts enhanced by introductions and notes by distinguished scholars and contemporary authors, as well as up-to-date translations by award-winning translators.

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Customer Reviews

Weep Not, Child is the coming of age story of a young man named Njoroge, whose promising future is threatened by civil unrest that brings divisions within his own community and family. The setting is the author's native Kenya during the 1950s at a time when the native African population was pressing for equality and eventual independence from the British colonial overlords. At the

beginning of the novel there is talk of a general strike to protest the low wages for African workers. When this is put down, guerrilla warfare gradually develops, and the uprising becomes known as the Mau Mau Rebellion. As the more prosperous black families side with the white government, communities are torn apart. Njoroge and his childhood friend Mwikaki, his landlord's daughter, find themselves on the opposite side of the dispute in the manner of a Romeo and Juliet. And when his elders are implicated in the Mau Mau movement, Njoroge's cherished hopes for an education are threatened. *Weep Not, Child* is a rather grim story of the fragility of the individual confronted with entrenched powers and prejudices. In some situations it is impossible to be simply an innocent bystander. One thing that surprised me in this novel was the impact of World War II on East Africa. Apparently the casualty rates among Kenyan soldiers serving in the British army were so excessive as to be a major cause of resentment in the post-war years, while military service gave a generation of Kenyans the training and confidence they needed to rise up against the British. This is a powerful and memorable novel. My only criticism would be that it rushes too quickly through so many events, telling a story in fewer than 150 pages that should have warranted a fuller treatment.

Weep Not, Child is sadly an all-too-common African story. The book takes place in Kenya in the midst of the Mau Mau rebellion, but it could be set in almost any sub-Saharan African country with or without a rebellion. It is a tale of one young man's hopes and dreams that an education will lift him and his family out of poverty, giving him a chance to save himself, his family, and yes, his country. But the reality of life in a developing nation, long under colonial rule, soon overwhelms. The strong desire by the young African to obtain a secondary/high school education runs throughout the book making it an instructive read for all who long to make a difference in Africa today. Elizabeth Geitz Chair, Good Shepherd Sustainable Learning Foundation focused on secondary education in Cameroon, West Africa

I did my final paper for my college English class, and I chose to do it on this book because this is as real as it gets, reading it was like watching live images in my head, what a great book, incredibly sad, but great.

Like many of Wa Thiong'o's books, this novel deals with the question of Kenyan Independence and the Mau-Mau. But unlike "a grain of wheat", this conflict is not the theme of the novel, but the backdrop. The story itself centres around a family that has lost its land to the colonial settlers, a psychological portrait of how the farmer, the soldier and the child deals with the changing world

around them. Crucial to the book is the child Njoroge, a schoolboy whose thirst for education and diligent Bible study blends into an almost Messianic vision, a vision that shines the brightest when the conflict around him is at its peak. A conflict, it is revealed, he cannot escape...It is this Icarus motif, coupled with the Romeo and Juliet-like love story that accompanies it, that reveals the complexity of the author. A post-colonial writer? By most definitions, yes. But also a man that knows the subtlety of the human soul.

This was mandatory read back (way back) in secondary school but the struggle in Kenya pervades in today's disenfranchised "Africa" resulting in the kidnapping of the "Nigerian Chibok girls" to the west; hijacking of ocean liners by Somalian pirates in the east; economic mismanagement by leadership of most southern African countries and many more tragic situations which have led to citizens being displaced and corrupt government officials being celebrated. I can't help but think of the irony that is Walt Whitman's poem which prefaces this book. Weep not, child Weep not, my darling With these kisses let me remove your tears The Ravening clouds shall not be long victorious They shall not long possess the sky The British/French/Germans long since left, but the caliber of today's African leaders are worse than any colonial master. I am African and I stand by that statement.

It may be in part due to my inability to absorb the particular setting of African colonialism, but it seems to me that the whole thing about African literature falls short of what it claims to be. It always reminds me somewhat of Hemingway hypes. You hope for the heap of what seems to be treasure passed down from old time, only to find some overrated, overused junks. It certainly has some value in cultural aspects and flaunt unique perspectives that need to be told. Like many of Wa Thiong'o's books, this throws many questions about Kenyan Independence and the Mau-Mau, especially in psychological angle. It is a good read.

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