Petals of Blood Study Guide

Petals of Blood by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o

BOOKRAGS

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Introduction

Petals of Blood is the fourth novel written by Ngugi wa Thiong'o, who is more commonly known simply as Ngugi. The novel describes the inequality, hypocrisy, and betrayal of peasants and workers in post-independence Kenya. As with Ngugi's other works, many of the events depicted in the novel have their basis in historical and social fact. The work is a damning indictment of the corruption and greed of Kenya's political, economic, and social elite who, after the struggle for freedom from British rule, have not returned the wealth of the land to its people but rather perpetuate the social injustice and economic inequality that were a feature of colonial oppression. In addition to criticizing this neocolonialism, the novel is also a bitter critique of the economic system of capitalism and its destructive, alienating effects on traditional Kenyan society.

The deeply political novel takes the form of a detective story. Three prominent industrialists in the town of Ilmorog in north-central Kenya have been murdered, and four suspects are questioned by the police. These four are the protagonists of the novel, whose interrelated stories are recounted against the background of Kenya's past and present. The shifting perspectives and timeline of the novel reinforce the sense of dislocation and disorientation of the once proud community of villagers who now struggle against the indignities of the neocolonial world.

The publication of *Petals of Blood* disturbed many of Kenya's leaders when it appeared in 1977, but the government did not formally denounce the novel. However, less than a year after it appeared Ngugi was imprisoned for his play *I Will Marry When I Want*. That work makes even more explicit the comparison between post-independence Kenyan leaders and British rulers.

Some commentators have faulted Ngugi for the novel's heavy-handed treatment of its message, the intrusive authorial voice, and the outdated socialist solution he offers for his country's ills. However, critics agree that *Petals of Blood* is an important contribution to world literature. Its admirers view it as an ambitious work that presents with artistic integrity Ngugi's statement of his social and political philosophy, and find it to be a realistic portrayal of the postcolonial experience in Kenya.

Author Biography

Ngugi was born James Ngugi in 1938 in Limuru in the Gikuyu Highlands of Kenya. Like many of the dispossessed peasants in *Petals of Blood*, his father worked as a laborer on the estate of an African landowner. Ngugi's mother was one of his father's four wives, and Ngugi was one of about twentyeight children in the family. After his primary school education at independent Kenyan schools, Ngugi attended Alliance High School, an institution that had many similarities to his fictional Siriana, with its western-biased curriculum and Christian teaching. During his high school years, many of his family members were involved in the Mau Mau uprising and the resistance movement. During the struggle, Ngugi's parents were arrested and his stepbrother was killed by government forces.

In 1958, Ngugi moved to Uganda to attend Makerere College, the only institution in East Africa at the time that conferred degrees. While at Makerere he began a marriage partnership with Nyambura, with whom he had five children. Also during his undergraduate years, he wrote his first novel, *Weep Not, Child*, and worked on what would later be published as his novel *The River Between* . He also wrote and produced a play, edited the student creative writing journal, and wrote newspaper articles. He completed a degree in English in 1963.

After a brief stint as a journalist in Nairobi, Ngugi went to Leeds University in England to take an M.A. There he associated with radical fellow students and moved in circles that encouraged critical thinking on political, social, literary, and academic issues. He also spent much of his energy working on his novel *A Grain of Wheat*. Ngugi left Leeds in 1967 without completing his thesis on Caribbean literature, and took a job as a lecturer at Nairobi University. There he advocated for a change in the structure and syllabus of the English department. He resigned from his post in 1969 in protest of the administration's poor handling of a crisis between the student body and the university government. He took a job at Makerere, where he helped to reorganize the syllabus from a traditional British structure to one based primarily on African literature. In 1970, Ngugi moved to Evanston, Illinois, to teach at Northwestern University. He returned to Kenya and to a job at the University of Nairobi in 1971, eventually becoming chair of the English department. He took it as his project to reorganize the focus of the department, and to place Kenya, East Africa, and Africa at the center of the curriculum.

After the publication of *Petals of Blood* in 1977, which took him six years to complete, Ngugi changed his name from James Ngugi to Ngugi wa Thiong'o. At the end of that year, after the highly successful staging of his Gikuyu-language play, in which he criticized the inequalities of the economic and social system in his country, he was detained without charges or trial for a year. After his release he ceased writing in English and began to write in Gikuyu only. His first Gikuyu-language novel, translated into English as *Devil on the Cross*, appeared in 1981. While in London for the launching of that book, he learned that if he returned to Kenya he would be arrested, and remained in exile abroad, traveling widely and lecturing. Since the late 1980s Ngugi has

taught at American universities. He continues to write and to work with organizations promoting freedom and equality in Kenya.

Plot Summary

Part One: Walking

In the first flashback of the novel, Munira is seen arriving in Ilmorog to teach at the primary school. He meets Abdullah, the owner of the village shop and bar, and his adopted brother, Joseph. They are soon joined by Wanja, who has left her life as a bargirl to join her grandmother, Nyakinyua, on their ancestral land. Some time later comes the Karega. In various confessional narratives, the characters reveal important facts about themselves. Both Munira and Karega had, at different times, been expelled from elite Siriana High School for their involvement in strikes. The leader of the strike during Munira's tenure at Siriana was the charismatic and brilliant Chui. Wanja recounts her relationship with an older man who seduced her while she was still a schoolgirl and abandoned her when she became pregnant. It is also revealed that Karega's mother, Miriamu, has worked as a laborer on the land of Ezekiel Waweru, Munira's father. Also during the first part of the novel Wanja convinces Abdullah to send Joseph to school. Munira and Wanja have a brief affair before Wanja leaves to return to the Highlands. Karega also leaves Ilmorog to find his way in the world.

Another important episode in the first part of the novel is the "Tea Party" that Munira attends. He is lured to a covert meeting of the Kamwane Cultural Organisation (KCO) during which participants are asked to take an oath to protect the property of rich Gikuyus from the envy of other tribes. At the end of Part One, Munira meets Wanja and Karega in Kamiritho township, and the three travel back together to Ilmorog on Munira's bicycle. Munira hires Karega to work as an untrained teacher in the school. Ilmorog suffers a severe drought, and with no other resources, the villagers face the possibility of a famine. Part One closes with the villagers preparing to load up Abdullah's donkey cart and journey to the city on foot, on the advice to Karega, to seek help from their Member of Parliament to improve their living conditions.

Part Two: Toward Bethlehem

During the trek to Nairobi, Abdullah emerges as a brave warrior who has fought valiantly to win independence for Kenya, and is the hero of the journey. He entertains the village children with stories and procures food with his catapult. Also during the walk to the city Nyakinyua tells her people of Ilmorog's glorious past "when all Africa controlled its own earth" as well as of the British occupation and Kenyans' brave resistance to foreign rule. Wanja recounts the terrifying details of her experiences in the city as a bargirl. After the third day of walking, the villagers' food supplies almost exhausted, Joseph falls ill. The travelers seek help from the Reverend Jerrod Brown, who turns them away after telling them they do not need physical but spiritual nourishment. They go to the next house, which Munira discovers is the house of Chui, who is having a party with his modern, urban friends. The crowd is disrespectfully singing the "juicy" parts of traditional circumcision songs. One of the guests at his party, a woman with bright red lips and a

huge "Afro wig," faints at the sight of the villagers, and Munira flees without asking for help for Joseph. Desperate, the villagers stop at the next house, where Karega, Wanja, and the villager Njuguna are imprisoned for trespassing. It turns out to be the house of Wanja's former lover Kimeria, who forces her to sleep with him in exchange for his aid. After the travelers arrive in Nairobi, they are offered assistance by a lawyer, but receive no help from their Member of Parliament, Nderi wa Riera. But the publicity following their trek to the city brings donations and aid from around the country. Also in the course of Part Two Karega reveals that after the strike at Siriana against the English head master Cambridge Fraudsham, Chui had been brought in to replace the ousted Englishman. The protest against Chui's policies, which were not much different from those of Fraudsham, was the cause of Karega's expulsion.

Part Three: To Be Born

Despite the failed mission to the city, the village enjoys some sense of renewal in the third part of the novel. Karega begins a correspondence with the lawyer, seeking to learn more about what African intellectuals are writing about the present struggle against economic inequality. He is disappointed and disillusioned by their abstract treatment of people's very real problems. The rains fall again, and a good harvest is gathered. The villagers celebrate their fortune with ancient songs and dances. The old woman Nyakinyua brews an ancient drink that had been banned by the British, Theng'eta, which the villagers partake of during a circumcision rite. Their consumption of the brew is followed by detailed confessions by the main characters. Abdullah reveals that he fought in the resistance with Karega's brother, Nding'uri, and that they were both betrayed by Kimeria. Karega tells of his love for Mukami, Munira's sister, and her suicide after her father's disapproval of their union. Munira is overcome with jealousy at Wanja's and Karega's growing love, and eventually has him dismissed from the school. Wanja confesses to Karega that the man she was forced to sleep with during the trek to the city was Hawkins Kimeria, the same person who had made her pregnant many years before and who Karega now knows is responsible for his brother's death. During the course of the third part Joseph is also shown as excelling at school, and Abdullah is increasingly proud of his younger brother's success. Part Three ends with the crash of an small plane carrying surveyors who have come to scope out the area for the building of the Trans-African Highway. The plane crash heralds a new age for Ilmorog. But for Wanja and the villagers, far more significant than the influx of new visitors into the town are the death of Abdullah's donkey and Karega's departure from Ilmorog.

Part Four: Again . . .La Luta Continua!

The final part of the novel sees the transformation of old, rural Ilmorog to a sprawling town of concrete, iron, stone, and glass. The Trans-Africa Highway linking Nairobi and Ilmorog is built and cuts the village in half, razing the old priest Mwathi's place to the ground. Abdullah's place, which eventually becomes Wanja's place, caters to the many new visitors by serving them roasted meat and drink. Wanja's and Abdullah's business booms. They build an extension to their bar and begin brewing Theng'eta, the ritual

drink, and selling it to the workers and peasants of the New Ilmorog. Their success is short-lived, however, as Wanja is forced to sell her business to save her grandmother's land from being possessed by the bank. Mzigo, the new owner of her premises, with the help of Chui, Kimeria, and foreign financiers, transforms her business into a major brewery that employs over six hundred workers. Abdullah and Wanja are unable to obtain a license to brew their own Theng'eta, and lose everything. Abdullah is forced to sell oranges in the street and Wanja becomes a high-class prostitute serving the new rich of New Ilmorog. Abdullah and Wanja's relations become strained, but they are eventually reunited when Abdullah learns that Joseph is doing well at Siriana and goes to Wanja to tell her the good news. He finds her in her old hut, not in her brothel, and she is crying. He comforts her and they make love.

During this time, Munira turns increasingly to drink, and then to religion, becoming a member of an extreme Christian cult. Karega returns from his travels through the country, where he has been working with and educating the exploited underclass, and begins to organize the workers at the brewery. He sees the great changes to Ilmorog and what the people have lost. Many villagers, including Nguguna, have been forced off their land and into degrading jobs. A new tourist center has opened up in town, as well as a shantytown for the new poor. Munira meets Karega when he returns and takes him to see Wanja at her brothel. During that visit she reveals to them what she had done with the baby she had by Kimeria all those many years ago: she threw it down a drain and killed it. In the final pages of the novel, the details of the murder of the three brewery directors becomes clear and Inspector Godfrey solves his "jigsaw puzzle." The three men had been in Wanja's house when the fire broke out. She had lured them there to humiliate them by rejecting them for Abdullah. However, it not Wanja who set the house on fire, but Munira. Munira explains that he wanted to burn down Wanja's whorehouse to save Karega from her immoral influences. Only Wanja knows that she had stabbed Kimeria before the fire actually broke out. As he waits in jail before his trial for the murder, Munira's father and Father Jerrod come to see him, and Munira criticizes their hypocrisy at not helping him earlier. The novel ends on several notes of hope, despite all that has transpired. Joseph visits Abdullah and expresses his ideals of constructing a new Kenya based on the values of his adopted brother. Wanja is pregnant with Abdullah's child. Karega learns that his mother is dead but also that the workers of Ilmorog are planning a rebellion, and so he sees possibilities in the future for the Kenyan working and peasant masses.

Part 1: Chapter 1

Part 1: Chapter 1 Summary

Petals of Blood starts with the arrest of the four main characters in the novel. Munira is the first to be arrested, and the two officers who come for him treat him respectfully, as he is the headmaster of Ilmorog School. There has been a triple murder in Ilmorog, they tell him, and Munira is wanted for routine questioning. The next person taken into custody is Abdulla, the one-legged bar and shop owner. He has just come from a night in the hospital, and his left hand is bandaged, although we don't yet know why. The officers try to arrest Wanja next, and are greeted by a doctor who tells them she is delirious and hallucinating. He tells them that in 10 days time, she would be recovered sufficiently for questioning. Karega is the fourth suspect, and has come in late from an all-night worker's union meeting. He is sleeping when he hears the knock at the door. Karega is to be involved in a trade-union strike the following day, so when he is arrested, the strikers mistakenly think his arrest had to do with the strike. They march towards the police station, protesting his arrest and demanding his immediate release. They are told that Karega is here about a triple murder, not a strike, but the strikers continue to protest.

The headlines that day read: Mzigo, Chui, Kimeria Murdered. The articles talks about their death by burning the night before in Ilmorog, only hours after a meeting in which they decided against a pay rise for the factory workers of Ilmorog. The article goes on to talk about the huge contribution the three men made to the town of Ilmorog. They are the three African directors of the Theng'eta Breweries and Enterprises Ltd., and prominent members of the KCO.

Part 1: Chapter 1 Analysis

The novel begins in a non-linear way, with the first chapter alluding to what will happen twelve years in the future. It mentions names that the reader will learn about in the following chapters, but gives no information about them. The four people that are arrested will form the backbone of the novel, and we will learn about their lives individually and in their relations to one another as the novel progresses.

Part 1: Chapter 2

Part 1: Chapter 2 Summary

Chapter 2 takes us back twelve years prior to the arrest, to the arrival of Godfrey Munira, the new teacher, in Ilmorog. News of his arrival spread quickly through the small town, although the townspeople assume that he would last no longer than the other teachers had. As a welcoming sign, the village elder "shat a mountain between the school building and the acacia bush."

Munira's first week was spent chasing the village children all over the hills on his "metal horse," or bicycle, and persuading them to come to school. During those first few weeks, an old woman comes to visit Munira at the schoolhouse. She asks him about the city he came from, and about the women there. She asks if they wear high heels, and if they are wise in the ways of the white man. He replies affirmatively, and she then asks him why he came to Ilmorog. She tells him that all their young people had gone, leaving both their parents and their children to suffer in the heat and drought of the small town. She asks if Munira had come to take the rest of their young people away. Before he has a chance to answer her, he is unable to control a massive sneeze that showers the old lady with mucus, and she runs away in fright.

Following this incident, Munira goes to the only shop in Ilmorog. Abdulla, the shop owner, is also new to Ilmorog. He has only one leg, and runs his small shop with the assistance of his young brother, Joseph, at whom he was always cursing, and his donkey. Although the townspeople are not fond of the donkey, they enjoy coming to the shop to drink beer and chat. There was no other use for money for the farmers and herdsmen of Ilmorog, as everything else was either grown or obtained by trade. That day, while Munira was having a beer, the three village elders came in to have a beer as well. They tried to talk to him about farming, but he hastened to tell them that he was not a farmer and did not understand what they were talking about. Njuguna, one of the elders, was envious of Munira, wishing that he too could stop working as a farmer.

They begin to ask him questions about the school, and about why he'd come to a place like Ilmorog. He explains that he is grateful to have had an education, and wishes to give that same gift to other children.

Despite the fact that Munira begins to become accepted by the people of Ilmorog, he is disappointed by the lack of enthusiasm both the children and their parents show for his classes. He decides to close the school, swearing to leave and go back to the city. As soon as he returns to the city however, he remembers why he left in the first place, and recalls the positive aspects of Ilmorog. He is disgusted by the pretentiousness of the city, and recalls with longing the straightforward, honest people he had met during his short stay in Ilmorog.

He comes to the conclusion that he will return to Ilmorog, but decides to spend a couple of days in his home city of Limuru before going back. We learn that he feels completely inadequate in comparison to his siblings, and does not get along with anyone in his family with the exception of his sister, Mukami, who had committed suicide just a few years earlier. He describes his father as "tall and mean in his austere holiness," and criticizes him for the way that he exploits his farm workers. Munira remembers that even as a child, he "was quick to notice that away from his father's house, in their quarters down the farm, the workers, even as they praised the Lord, were less stilted, were more free and seemed to praise and sing to the Lord with greater conviction and more holiness."

He also recalls, as he rides towards his home, an incident of his youth, when he loses his virginity to a prostitute. In a childish attempt to purify himself, he builds a replica of the woman's house and burns it. He feels cleansed of all wrongdoing, but in the middle of the night the fire, which he thought he had fully extinguished, was rekindled and nearly burned down the barn where he had conducted his ritual.

He also remembers one woman in particular who lived on his father's farm. Although she never went to church, she had always stood out to him as especially holy. The woman, Old Mariamu, had a son who Munira used to play with as a boy. He was shocked to hear one day when he was home from college for the holidays that the young man who used to be his playmate was accused of carrying weapons for Mau Mau, a rebel group, and was subsequently hanged.

When Munira arrives at his house, he plays with his two children. He tries to tell them funny stories about Ilmorog, but his pious wife restrains him. He describes his wife as a woman who "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." It is then, in the face of his wife's accusations, that he realizes that he truly does not belong in Limuru, and decides to make Ilmorog his home.

Munira's second arrival to Ilmorog is very different than his first. People come out to greet him, and even the old woman, Nyakinyua, is more pleasant to him. He notices a change in his students' attitude towards him, and although he still has few students, they show up consistently and make an effort to learn. He now enjoys his talks with the farmers and herdsmen over a few beers at Abdulla's store, although he still is sensitive to certain topics. He is especially sensitive to the subject of colonialism, and whenever the subject is broached he would "suddenly become conscious of never having done or willed anything to happen, that he seemed doomed to roam this world, a stranger."

He continues to feel more and more comfortable in Ilmorog, and even begins to view the outside world of Limuru, the world of his father, his children, and his wife, "with suspicion and hostility."

One day he takes the children out into the field to study nature. He teaches them the parts of a flower, and about fertilization. One of the children points out a flower with "petals of blood," in amongst a field of blue and white flowers. It did indeed look like

blood. Munira picks it with trembling hands, explaining that there is no color called blood, that it was merely a red flower. The children begin to ask him questions about why things die, and why God allowed bad things to happen. Munira is upset by these questions, and he vows never to take the children into the fields again.

At that moment Wanja, another newcomer who has just arrived in town, greets him. She asks him for some water, and he gives her some before returning to his classroom. He is unsettled by her coy ways, and yet excited by her beauty. She is at Abdulla's shop when he goes for a beer after class, and he once again feels mixed emotions from her presence. He learns that she is the granddaughter of Nyakinyua, the old lady, and that she has come from the city to visit her grandmother.

To everyone's surprise, Munira begins to speak of his childhood. He talks about being accepted at Siriana, a competitive and elite private school. He talks about his first headmaster there, the kindly Rev. Hallowes Ironmonger, who was replaced by the strict Cambridge Fraudsham. He speaks glowingly of Chui, the class leader, who excelled at everything, and was always at the top of the class in every subject, as well as a natural athlete. When Chui led a class strike to try to get their former headmaster reinstated, Munira was inspired for the first time in his life to take an active role. He was actively involved in the strike, and as a result he, Chui, and five other students were expelled from Siriana. He realized then that he was not cut out to be a leader, but a follower, and has lived his life that way ever since.

At the end of his narrative everyone is silent for a few moments. Joseph comes in to clear the table, and Wanja asks Abdulla if Joseph is in school. Abdulla says he is not, and that he needs Joseph's help because of his leg. Wanja offers to help him in the shop if he will let Joseph go to school. She then asks Munira to accompany her to her grandmother's house.

Wanja becomes the talk of the town. To the townspeople she is a contradiction, a city girl who helps her grandmother in the fields like a peasant woman. When she disappears, everyone is certain she has gone for good. She returns a few days later however, with all of her belongings. They are all overjoyed at her return, Munira no less so than anybody. He enjoys her company, and begins to think longingly of her at night.

An airplane flies over Ilmorog, followed a couple of days later by two government officials. They are taking measurements and making plans for a road that would come through Ilmorog and connect it to the rest of Africa. The people of Ilmorog are both apprehensive and excited at the prospect. Only Wanja seems upset by something, and quickly leaves the scene.

That night, Munira goes to Wanja's hut. He is disappointed to find Abdulla there. They are celebrating, and Munira's heart sinks further. Then Wanja tells Munira her happy news, that Abdulla has offered her a job as a barmaid at his shop. This way she can stay in Ilmorog, and Joseph can go to school. She tells Munira that it was his story from the previous evening that inspired her to make this change in her life. She muses that perhaps it was an act of God that they were all in Ilmorog at the same time, and then

begins to tell her own story of why she came. The story began with her high school sweetheart, who used to write her love letters and bring her gifts. At first she made fun of him with the other girls, then began to fall for him. One night, she walked home with him holding hands, and was spotted by her father. That night, she was beaten severely by both her mother and father. She could not understand why, and thought her punishment unfair. She swore to somehow get revenge. Soon after that a wealthy older man bought a plot of land near theirs and moved in. He became friends with Wanja's father, and began to come to the house all the time. He and Wanja began to see each other frequently, and became lovers. Her parents found out, and she agreed to stop seeing him. She realized soon after that she was pregnant by him, and when she confronted him he merely laughed at her. She dropped out of school, ran away to her cousin's house, and was forced to become a barmaid, as it was the only option open to dropouts.

She ends her story sadly, but is quickly smiling and happy again. She invites them both to celebrate her first night as a barmaid the following evening at Abdulla's shop. She asks Munira to bring a pound of rice to the celebration tomorrow, and promises to let him walk her home as a reward.

Part 1: Chapter 2 Analysis

Ilmorog is a dead town. It is a town where all the people of working age have been lured away by the promises of big city life. They leave their families and even their children, returning once every year or so to see how life in Ilmorog is. This sense of desertedness is why Munira decided to come to Ilmorog. He is clearly running away from something, although we don't yet know what. "Isn't there a safe corner in which to hide and do some work, plant a seed whose fruits one could see," he asks himself in response to the old lady's questioning. We learn that he is not a farmer, and while he does not wish to be a farmer, he also feels sorely the distance that his education puts between himself and the other townspeople. This feeling of being different from others, of being outside the circle rather than a part of it, will haunt him throughout the entire novel.

When he goes back to the city, we learn a little more about what he's running away from. He refers to a sense of failure, especially in comparison to all that his father and siblings have accomplished. We also learn of his first sin, and of his efforts to purify himself. It is an example of irony that his attempt to cleanse his soul of sin nearly ends up burning his father's estate down.

Old Mariamu, her son who was hanged, and Munira's sister Mukami, are all introduced early on in the story, because they will all play a central role later on in tying different characters and stories together. Munira remembers that he "had once heard her name mentioned in connection with his father's missing right ear – it had been cut off by Mau Mau guerrillas – and more recently in connection with Mukami's suicide." This foreshadows a time when these events will come together to connect people in Ilmorog that he would not have dreamt would be connected.

The name of the novel is *Petals of Blood*. In chapter 2, Munira's pupils find red flowers that they describe as having "petals of blood." The meaning of the title is never fully explained, although the one red flower in a field of blue and white flowers could be seen to symbolize Munira's feelings of solitude and estrangement from his family and the rest of the community. It could also foreshadow the future destruction of Ilmorog.

In Chapter 2 we also learn the histories behind the lives of both Munira and Wanja. Munira's story helps us to understand his feelings of inadequacy and failure. He had always been a mediocre child, both in academics, in sports, and socially. He had always had more of a passive than an active role in life, unlike Chui, who was a natural born leader. Munira's one experiment with leadership was the strike that he helped Chui lead, which resulted in his suspension from Siriana and his subsequent realization that he was not cut out for leadership.

Wanja's story also resulted in her having to leave school early, despite the fact that she excelled in academics. Her pregnancy forced her into life as a barmaid, and two things are left unsaid at the end of her story. One is what became of her pregnancy. Did she have an abortion? A miscarriage? Give the child up for adoption? Where was this ill-fated child? The other ambiguous part of her story was what exactly being a barmaid consisted of. It is hinted at that a barmaid is not a respectable position, although she is a barmaid at Abdulla's shop, and seems quite contented with her position there. Prostitution is a possibility, and there is also the possibility that a barmaid was more akin to something like an escort.

Part 1: Chapter 3

Part 1: Chapter 3 Summary

Chapter 3 brings us back to the present day. Munira is in his cell, and has been questioned by a young police officer that has no patience for his ramblings about Wanja's history, God, or anything else. He wants simple facts, which Munira, in his present flustered state, cannot give. He is put back in his cell, and falls into a deep sleep. The next morning a new officer has come from Nairobi to take over the investigation. He is more patient, and apologizes for the abruptness of Munira's previous questioner. He agrees to give Munira pen and paper to write down his statement rather than give it verbally, as per Munira's request, but he apologetically tells Munira that he must keep Munira locked up until he has finished his statement.

As the memories of the past twelve years flood through his mind, he is unsure where to begin. He thinks first of Wanja, and is certain when looking back over the course of twelve years, "that all she wanted was power, power especially over men's souls, young, desperate and lost power."

We are then taken back to the past, when Karega first arrives in Ilmorog. Karega approaches Munira when Munira has just returned from buying Wanja's rice. He cannot give his full attention to Karega, as his thoughts are occupied almost completely by Wanja and her promise to let him walk her home that evening. Something he says reminds Munira of a woman who used to live on his father's farm, old Mariamu, who would make tea when she didn't have money for tea leaves by burning sugar on a spoon and mixing it with hot water. When Karega mentions this tea in passing, he realizes that Karega must have some connection to his former life in Limuru. He is further surprised when Karega tells him that he was at school at Siriana, the same school that Munira was expelled from. He tells Munira that Mariamu was his mother, and Munira tells him that he used to be playmates with his brother. Karega is surprised by the news, and tells him that he didn't even know he had a brother until Mukami, Munira's sister who committed suicide, told him. Munira is shocked that Karega knows his late sister, but before he can ask more questions Karega has begun a new topic of conversation. He reminds Munira that he was Karega's teacher at Manguo School, and Munira suddenly remembers him. Karega then tells him he had been expelled from Siriana under much the same circumstances that Munira had been many years earlier.

When Karega leaves, Munira is strangely shaken by this news, and feels as though the life he had worked so hard to leave behind has now found him in his safe haven of Ilmorog. To try to dispel these thoughts he turns his attention to the celebration he is to attend at Abdulla's with Wanja. However, he cannot recover the calm he has felt these last few months in Ilmorog. He decides to bicycle after Karega and offer him a place to stay for the night.

Wanja, recovering in the hospital from her brush with death from the fire in her house, also recalls that same day, the day of the arrival of Karega, twelve years earlier. She had begun the day helping her grandmother harvest the meager crops in her small shamba, or field. There had been hardly anything to harvest, so Wanja went early to Abdulla's shop, anxious to start her job as barmaid. She recalls cleaning, stocktaking, and putting up signs to attract customers. It works, and soon Abdulla's bar is full of people talking or drinking beer. They leave, however, and, as Wanja waits for her next customers, she remembers why she first came to Ilmorog. Tired of the amusing but thankless work as a barmaid, she feels as though there is something missing from her life. She realizes that she wants another chance at motherhood, but try as she might, she can't become pregnant. She decides to come to Ilmorog to ask her Grandmother for advice. Her Grandmother takes her to Mwathi, the wise man and prophet of the town, who issues advice from behind a wall. He tells her that she would be able to conceive on the night of the new moon. She decides that she will try with Munira, and plans the celebration accordingly. When Munira is late arriving, she despairs, and asks Abdulla to take her home.

We learn the story of Karega, whose mother and father quarreled when her mother refused to work so hard in the fields and at home without seeing any payment from her husband. Karega's mother took her first son, Nding'uri, to Limuru, where she begged to be able to live on Munira's father's land. She was briefly reconciled with her husband, becoming pregnant with Karega, but then returned shortly after to Limuru.

When Munira catches up to Karega on his bicycle to offer him a place to stay, Karega agrees, and they go together to Abdulla's. They arrive shortly after Wanja and Abdulla leave, and decide to go to Wanja's house. Wanja and Abdulla are both there, and they exchange stories merrily until Abdulla begins to tell a story about his involvement in the war for independence, and Munira becomes so upset that he accidentally breaks Wanja's pressure lamp, bringing a dark gloom over the party. Abdulla decides to leave, and Wanja asks Munira if he would go for a walk with her.

As they walk, Munira tries to explain to Wanja the feelings that Karega's arrival has aroused in him. Wanja is only half listening though, consumed by her own thoughts and by her disappointment that the moon has not yet risen. She tells him a story about her aunt being burned to death by her cousin's husband, citing it as the reason why she had been so upset by the pressure lamp being broken and the small fire starting in her hut. Munira suddenly asks what happened to Wanja's child. She becomes distraught, and asks Munira to take her home. She is crying, but as they reach the hut she sees the new moon come out from behind a cloud, and is suddenly ecstatic. She asks Munira to stay with her to "Break the moon over me." He stays happily, although twelve years later points to that night, when all four of them were together for the first time, as the beginning of the end.

Part 1: Chapter 3 Analysis

It is evident by Munira's rambling thoughts while he is in prison, and his intense brand of spirituality, that he is not the same man that he was at the beginning of the book, twelve years earlier. We are given small hints that perhaps Munira is involved in the murder in some way, although in exactly what way, we are not sure. Once he is given pen and paper, and put back in his jail cell, he muses, "How does one tell of murder in a New Town? Murder of the spirit? Where does one begin? How recreate the past so that one can show the operation of God's law? The working out of God's will, the revelation of His will so that now the blind can see what the wise cannot see?" This would perhaps hint that in his version of the story, "God's will" is the cause of the deaths, rather than any human.

One of the prominent themes in Petals of Blood is that of history repeating itself. That both Munira and Karega were expelled from Siriana over a strike involving Cambridge Fraudsham is one example of this. The fact that Karega's strike succeeded in dethroning Fraudsham where Munira's failed, also establishes the beginning of a rivalry between Munira and Karega that will continue throughout the novel.

In this chapter we are acquainted with Wanja's desperation to have a child. We still do not know what has happened to her first pregnancy, but so desperate is she for another chance at motherhood, that she is willing to try the traditional methods of her Grandmother and the other elders of Ilmorog.

Once again, evidence of Munira's guilt at not being a part of the fight for independence appears. He is visibly unsettled by Abdulla's talk of participation in the war, so much so that he knocks over Wanja's lamp. Munira's defining characteristic in the novel is his discomfort and dissatisfaction towards himself. We are lead to wonder just what will break Munira of his habit of self-recrimination and loathing. Is it Wanja? Ilmorog? His dubious love of teaching? It will be revealed to us as the novel unfolds, but what we know now is that it will have to be something powerful to dispel the all-consuming guilt that Munira has about who he is.

Part 1: Chapter 4

Part 1: Chapter 4 Summary

Chapter 4 begins with a brief history of Ilmorog. It begins with the native Kenyans, and moves on to the colonists who appeared to disrupt the peaceful existence that had once blessed the Ilmorog residents. Abdulla's shop had been started by an Indian man, who'd gotten a Kenyan girl in trouble and been killed in the Ilmorog forest for it. When Abdulla came to Ilmorog, he'd had to rescue the small building from moths, spiders, and rats. He'd always been bad tempered, constantly cursing at Joseph and frowning at the customers. Since Wanja's arrival however, he became friendlier to the customers and almost kindly to Joseph. At first Wanja seems content to help Abdulla in his shop and her Grandmother in the fields. Soon however, she becomes despondent, even angry, and bitter at the village and its people. Abdulla tries to offer her a 50/50 partnership in his store to get her to stay, but it is not enough to keep her restless spirit in Ilmorog, and she leaves not long after her arrival.

Part 1: Chapter 4 Analysis

Chapter 4 acquaints us with Wanja's hot temper and fleeting emotions. At the beginning of the chapter, she appears content with her position as barmaid in Abdulla's store, and her easy relationship with Munira. By the end of the chapter, she has left for the city.

Part 1: Chapter 5

Part 1: Chapter 5 Summary

The year following Wanja's departure was a hard one for the residents of Ilmorog. They were all used to young people deserting them, so it was not so much Wanja's disappearance that troubled them. The weather had been particularly bad that year, with almost no rain, and everyone worried that the crops would not yield enough to sustain them through another year.

They all blamed Abdulla's donkey. Not only did he eat too much grass, leaving nothing for the cows and goats, but they also thought of the donkey as an evil omen that prevented rain from coming to Ilmorog.

At the same time, Munira reopens the school. However, with four classes, he finds that he cannot possibly keep it running without an extra teacher. He decides to go to Mzigo to threaten his resignation if he cannot hire another teacher.

Before he leaves however, Ilmorog is visited first by a tax collector, and then by two government men, whom the villagers call Fat Stomach and Insect. Fat Stomach spoke of a new cultural movement that was happening in Kenya, and by an invitation by the government to go to Gatunda to drink tea. The women are furious, and begin to shout at these two men. Why would they want to go and drink tea when they are starving to death for a lack of water in Ilmorog? Afraid, the two men run back to their Land Rover, and drive off.

Munira leaves to go and see Mzigo. Before he can voice his request, Mzigo informs him that he has been made Headmaster of the school, a promotion from his old title of Acting Headmaster. Munira is filled with pride. He asks Mzigo about hiring more teachers, and Mzigo gives him free reign to hire as many teachers as he needs. Mzigo then hands him an envelope with an invitation from the Kamwene Cultural Organization to have tea at Gatundu with Nderi wa Riera, the government official that represented Ilmorog and its surrounding areas. He is elated by the invitation, and goes to Limuru to share the news with his wife and father.

When he and his wife arrive to the tea with many other people, he is astonished and disappointed to find something completely different than what he had expected. It is not made completely clear what happens, but some people are beaten when they speak out against the failure of an independent Kenya to make things significantly better than they had been during colonialism. He is ashamed, confused, and saddened. He decides to go and speak to his father, who he now feels more respect for. His father at least is a man of God, and not the government, a man who has stuck to his beliefs even in the face of adversity. He tries to describe the scene of the previous day to his father. "What I could not understand…what I shall never forget was this man…he was so poorly dressed…rags…no shoes even…and he stood there, when all of us were trembling,

and he said: 'I am a squatter – a working-man in a tea plantation owned by Milk Stream Tea Estates. I used to work there before 1952. During the movement I was in charge of spying and receiving guns and taking them to our fighters. I was later detained. Now I am working on the same estate owned by the same company. Only now some of our people have joined them. It is good that some of our people are eating. But I will not take another oath until the promises of the first one have been fulfilled." They beat him in front of us. They stepped on his neck and pressed it with their boots against the floor, and only when he made animal noises did they stop. He took the oath all right. But not with his heart. I shall never forget his screaming."

Once he has shared this experience with his father, Munira feels a moment of extraordinary closeness with him. Even as his father criticizes him, he feels as though he is deserving of his father's harsh words. It is not until his father tells him that he has joined the KCO, and urges him to join as well, that Munira is snapped from his momentary worship of his father. For the first time he tries to argue with his father, reminding him "before God there are no tribes." His father is condescending to him, advising him to return to Ilmorog to teach, as he has no idea how deep the KCO's power is. Munira is shocked at this news of his father's treachery, and goes into town for a drink.

Unbelievably, he sees Wanja there. She seems upset, and tells him she was on her way back to Ilmorog the next day. She tells Munira about an unpleasant experience she'd had when she took one of her clients back to her home, only to find her door on fire. She didn't know who'd started the fire, but she has had a lifelong fear of fire, and was greatly upset by the incident. Her client left her to fend for herself, and she realized that she must go back to Ilmorog.

Munira is disgusted and attracted by her story, and combined with his own recent experiences, decides to drown his thoughts in alcohol. They spend the better part of that day, and all night, moving from bar to bar, getting more and more drunk. Suddenly, they see Karega. He is drunk, almost unconscious, in one of the bars they go to. He is much deteriorated from the proud young man they had known in Ilmorog. They take him back to Munira's hotel, and he passes out. When he wakes, he tells them that upon leaving Ilmorog, he'd tried to find employment, and failed miserably. He began to sell sheepskins and fruits and vegetables by the roadside, which ashamed him deeply, but provided him enough to live on. He has become embittered and saddened by the world. Wanja suggests that he return to Ilmorog with them, and he accepts the proposal.

Part 1: Chapter 5 Analysis

Munira's family is a deeply Christian family. Despite his attempt to break free by marrying a girl from an atheist family, his efforts are thwarted when the girl quickly converts to Christianity and surpasses even Munira's family in devoutness. Munira has never felt comfortable in his family, and the feelings are returned, as his father has always thought of him as a failure in comparison to himself and his other sons. However, this invitation to tea has given Munira a sense of self worth. As we will find

later, the Kamwene Cultural Organization is merely a corrupt branch of the government, an attempt to control the villagers of the surrounding areas. But for now, Munira is content in what he thinks to be a great honor.

Although it is unclear exactly what the KCO is, it is obviously a post-independence strategy to turn the various Kenyan tribes against each other, forcing them into a weaker and more vulnerable position against the ruling class.

Munira's experience with the KCO and his father spurs a drinking binge that will foreshadow his future state when he is arrested for the murder of the three businessmen. Coincidence is another theme that is revisited often in the novel, as the four main characters think back on the events of the preceding twelve years. They were all in Ilmorog for different reasons, but the fact that they were all there at the same time made possible the chain of events that happened. Although Wanja claims to have been heading back to Ilmorog, it is an extreme coincidence that she and Munira would end up in the same bar together, and even more of a coincidence that they would have run into the despondent Karega.

Part 1: Chapter 6

Part 1: Chapter 6 Summary

"They returned to Ilmorog, this time driven neither by idealism nor the search for a personal cure but by an overriding necessity to escape." When they arrive, Ilmorog looks like anything but a place to escape to. The land has been struck by drought, and the green fields of their memories have been replaced by sun, dust, and sand.

The first thing they encounter is a group discussion about Abdulla's donkey. The village elders want to kill it to end the drought. Munira, Wanja and Karega take Abdulla's side, arguing that a donkey could not possibly have any effect on the weather. The elders agree to continue to wait for the rain.

School begins, but Munira and Karega are discouraged by the despondency of the children who are suffering greatly from the effects of the drought. When the elders finally come to the conclusion that Abdulla's donkey must die, Karega decides that something must be done. They meet with the elders, and convince them that killing a donkey will not make rain come. Karega proposes that they journey to the city to appeal to the MP of Ilmorog for help. He further proposes that one person would not be effective, but that a people's delegation may be. He convinces the elders of his plan, and preparations begin for the great journey.

There is suddenly a feeling of hope, and a communal bond, in Ilmorog. Even Abdulla gained new strength from the proposal of the journey, and is grateful to his friends for having proposed a plan that would allow him to keep his donkey.

Part 1: Chapter 6 Analysis

As Munira, Wanja and Karega travel back to Ilmorog after being reunited in the city, they are each caught up in their own thoughts. Munira is wondering at his spontaneous decision to offer the position of assistant teacher to Karega. Wanja has made a pact to start a new life, free from the power of her body over men. Karega is hopeful about his new start as well, and is eager to start his new career as a teacher.

The reality of Ilmorog is quite different. Munira and Karega realize that it is impossible to teach theory, when the realities of the children's daily lives are so harsh. Karega's plan to lead a people's delegation to the city is a foreshadowing of his future role as a leader and champion of the poor. He seems to return to life, and makes a powerful argument to the elders of the village. They agree with him, and with the decision comes new life in Ilmorog.

Part 2

Part 2 Summary

Part 2 begins with the history of Ilmorog. It tells of a time when all people were herdsmen, wandering from place to place to find food and shelter. One man, Ndemi, decided that he was tired of living such an uncertain and hard existence. He found a nice spot, and decided to stay there. He built a small farm, and soon found a woman who was also brave enough to leave the tribe and settle down. This was the beginning of Ilmorog.

This is one of the many stories that Nyakinyua tells on their long journey to the city, in an effort to keeps spirits high. One night, Karega cannotsleep. He goes for a walk, and is startled out of his thoughts by Wanja. They begin to talk, he of his shame at being expelled from Siriana, and his drunken, fruit-selling days, and her of her shame at being a prostitute. Their individual shames seem to bond them, and Wanja tells a story about an experience she had with a European man as a prostitute. Although he does nothing to harm her, she is afraid, and runs from his house. She is picked up by a kind black man, who gives her some food and a place to sleep. She decided then that she'd go home to her parents, and gets on a bus. When she gets to her bus stop, however, she changes her mind, and returned to her life as a barmaid.

During the journey, both Abdulla and his donkey become more liked and respected. The donkey pulls the cart that carries some people and supplies, and even with his crippled leg, Abdulla refuses to ride in it. He tells stories about how he lost his leg in battle, fighting for African independence, which wins him even more respect. The high point of the journey is when Abdulla spots some antelope in the distance, and kills one with a catapult. They feast that night, and Abdulla's status is sealed. Abdulla's feast, as they called it, is the highlight of their adventure. In the following days the children begin to tire, and the adults become quiet. Then Joseph grows ill, and they know they must stop for help.

Their first stop is at the Rev. Jerrod Brown, and from a man of God they knew they were certain to receive assistance. He turns them away however, and they continue on their way. Coincidentally, the next house they stop at has the name of Raymond Chui on the front gate. Munira is overjoyed to see his classmate's name, and is certain he'll receive assistance. Just as Munira knocks at the door, he remembers how he must look, unwashed and disheveled, and turns to leave. A woman who opens the door surprises him, and upon seeing him immediately starts screaming. He senses that he is in danger, and starts running. He escapes, but Joseph's fever is worse. They decide to try one last house, and coincidentally it is the man who rejected Wanja so many years ago after impregnating her. He offers to help them if Wanja will become his mistress again. She consents, but makes a solemn pledge to herself that he must die.

Finally the delegation reaches the city. When they find Nderi wa Riera's office, they are told by his secretary that he is out, to return the following day in the afternoon. They don't know what to do, and go and sit in the park mournfully. Wanja saves them again however, and takes them to the house of the kind black man who had picked her up and given her shelter when she had been running from the European man many years ago.

He gives the group a place to stay and food, and they pass an enjoyable evening at his house. The next day they return to the MP's office, but it is not until the following day that they can see him. Word has already reached him that he has a delegation waiting for him, but he assumes that it is his political enemies plotting against him.

Wanja, Abdulla, Njuguna, Karega and Munira go into the office, while the others wait in the garden below. They introduce themselves to the MP, and make small talk for a few moments, before Nderi asks them what they have come for. They indicate that the others were waiting downstairs in the garden, and couldn't all fit in the office. After explaining that they'd had a drought for 6 months and were all starving, they decide to continue the meeting in the garden.

The delegation is enthused at his appearance, and sings native songs for his benefit, thinking that he has come to propose a solution to their problems. Instead, he enthusiastically proposes that they raise money to go to Gatundu to meet with the KCO. The delegation becomes so enraged that they begin to throw trash and rocks at Nderi. Unable to leave in a dignified way, he turns on his heels and runs towards the police station.

Munira, Abdulla, and Karega are taken to the police station for questioning. They are charged with causing a breach of the peace, but once again, Wanja's friend the kind lawyer saves them. He argues that they are good Samaritans, come to help their fellow community members in a time of drought. Not only are they acquitted, but also their names appear in the newspapers, and their story is told. The lawyer's house is flooded with donations for them, and for a month after their triumphant return to Ilmorog a number of church and government officials with plans and strategies of how to help Ilmorog visit them.

Part 2 Analysis

This history of Ilmorog can be said to parallel Karega's plan. He, like Ndemi, is tired of relying on the Gods to decide when it will rain and bring food to the community. He, like Ndemi, decides to take matters into his own hands. He, like Ndemi, will soon have a devoted following for his courage.

Once again, the powerful force of coincidence comes into the story. Fate places them at the houses of two of the three murder victims, Chui, and Kimeria, as they look for help for Joseph.

The only person who is not happy about the outcome of the delegation's journey to the city is Nderi, the PM. Nderi, as it turns out, is the creator of the KCO. It had grown from

a vague idea, out of his "belief in cultural authenticity, which he had used with positive results in his business partnership with foreigners and foreign companies. Why not use culture as a basis of ethnic unity?" His idea was based on the models built by the Free Masons, and other secret societies that used witchcraft and other pre-colonial cults to keep the masses in check. The Mass Tea Party had also been his idea, and he wanted to use his new mass power to promote economic growth in his area. He realizes that the only way to recover from the political public humiliation the Ilmorog delegation had caused him was to open a branch of the Ilmorog KCO, with himself as the head of the committee.

Part 3: Chapter 7

Part 3: Chapter 7 Summary

Chapter 7 returns to the present, twelve years later, and continues with Munira's autobiography. Munira recalls that things were never quite the same after their adventure to the city. He has been held in the prison for 8 days, and still has not yet been called by the inspector. He demands to speak to the officer in charge, but is suddenly soothed. "Why my sudden doubt," he asks. "Everything is ordained by God. The vanity of man's actions divorced from a total surrender to the will of the Lord! We went on a journey to the city to save Ilmorog from the drought. We brought back spiritual drought from the city!"

A month after the journey to the city, the rain began to fall. School resumed, and Karega throws himself into his new career with a vengeance. He wants to take his mind off his constant questions and doubts, but the questions keep reappearing. "Where was the unity of African people?" Karega's doubts persuade him to write to the lawyer he had met and admired so much in the city. The lawyer sends him some books, but Karega finds no answers in the books.

Munira, on the other hand, is happy. He feels "on the verge of being inside things," despite the fact that Wanja now keeps her distance from him. The harvest is not huge that year, but it is enough, as Abdulla says, "to keep bones and skin together." Then two lorries that come with men who erect a church and a police station destroy the peace. The community of Ilmorog bands together against the intruders, and they are for the most part ignored. Soon after the arrival the real rain starts, and does not leave for a full month. It bodes to be one of the largest crops in Ilmorog history, and the people are joyous.

The other source of excitement is the circumcision festival, which will be held after the harvest. In honor of this infrequent ritual, Wanja decides she will make Theng'eta. Theng'eta is a plant that grows wild on the plains of Ilmorog, and before colonialists banned it, people used to drink it as a hallucinogenic beverage.

They set to work on making Theng'eta immediately. The first step was the germination of the seeds, followed by a drying process. Wanja then crushed them with a granite stone, and Nyakinyua mixed the stringy mass with maize flour. She then put the mixture in a clay pot, and added water. The brew would take several days to ferment, and would be ready just in time for the evening of the circumcision ceremony. The ceremony itself is a combination of bawdy songs, dancing and drinking.

After the ceremony, Wanja and Nyakinyua go looking for the Theng'eta plant. They squeeze a small amount of liquid from the plant into the distilled concoction in the clay pot. That evening, they all drink Theng'eta. Munira's experience is one of relaxation, and of being at peace with the world. He has been hoping to rekindle his romance with

Wanja this evening, and eagerly anticipates a moment alone with her. Karega's experience with Theng'eta brings back memories of Mukami, Munira's sister and the love of his life, which ended their love by committing suicide. He begins to talk of their time together. He tells of the day they met, and of how they would wrestle in the grass, of the first time they made love in the middle of a lake, and of the time Mukami told him that his older brother had been a Mau Mau, or rebel warrior, and had cut off her father's ear in a fight. She went on to tell him that her father had discovered their love, and forced her to choose between him and Karega. Confused and frightened, she made her choice by jumping to her death off the quarry that had been their meeting spot.

Although the news that Karega's brother had been Munira's father's attacker was obviously a shock to Munira, it apparently was also a shock to Abdulla. Upon hearing the news he grabs Karega by the shoulders and shakes him. "You, you, Nding'uri's brother?" he repeats, like the cry of a strangled animal. His confession comes next. He tells the story of his childhood friend Nding'uri, Karega's brother, with whom he had been inseparable for years. Together they had smuggled bullets to African freedom fighters, until one day undercover policemen had caught them. While they were searching Nding'uri's pockets, Abdulla made a run for freedom. He made it into hiding, where he stayed until the heat was off, but Nding'uri was hanged the following week.

After Abdulla's confession Nyakinyua urges them to go home. Abdulla leaves first, followed by Wanja and Karega. The sight of them together makes Munira feel that he was "being excluded from something that bound the others together." Munira left them alone and walked home, engrossed in his own thoughts of Karega's story and his brother's mutilation of Munira's father.

Part 3: Chapter 7 Analysis

Munira's madness is worsening, and his brain is heckled with incoherent questions as he attempts to write his statement. "Why did things happen the way they did at the same time they did and no other? How was it that the puny acts of men, arising from a thousand promptings and numerous motives, could change history and forever condemn and damn souls to external torment and loss, guilt and cruelty, but also to love – yes – love that passeth all understanding? No there was a design, a law."

Wanja's idea to make Theng'eta coincides with the arrival of the church and police station builders for a reason. These buildings are not the only foreshadowing of the New Ilmorog. It is actually Wanja's Theng'eta that will bring prosperity and growth to the sleepy village, as well as corruption and violence. It will also bring sorrow and an alcoholic dependence to Munira and Abdulla.

The Theng'eta plant itself is described as being very small, "with a pattern of four tiny red petals." It is perhaps here that the book gets its name, Petals of Blood.

Both Karega's and Abdulla's confessions are shocking, and revisit the theme of chance occurrences bringing the foursome together. No less shocking is Munira's reaction

towards Karega's confession. He somehow blames Karega in a vague way for his own estranged relationship with his father. He accuses Karega in his mind that "Karega was more of an insider even in my own family. Had he not already affected the course of its history?" He accuses himself of being "a son who had wined and dined with those who had deformed his father, blood of his blood, and brought death to the family." He wishes for something that would "restore me to my usurped history, my usurped inheritance, that would reconnect me with my history. Something to enable me to claim my father. And Karega loomed large in the way." He admits, though, to not knowing who he wanted to avenge: himself, Mukami, or his father, but only felt driven to do something to give him "a sense of belonging." This feeling most likely stems not only from Karega's relation to his father's attacker, but also from the fact that Karega left the Theng'eta session with Wanja, who he had claimed in his mind that night for himself.

Part 3: Chapter 8

Part 3: Chapter 8 Summary

Wanja follows Karega home after they leave the Theng'eta ceremony. Karega almost does not notice her, so lost is he in his own thoughts. He has finally learned the truth about his brother's death, and he is proud and grateful to know how he died. He is also saddened, but as they sit on the hill together Wanja cheers him by telling him that he has rebel blood in his veins, reminding him that he alone had organized the delegation to the city. They touch, and are swept away on a wave of passion.

Wanja awakes the next morning with a feeling of peace. She is still under the effects of Theng'eta, and dreams of her childhood, of her first love, and her father. Karega wakes with a similar feeling of joyful peace, and as he drifts in and out of sleep has similar dreams of his youth. Munira shakes him from his reverie. Munira confronts him about his brother's' attack on Munira's father, and accuses him of being the cause of his sister's suicide. He tells Karega that he had heard him in his sleep saying the names of both Mukami and Wanja, and tells Karega that he is offended to hear his sister's name spoken in the same breath with a prostitute. Karega's first reaction is to hit Munira, but then restrains himself. Munira tells him to leave Ilmorog, and Karega refuses. Munira threatens him ominously, and then leaves.

Part 3: Chapter 8 Analysis

Although this entire chapter takes place in less than 24 hours, much transpires. Before they make love, Wanja makes an important comparison between Karega and Munira's experiences of being expelled from Siriana. Whereas Karega was the leader of the strike, Wanja says, in Munira's case it was different. "He was only a spectator, a bystander, who happened to be thrown into the stampede and the melee." This once again raises the theme of the comparison of Munira to Karega, where Munira always comes up as inferior to Karega. Even when Munira comes to confront Karega, he feels as though he were "on trial, that he had been placed on a moral balance and had been found wanting."

Wanja's and Karega's union is obviously a positive one for everyone except Munira. A large part of Munira's fury is clearly based on jealousy, a jealousy that he thinly disguises as family honor.

Part 3: Chapter 9

Part 3: Chapter 9 Summary

Karega and Wanja's love blossoms, and both the community and the couple are blessed for a short while with peace and harmony. Everyone, that is, with the exception of Munira, who had taken to "galloping his iron horse" across the hills of Ilmorog, and is rarely seen at Abdulla's.

Years later, when Munira tried to recreate this period of Ilmorog's history, his thoughts are completely dominated by Karega and Wanja. Their love tortured him, and from his prison cell he wrote only about saving Karega from Wanja. He writes about how tortured he had been by his desire for her, and his pain at "the great slap on the face, the shock, during the night of Theng'eta drinking." He admits to working himself into a rage, and actually convincing himself of Karega's guilt regarding Mukami and his father. He had felt the need to do something, but what? He asks himself, "Could I resurrect the past and connect myself to it, graft myself on the stem of history even if it was only my family's history outside of which I had grown?" He admits to developing an obsession over the love that Karega and Wanja shared, and begins to spy on them.

Munira recalls that he cycled to Limuru for more teachers, eager to find some excuse of leaving Ilmorog, and hatching a plan to get Karega to leave. He found three new teachers, and the school expanded. He recalls clutching wildly at straws, even moralizing about the damage that the unmarried relationship could have on the souls of his students.

One day he called a meeting with all the new teachers, and accused Karega indirectly of filling the children's head with useless propaganda about Africa history, rather than facts. Karega retorts with an impassioned speech about the rights of young children to know their history and their heritage, and Munira is at a loss as to how to respond.

Part 3: Chapter 9 Analysis

As Karega and Wanja's love grows, Wanja becomes more lovely and radiant every day. Munira is tortured by his feelings from her, and the more she pushes him away, the more his need for her grows. In this chapter we see the first signs of the madness that will completely enfold him by the end of the novel. Once again, during the teacher's meeting, Munira challenges Karega and is found lacking. His feeble attempts to show his moral superiority over Karega, once again a thin disguise for his jealousy over Wanja, result in him being made to look ridiculous and petty in front of the other teachers. This drives him to resort to desperate measures to rid himself of Karega's presence.

Part 3: Chapter 10

Part 3: Chapter 10 Summary

Chapter 10 marks year 5 of Munira's life in Ilmorog. The following year the school that he started would have six full time classes going, with some students doing well and hoping to go on to obtain a higher education. Munira is particularly hopeful about Joseph, who is excelling at an astonishing rate. He is cheerful, because through his introduction of three new teachers to the school, he has regained his status of hero in the eyes of the citizens of Ilmorog. His happiness is compounded when he sees Wanja waiting for him at his house. He invites her in, and she accepts a glass of water from him. She reminds him that he had once asked her why she came to Ilmorog, and says she has come to tell him. She tells him that her first baby died, and that after that birth she believed herself to be barren. She tells him that she came to Ilmorog to seek the help of the witch doctor, whose instructions led her to sleep with Munira on the night of the new moon. He suddenly realizes that he had been nothing more than part of a witchdoctor's experiment, and she confirms this, telling him that she wants him to understand the importance of Karega to her. Until Karega, she tells Munira, she had only used men, including Munira himself, to attain something. Karega is different, she tells him, and she is deeply in love with him. She threatens Munira ominously, if he does not undo whatever he has done to have Karega dismissed from his teaching post.

Abdulla offers Karega a job at the store, and Wanja remembers when he once offered her the same proposition. Karega knows however, that the store cannot support them all. He asks Abdulla why he came to Ilmorog, and Abdulla tells him about the period of his life after he lost his leg. Once again, coincidence strikes the Ilmorog foursome. In their conversation about Abdulla's journey to Ilmorog, they discover that it was Kimeria, ex-lover of Wanja, who had betrayed Abdulla and Nding'uri and had Nding'uri hanged. Before they have time to digest this information, disaster strikes in the form of an out of control airplane that crashes into one of the nearby fields, injuring nobody but killing Abdulla's donkey.

Abdulla is devastated, but it is the airplane that eventually brings his small store success. The airplane is a novelty in those parts, and people come from far and wide to see it. Wanja and Abdulla decide to go into business, and open a small restaurant in Abdulla's store that sells food and Theng'eta. The word spreads quickly about the effects of Theng'eta, and puts Ilmorog on the map. New growth starts in Ilmorog, and people are hopeful about their prospects. The only members of the community who are not happy are Abdulla, who had lost his donkey, and Wanja's whose lover has lost his job, and is forced to leave Ilmorog.

Part 3: Chapter 10 Analysis

Although it is not stated, it is implied that Munira has, in his desperation to win back Wanja, committed the ultimate betrayal. He has obviously made up a lie about Karega's performance as a teacher to have him expelled from the school. Wanja is devastated, and decides in her mind to seek her own desperate measures to retaliate against Munira for his deception.

Abdulla's donkey was a symbol of the leg he had lost. His death symbolized not only a repeat of the tragedy of losing his only form of transportation, but was also an ominous warning of bad things to come. Although at first, the death of the donkey seemed to bring a fair trade off, prosperity to Ilmorog and especially to Abdulla and Wanja. However, it would bring future evils to Abdulla, Wanja, and the town of Ilmorog.

Part 4: Chapter 11

Part 4: Chapter 11 Summary

The fame of Ilmorog's legendary Theng'eta brings a road. The Trans-Africa road would link Ilmorog to the rest of Africa, and with it more hope of development to the area. The road certainly brings prosperity to Wanja and Abdulla, as road workers have nowhere else to eat and drink. A thriving marketplace springs up, seemingly overnight, to cater to the multitude of workers that come to tear old Ilmorog down, and rebuild it seemingly overnight. Abdulla and Wanja add more extensions to their building, including a shop, a butcher, a bar, a beer-hall and dance club, and a 5-room hotel.

Everyone is proud to see the opening of the Ilmorog section of the Trans-Africa road. Nderi wa Riera comes with his grandiose promises of economic development, and this time people do not throw trash at him. Nderi keeps his promises, and development does come to Ilmorog in the form of a bank, a Farmer's cooperative, and many shops.

Five years pass like the blink of an eye since the day Karega left Wanja. Munira's hopes that he and Wanja could rekindle their romance are long gone, and Munira's dependence on Theng'eta grows. Wanja channels her fury into her business, and grows wealthy on the addictions of Munira and others.

In the midst of his Theng'eta-induced stupor, Munira has a short relationship with a woman named Lillian. He enjoys her company, but more than anything wants to make Wanja jealous. When this fails, he begins to beat her and they part. His dependence on Theng'eta increases, and he determines that in order to make Wanja love him he would think up a Theng'eta slogan to help her against any future competitors. Theng'a, Theng'a with Theng'eta, was what he came up with finally, and it stuck, although in the beginning it was said as a joke.

One day Karega comes back, out of the blue, like his first arrival to Ilmorog. He sees Munira, begins cautiously to ask him questions about New Ilmorog. Munira tells him about Joseph, who was accepted to Siriana. He asked about Wanja's grandmother, Nyakinyua, tactfully avoiding talking about Wanja herself. Wanja's grandmother, Munira tells Karega, had her small plot of land seized by the government on a technicality. She died shortly thereafter, heartbroken and with no way to support herself. On the day of her death, Wanja purchased the land so that her grandmother could be buried with her grandfather, on her own land, as she'd wished. In order to do this, she'd had to sell her own business, and was left with nothing.

After her grandmother's death, Wanja's heart was not in business. She built a huge house on her land, and one day invited Munira over to see her new house. He was excited at the prospect, and she seduces him. After it is over, she promptly charges him a hundred shillings, taking him into her confidence that her huge new house is to be a brothel.

Her brothel, like her other businesses, is a huge success, and she continued to acquire new holdings in the form of property and transport lorries. In his recount of the events of the past five years, Munira does not tell Karega how Wanja made her fortune. He has the sudden desire to torture Karega with the knowledge, and takes him to see her. First they stop at Abdulla's house, which has also become a Theng'eta addict. He does not even recognize Karega, and their stay is a short one. However, in the short time they are there, Abdulla drunkenly confesses that Joseph is not actually his brother, but an orphan he'd rescued from homelessness as a very young child.

Karega is shocked at the changed appearance of Wanja. She is larger now, with a more physically imposing presence, and is languid in her movements. Karega recounts his past five years briefly, saying that he'd traveled a lot, and worked with the lawyer who had saved them from prison during their journey to the city. He finally found work with a factory, and saw how even hard workers did not have enough to feed their family. He tried to organize the workers, and was fired, so he decided to come back to Ilmorog.

It is Wanja's turn to talk. She says little about the past, choosing instead to try to justify her current position. "I ask neither pity nor forgiveness nor any understanding excuse. This world…this Kenya…this Africa knows only one law. You eat somebody or you are eaten. You sit on somebody or somebody sits on you." She then makes the ultimate confession to them, that she had drowned her baby at birth in a latrine. They are both in shock at the severity and unexpectedness of the confession.

She then tells them that she'd had to shut down her brewery due to a licensing technicality, and that a new Theng'eta brewery had been opened-by Mzigo, Chui, and Kimeria. She recalls how she had grown angry, and had decided that the only way she could make an honest living without being trodden on by greedy rich men was by offering herself as a commodity. Her brothel now employs many prostitutes, but she still offers herself to her best customers, ironically, Mzigo, Chui, and Kimeria.

Part 4: Chapter 11 Analysis

The Trans-Africa road is a symbol of unity and division at the same time. The road unites Ilmorog with the rest of Africa, but at the same time divides it from the Ilmorog that the community once new and loved.

Wanja has gotten her revenge on Munira. Whereas he was once dependent on her for love, he is now dependent on her in a more physical way, to feed his growing addiction to Theng'eta. Her economic success, due mostly to her Theng'eta sales, were Munira's downfall.

Wanja also gets her revenge on Karega for not returning to Ilmorog, in the form of prostituting herself to the man who had killed Karega's brother.

Munira's journey with Karega through New Ilmorog gives us a glimpse of the harmfulness of unchecked economic development. Slums have grown up around the city, and poverty and addiction run rampant. New Ilmorog is the author's statement

against the irony of an independent Africa where only rich and ruthless black men can prosper, but the majority of the population is as bad or worse off than before independence.

Part 4: Chapter 12

Part 4: Chapter 12 Summary

Chapter 12 takes us back to Munira's prison cell. Inspector Godfrey is questioning Munira's meaning of a phrase he has written in his account. "A new earth, another world," Munira tries to explain, referred to Munira finding God. Ironically, he found God through Lillian, the woman he had used to try to make Wanja jealous. She had become a preacher, and when he saw her preaching one day on the street to a group of men and woman, her words moved him.

Following that day, Munira was a changed man. He stopped drinking Theng'eta, and took to following around Karega, Wanja, and Abdulla, trying to help them find God too. In his meetings with Inspector Godfrey, we learn that Munira's obsession has moved from Wanja to Theng'eta to God. We also learn that Inspector Godfrey believes that the murderer is Karega, and is trying to get Munira to corroborate his story. What he does not understand is that Munira is not trying to save Karega from the sin of murder, but from the sins he has committed with Wanja. He tells Godfrey that he knew Karega and Wanja had started seeing each other again, because he'd seen them meet in Wanja's old hut a week before the fire. Godfrey rushes out of the questioning room, feeling that he has picked up a lead to the case.

When he was arrested, Karega had been planning a strike with his workers union. He had mistakenly thought his arrest was related to the strike, but then heard that the strike had been banned due to the confusion caused by the deaths of Kimeria, Chui and Mzigo.

From his cell, Karega recalls the past few years of his life. He recalls seeing how independent Africa was in reality no different to colonial Africa, and he recalls his desire to want to do something. He found his chance when he got a job as a clerk at the Theng'eta Brewery, owned by Mzigo, Chui, and Kimeria. He began to distribute literature and talk to the workers, uniting them against their employers. He formed the Breweries Workers' Union, and they began to demand their rights from their employers. He recalls his annoyance at Munira, who would not leave him alone, and would try to persuade him to give up his union struggles to work for the church.

He also recalls the night Wanja sent for him, asking him to meet him at her hut a week before the murder. Inspector Godfrey questions him about this meeting, but he replies that the nature of the meeting was personal. Due to his refusal to talk, Karega is taken to the "red chamber" to be disciplined.

Abdulla's thoughts, while sitting in his cell, are on his pride in Joseph's academic success, and on Wanja. He remembers the pride he had once felt at her financial success, and remembers the offer he made her of marriage when he found out that she had returned to her old life as a prostitute and opened a brothel. She denied him. After

selling his share of their business, he had tried a few ventures on his own, all of which failed, and he was left destitute, selling oranges and sheepskins by the side of the road. He began drinking Theng'eta, and continued to deteriorate. His only consolation was receiving notices that Joseph was receiving top marks at Siriana. One day he decided to share one of these notices with Wanja. He went to her house, but saw Karega on the way who told Abdulla he was at her hut. He found her there, crying. They talked all night, and mysteriously, she let him make love to her.

Abdulla woke the morning of the fire that killed the three owners of his old business with a feeling of joy at his new relationship with Wanja. They'd continue to see each other all week, and she had asked him to come to her again that evening. He awaited their meeting with eager anticipation. He goes for a walk, and sees Kimeria, who is in Ilmorog for the board meeting that would decide on the union demands. Suddenly, the thought of Kimeria with Wanja crosses his mind, and he knows that he must kill Kimeria that very night, to avenge both Nding'uri and Wanja. He is certain that Kimeria will be at Wanja's that night, so he walks towards her house. Unbelievably, he sees that her wooden bungalow is on fire, and without a second thought, he runs in, and drags Wanja out, just as the flames engulf the entire building and it collapses.

In his interrogation with Inspector Godfrey, Abdulla confesses that he had intended to kill Kimeria that night, had the fire not killed him. Godfrey believes him, but feels that he is hiding something. He questions Abdulla about his meeting with Wanja in her hut, as he had questioned Karega. Abdulla gives much the same response as Karega that they had met in the hut for personal matters. Abdulla is also sentenced to the red chamber for not giving Godfrey the answer he was looking for.

On the tenth day after the fire, Wanja recovers sufficiently to speak. Godfrey goes to interrogate her, and learns a number of facts. He learns that she had invited Mzigo, Kimeria and Chui to all be at her brothel that night. He also learns that she had given her watchman and her girls the night off. Finally, he learns that she had invited Abdulla to come that night as well. He asks her too about the meeting at her hut. She replies that Karega came first, and then by coincidence, Abdulla showed up after he left. She tries to explain about the two meetings she had at the hut, but does not tell him everything. She remembers in her mind her anticipation as she waited for Karega to arrive. They talked about many things that evening, but the spark between them was out for good. She tells Karega that she had called him there to warn him that Kimeria, Chui and Mzigo were going to try to have him killed, and to be very careful. Karega accuses her of being on their side, and of having turned against her African roots. She denies it, but he leaves her in her hut, crying.

Abdulla finds her only moments later. After her night with Abdulla, Wanja decides to change her life. Her first course of action was to end her relationship with Kimeria. She chose that Satuday as the date when she would do it. She would invite all three men there, and keep them in separate rooms until Abdulla arrived, and then introduce him to all of them as her rightful man. She would then expose Kimeria for his corruption.

She remembers the day's events. Chui was the first to arrive, and she put him in one room, promising to return. She went into the kitchen to make herself some supper. Mzigo arrived, and she put him in another room. Kimeria was the last to arrive, and she showed him into his room. She was on her way to see if Abdulla had arrived when she saw flames coming from the kitchen, where she'd been frying meat for dinner.

She told this story to Inspector Godfrey, but omitted one fact. Before locking the door on Kimeria to go to Abdulla, she had hit him over the head with a heavy frying pan, killing him instantly.

With this knowledge, Godfrey continues to question Munira. He asks Munira about his relationship with Chui, and Munira tells him that after they had been expelled, he had only seen Chui once, at the opening of the Ilmorog Golf Club.

Godfrey feigns interest, then grows serious. He suddenly asks Munira what he was doing on Ilmorog Hill on the Sunday morning after the fire. He reads Munira's guilt in his eyes, and charges him with burning Wanja's house and causing the deaths of three men. Munira confesses, and Godfrey then asks Munira what his motives were. "I-I wanted to save Karega," replied Munira.

Part 4: Chapter 12 Analysis

Munira's final obsession, as it turned out, is with Karega. His desperate attempts to try to save him from Wanja's evil power and the evils of his Godless mission to bring the workers of Ilmorog together caused him to make a decision to try to kill Wanja. To Munira, in his final stages of madness, Wanja was the devil incarnate, a bewitcher of men and ruiner of lives. Had she not led Munira himself to the dark side, before he was saved by his newfound faith?

Coincidence once again threw Karega in front of him on the Friday that Wanja had asked him to her hut. He followed Karega to Wanja's hut, and assumed that they had begun their relationship anew. As he sat outside the hut, a voice spoke to him. "She is Jezebel, Karega will never escape from her embrace of evil." Munira took it to be the word of Christ, and stayed and waited. He saw Karega leave, and Abdulla go in. He was amazed to think that even Abdulla had fallen victim to her evil charms.

For a week he prayed that God would show him the way. He bought petrol on Saturday evening, and walked to Wanja's. It was as though he was under a spell, and only acting under orders. "It was enjoined on him to burn down the whorehouse-which mocked God's work on earth." He poured petrol on the house, lit a match, and watched it burn from the top of Ilmorog Hill. "He, Munira, had willed and acted, and he felt, as he knelt down to pray, that he was no longer an outsider, for he had finally affirmed his oneness with the Law."

Part 4: Chapter 13

Part 4: Chapter 13 Summary

Wanja is reunited with her mother. Upon hearing about her daughter's near brush with death from a friend, a month after the event, she is moved to find Wanja. Their meeting is a joyous one, and for the next few weeks they talked almost constantly about the past. She confesses to her mother that she believes herself to be with child. Her mother asks who the father is, and Wanja takes a piece of cardboard and begins a sketch of a one-legged man with sad eyes and kindness in his heart.

Abdulla and Joseph are also reunited. Joseph tells Abdulla that it is strange that Chui died when he did, because the students at Siriana were planning another strike. Abdulla changes the subject; suddenly he is apologizing for the way he has treated Joseph in the past. Joseph assures him there is nothing to forgive, and expresses his gratitude and admiration for Abdulla and Wanja. He goes on to say that when he graduates he too would like to make a difference in the lives of Africans, as did Abdulla and Karega.

Before the trial, Munira's father, mother, and wife come to see him, accompanied by Rev. Jerrod Brown. They are humiliated by his actions, and have come to ask his reasons for committing the crime. He responds by asking if Reverend Jerrod remembered a group of poor travelers he had turned away so many years ago, and told Rev. Jerrod that he had been among that group the Reverend had so uncharitably turned away. He begins a long sermon that talks of eternal punishment and eternal life.

They go away weeping for his madness. Rev. Jerrod speaks sadly of revivalist cults that were poisoning the nation, and Munira's father agrees, but for some reason, he is thinking of Karega and Mariamu, and how he had been punished severely by his attempts to seduce her.

Karega learns from prison that his mother is dead. For two days he does not eat anything, but on the third day, a girl comes to visit him. She comes with a message from the workers, telling him that they were planning a massive strike, and a march through Ilmorog. She told him of similar actions in Nairobi, and that the workers of Ilmorog were truly united and ready to fight. Her words gave him hope, and he smiled through his sorrow. "Tomorrow…tomorrow," he murmured to himself. "And he knew he was no longer alone."

Part 4: Chapter 13 Analysis

Petals of Blood ends in the cyclical way it began. Inspector Godfrey goes away, satisfied that he had solved the complex case, closing a series of questions that began at the beginning of the novel. Wanja is reunited with her mother, and receives the happy news that she is pregnant by Abdulla, ending her barren spell that has haunted her throughout her 12 years in Ilmorog. Munira has somehow found peace with himself, and

no longer feels he is an outsider. Despite his criminal actions, he is no longer afraid of his father and ashamed of whom he is. He will be punished for his crimes, but will be content in his actions. Abdulla is proud of Joseph, who, in keeping with the historically repetitive theme of the novel, is hoping to join in a strike in Siriana, and after his graduation work for the good of African people. And Karega's movement has taken off, its implications as far reaching as Nairobi. Although imprisoned, Karega is hopeful for a better tomorrow.

Characters

Abdullah

As the novel opens Abdullah, a former freedom fighter who has lost a leg in the struggle for Kenyan independence, runs a *duka*, or shop, where he sells provisions and drinks to the townsfolk of Ilmorog. Like the other protagonists, Abdullah has come to Ilmorog to flee his former life, its painful memories, and its responsibilities. He had been one of the bravest and most active participants in the movement for independence, joining the Mau Mau rebellion and fighting in the forest with the charismatic leader Ole Masai. During the uprising he and Karega's brother, Nding'uri, had been betrayed by Kimeria. Abdullah managed to escape, but Nding'uri had been hanged. After independence, Abdullah returns to his hometown, Limuru, expecting to see the fruits of his struggle□the redemption of the land for the people. But he finds that his heroism is not acknowledged, and he and other peasants are unrewarded for their sacrifice while those□including Kimeria□who have not fought for their country turn the economic system to their advantage. Abdullah moves with his donkey□his "second leg"□and his "brother" Joseph, whom he has rescued from a life on the streets, to Ilmorog "where I could have no reminder of so bitter a betrayal." At the beginning of the novel Abdullah is bitter and surly, barking orders to Joseph and making sarcastic remarks to Munira about his work at the school. But a transformation begins when Wanja convinces him to send Joseph to school. During the villagers' journey to the city, which is made possible by his donkey and cart, Abdullah inspires the travelers□ reminding them of the independence struggle, singing patriotic songs, and procuring food for them. Abdullah is betrayed again by the end of the novel when his shop is forced to shut down to serve the interests of the economic elite, and he is reduced to selling oranges by the roadside. Abdullah's stump is one of the important symbols in the novel, a reminder of the betrayal of the peasantry. His mixed ancestry (he is the son of an African mother and an Indian father) underscores his struggle with a divided self. Abdullah's brief union with Wanja results in his fathering her child, which is a symbol of hope and possibility at the end of the novel.

Chui

Chui is an educator and one of the three African directors of the Theng'eta Breweries. We learn about his past from both Munira and Karega. Chui is an example of the potential and idealism of his country gone terribly wrong. While a student at Siriana High School, Chui led the students, including Munira, in strike against the policies of the new headmaster Fraudsham, advocating for better social conditions. He was expelled from Siriana and continued his education abroad. Years later, while Karega is a student there, Chui is called to Siriana to replace Fraudsham after he is ousted in another strike in protest of alienating, un-African school curricula. But it turns out that Chui outdoes his predecessor in promoting foreign values. He is a symbol of the corruption of Kenyan leaders who betray their people by implementing the colonial values and systems that

had been fought against in order to gain personal power. Chui leads a decadent life, and he is shown as dishonoring his people's values as he sings bawdy versions of traditional songs with his wealthy urban friends. In Kiswahili, "Chui" means "leopard," perhaps an indication of the way he changes his spots to suit his own purposes.

Cambridge Fraudsham

The English headmaster at Siriana High School who is ousted after a student strike, and whose twisted values reveal him to be the "fraud" and "sham" that his name indicates.

Inspector Godfrey

Inspector Godfrey is the Nairobi police officer who is in charge of the murder investigation of Chui, Mzigo, and Kimeria. He sees it as his duty to protect the status quo of post-independence Kenya, although he himself is not a wealthy man. He approaches solving the murders with detachment, viewing it as a "criminal jigsaw puzzle" and does not concern himself with the moral questions of how and why.

J. M.

See The Lawyer

Reverend Jerrod

The hypocritical Reverend Jerrod, a well-to-do priest, turns away the weary Ilmorog travelers as they seek aid for the sick child Joseph during their journey to the city. The villagers need food, but he tells them to feed on "the food of the spirit, the bread and fish of Jesus."

Julia

Munira's estranged wife.

Karega

Karega is a student activist who becomes a union leader fighting for the workers in the developing industries of the New Ilmorog. After his expulsion from Siriana High School he is forced to take a series of jobs to make a living, and moves to Ilmorog in search of his old teacher, Munira, who hires him to work at the school. His spirit of action and reform is shown as he organizes the villagers' trek to see their Member of Parliament and voice their concerns about the drought. Munira dismisses Karega from his post after finding out about his affair with Wanja and his former relationship with his sister,

and Karega wanders the country again continues to advocate for workers' rights. He returns to aid workers in their struggle against the owners of the Theng'eta Breweries. Karega is a member of the oppressed poor who, despite having had few advantages, maintains a vision for a more just society. He does not accept blindly what he is taught at school, nor even what the lawyer, whom he deeply respects, teaches him about how to right the wrongs of the existing social order. He sees the only way to reform the ills of society is to destroy the corrupt elite, and seeks to lead his people in their struggle against oppression. He is a sensitive and caring man, as seen in his relationship with his first love, Mukami, and later with Wanja. Karega's optimism and youthful idealism see a positive transformation in the novel as he channels his energies and dedicates his life to reconstructing Kenyan society.

Hawkins Kimeria

Hawkins Kimeria an industrialist and one of the three African directors of the Theng'eta Breweries whose murders are being investigated as the novel opens. He is painted as a despicable, almost inhuman character as the facts of his past are revealed: he became wealthy during the independence movement by transporting the dead bodies of the Mau Mau killed by the British, he betrayed Abdullah and Karega's brother during the rebellion, and he made Wanja pregnant when she was just a schoolgirl. During the journey to the city, Kimeria humiliates Wanja once again by forcing her to sleep with him in order to help her companions and the sick child, Joseph.

The Lawyer

The lawyer is an activist who understands and tries to reform the corrupt economic and social system. He is educated and from a well-propertied family but his allegiances are with the people. A politically astute but compassionate man, he aids the villagers when they arrive in the city to air their grievances about their living conditions to their political representatives. Karega works for him after the lawyer is elected to political office, and finds that he is sincere but perhaps misguided in his hope of achieving radical reform through the mechanisms of the corrupt system. He is eventually brutally murdered by his political enemies.

Lillian

A bargirl-turned-Christian fanatic who eventually turns Munira to religion.

Miriamu

Karega's mother, a peasant farmer who has been forced to work on Munira's father's land.

Mukami

Munira's younger sister Mukami, a sensitive and unusual girl and the only member of the family for whom Munira feels any affection, killed herself several years before the action of the novel begins. Munira later finds out that her suicide was prompted by their father's disapproval of Mukami's love affair with Karega.

Godfrey Munira

Munira, a schoolteacher and the headmaster of Ilmorog Primary School, is one of the four principal characters who have been accused of murder. Munira is a complex individual. He is seen by himself and his middle-class family to be a failure, and he tries unsuccessfully to overcome his poor sense of self. His desire to bring education to the dusty village of Ilmorog seems to be the action of an idealist, but in fact his motives are to flee from his family and responsibilities. Like Karega, Munira was expelled from Siriana High School, but the event does not inspire him to action but rather to inaction. He has a narrow understanding of education, and does not encourage his students to think for themselves. He wants to be revered but has little interest in the situation of the people of the village. His jealousy at Karega's and Wanja's relationship prompts him to dismiss his former friend from his teaching post. Munira turns increasingly to drink to mask his unhappiness, and by the end of the novel embraces a fanatical brand of Christianity, insisting that his world cannot be changed and the only hope is in the next. However, despite his inaction for most of the novel, he performs *the* decisive act in the novel in committing the murders of the brewery directors. Munira's name means "stump," which speaks to his enfeebled state and contrasts his weakness to the heroism of the lame Abdullah.

Muturi

An Ilmorog villager. His name means "black" in Gikuyu.

Mwathi wa Mugo

Mwathi is Ilmorog's occult priest, the mentor of the clan. His sacred compound is eventually bulldozed to make room for the Trans-African Highway, cleaving Ilmorog into two and forcing it into the modern age.

Mzigo

Mzigo is a school administrator and one of the three murdered directors of the Theng'eta Breweries. His character is not well fleshed out; he is presented as a one-dimensional figure whose only concerns are money and power. He represents the

corruption of education in neo-colonial Kenya with its interests in supporting the established economic and social order and stifling real critical inquiry.

Nderi wa Riera

Nderi is the member of parliament for the people of Ilmorog. He ignores the villagers' concerns when they appeal to him for help after journeying to the city, and is seen as an opportunistic politician who seeks power for his personal ends. and ignores his electorate unless an election is approaching. In Gikuyu his name means "vulture son of air."

Nding'uri

Karega's older brother, a freedom fighter who lost his life during the Mau Mau rebellion.

Nedmi

The semi-legendary founder of Ilmorog.

Nguguna

An Ilmorog villager who is imprisoned with Karega and Wanja when the villagers seek help at Kimeria's house during the journey to the city. His name is allegorical and means "common man" in Gikuyu.

Joseph Nijraini

Abdullah's "brother" Joseph is transformed during the novel from a homeless vagabond eating rubbish in the streets to the star pupil at the elite private high school Siriana.

Njogu

An Ilmorog villager.

Nyakinyua

Wanja's grandmother, who is in a sense the mother of the community of Ilmorog. She is a storyteller who offers insights into Ilmorog's past, from pre-colonial times to her husband's brave struggle against the British.

Ruoro

An Ilmorog villager.

Wanja

Wanja is the central female character in the novel, a bargirl-turned-prostitute who is one of the four murder suspects. She moves to Ilmorog to escape life in her native Limuru and Nairobi, where she worked as a bargirl, and join her grandmother on her plot of land. As a schoolgirl Wanja was seduced by the wealthy Kimeria, who abandoned her when she became pregnant. During the course of the novel she reveals that she disposed of her baby in a drain, and has carried the guilt of her action with her for many years. In Ilmorog Wanja works at Abdullah's shop and eventually begins a successful distillery. When her business is not allowed to continue she makes herself into a highclass prostitute servicing the urban elite who have transformed Ilmorog. Wanja is at once an innocent and wise woman, a temptress and protector of the downtrodden. She is a woman of action, as she convinces Abdullah to send Joseph to school and rescues her grandmother's ancestral land from being repossessed by the banks. She is intelligent and remarkably resilient, and has a sensuality and physi cal presence that makes her desirable to all the principle male characters of the novel. She also exerts a strong psychological influence on the villagers of Ilmorog, and they assume that her name comes from "Wanjiku," the mother of the nine clans of the Gikuyu people. Her name also means "stranger or outsider," which is appropriate as she moves from city to city and town to town trying to find her place in the New Kenya.

Ezekiel Waweru

Ezekiel Waweru, Munira's father, is a wealthy landowner who uses his Christianity to advance his material interests. He forbids the relationship between his daughter Mukami and Karega, which results in her suicide. Waweru is concerned with money and success, and sees his son Munira as a failure.

Themes

Alienation of the Land

Petals of Blood is an overtly political novel, and the author's intention is to present readers with a portrait of the economic, social, and other ills of post-independence Kenya. As he makes clear in his writings, Ngugi does not think that his role as a writer is to change society, because only people can change society. However, as he says in a 1979 interview in *African Report*, he thinks writers can point out where things are wrong and also that "fiction should embody the aspirations and hopes of the majority□of the peasants and workers." Clearly the main concern in *Petals of Blood* is to draw attention to the plight to the dispossessed peoples of Ilmorog, and by extension, of Kenya. The novel shows that after decades of colonial rule, many of the poorer segments of Kenyan society have been alienated from the land, the source of life for centuries. Even after independence, this separation continues. Karega's mother, Miriamu, is forced to work as a laborer on Munira's father's land. The villagers are helpless in the face of a drought that threatens their life. The landscape of Ilmorog changes forever when the Trans-Africa Highway is built, dividing the village into two. With the transformation of Ilmorog to an industrial center, peasants are forced to pawn their land to obtain bank loans, which they cannot pay, and their ancestral homelands are seized by financiers. The land of the people becomes just another commodity in the hands of economic rulers as Ilmorog is transformed from a bucolic rural village to a polluted industrial development.

Critique of Capitalism

Related to the theme of the people's alienation from their land is Ngugi's critique of capitalism. Capitalism is an economic system in which the means of producing wealth are privately owned. The novel denounces such a system that has created unequal classes of rich and poor by dramatizing its effects on the people of Ilmorog. The capitalists in the novel□including Kimeria, Chui, Mzigo□are seen as ruthless men who are unconcerned with the misery that their greed creates. They seek to suppress the workers' union and refuse to raise their wages. They drive expensive cars and want for nothing, while the villagers travel on foot to seek help in the face of famine. They take from the people of Ilmorog the recipe of their traditional alcoholic brew, Theng'eta, and make millions from it, forcing the townspeople to work in the factory under poor conditions. The novel also presents these entrepreneurs as working in collusion with Western corporations that continue to exploit the labor of the uneducated Kenyan masses. The revolutionary Karega, who some critics have viewed as presenting Ngugi's opinions, sees that the only way to reconstruct a just society is to do away with the elite who amass riches at the expense of the people. He presents a vision of a socialist system in which the working classes, those who create the wealth, have access to the fruits of their labor by owning the means of production and so are no longer exploited and oppressed by corrupt businesspeople.

Village versus City

The contrast drawn between village and city in the novel serves to underscore the damaging effects of capitalism as well as to make clear the difference in values between traditional and modern Kenyan society. The village of Ilmorog had once been a thriving place set against a ridge that the novel's narrator says must have been "one of the greatest natural beauties in the world." Founded by a courageous herdsman, Ndemi, who began cultivation of the lands, it was once a place of peace, beauty, and dignity. After independence, Ilmorog has become a dusty and backward place, but the people still uphold their integrity. The community is close-knit and hold onto their values and beliefs, participating in communal rites and helping each other. Their values are seen in contrast to those of the urban elite, whose sole interest is money and power. The city is seen as a place of corruption and decay, with tall buildings and gardens as well as shantytowns and bars. Over the course of the novel Ilmorog is transformed from a rural village to an industrial center, and with it comes a disintegration of its values. Wanja, who has been forced to give up her successful business and turn to prostitution in order to avoid being exploited in other ways, says of the values of the city and the "New Kenya": You eat somebody or you are eaten. You sit on somebody or somebody sits on you."

The Struggle for Independence

The novel details the heroic struggles of the freedom fighters, many of whom gave up their lives to achieve independence, or *Uhuru*, for Kenya. The village elder Nyakinyua recounts her husband's exploits and his proud refusal to be humiliated by the British. Karega's brother, Nding'uri, gave up his life for the cause as a Mau Mau rebel. And Abdullah, who has lost his leg during the resistance, is a reminder of the sacrifices made by the common people in the struggle for freedom from colonial rule. Now that independence has been achieved, however, the people who fought so bravely for their country are not rewarded. Rather, they are dispossessed by the wealthy few who did not participate in the struggle at all. Those like Mzigo and Kimeria who stayed in school or were involved in business during the movement have reaped the rewards of independence. With their money they have appropriated the land of the peasants who bought the country's freedom, leaving them dispossessed and without a means of livelihood. These entrepreneurs are seen as continuing the practices of the British oppressors, as they force peasants to work at subsistence wages on land that was traditionally theirs.

Christianity

Although the critique of Christianity in the novel is not as overt as are its social and political indictments, it seems clear that Ngugi means to point out the hypocrisy that attends many forms of Christian religious practice. There are no sympathetic portrayals of Christians in the novel. Ezekiel Waweru and the Reverend Jerrod Brown are seen as using Christianity to further their own material interests. Both have adopted the

Christianity of the colonial masters and perpetuate the inequality of their system of values. When the villagers first encounter Reverend Jerrod Brown they assume he must be a white European because of his name. He offers them no help with the sick child, Joseph, nor does he give them food, and tells them they need only eat "the food of the spirit, the bread and fish of Jesus." Waweru has adopted the Christianity of the missionaries because it is more profitable for him to do so, but shows no Christian compassion to his son, daughter, or the laborers on his land. The Christian Lillian is also presented as a crazed fanatic who ignores the problems of this world by emphasizing life in the next, a strategy which she eventually gets Munira also to adopt.

Oppression

One of the persistent themes of *Petals of Blood* is oppression□social, economic, political, racial, and sexual. By oppressing them, or controlling the direction of people's lives, colonial and neocolonial rulers prevent ordinary Kenyans from reaching their full potential. The treatment of social, economic, and political oppression is tied in with the novel's critique of capitalism and the alienation of the people from their traditional work. Racial oppression is explored in attitudes of Europeans to Kenyans during colonial rule, particularly those of people like Fraudsham who view Africans as having to conform to a standard of behavior set by the British. The concern with sexual oppression becomes clear in the figure of Wanja, a woman of great energy, intelligence, and sensitivity whose only recourse in the face of economic failure and exploitation is to turn to prostitution and to serve the interests of men. Throughout the novel, peasants and workers are prohibited from prospering because of the oppressive external forces of colonialism and capitalism. In the figures of Joseph and Karega it is seen that it is possible for the Kenyan peasantry to flourish if, like flowers, they are exposed to nourishment and light and not prevented from shaping their own destiny.

Education

There is a great deal of discussion and action in the novel surrounding education. Four important characters□Munira, Chui, Karega, and Mzigo□ are teachers. Munira, Chui, and Karega attended Siriana High School and were expelled for their revolutionary activities, which did much to determine how they would view their futures. Joseph earns a scholarship to Siriana also, and seems to exhibit the same idealism as that shown by the others. The future of the country seems to lie in what he will make of his experience there. Cambridge Fraudsham, the English headmaster of Siriana, represents the arrogance of the colonial school system, with its irrelevant curriculum that is forced upon Africans and its systematic degradation of its students because of their race. Like Ngugi, Karega and the other students who strike want the Kenyan educational system to reflect the contributions and experiences of Africans and not simply those of white Europeans. The hope for reform at Siriana is dashed when Chui, "a black replica of Fraudsham" takes over and forces students to conform to the same principles as those of the British. With this theme Ngugi again emphasizes that the new leaders in Kenya follow the same path as the oppressors they have just overthrown. Education also

serves to contrast the characters of Munira and Karega. Munira has come to Ilmorog to be a teacher but he is not concerned with the welfare of his students as much as to be revered himself. He thinks the pupils should be given "simple facts" so they can pass their exams. Karega sees his students as thinking beings and he takes it as his duty to help them shape their future and their lives. As a union organizer he continues to teach workers and others about the truth□of the destructive powers of capitalism and the possibility for a better socialist society.

Style

Point of View

One of the most striking features of *Petals of Blood* is its narrative style that uses multiple points of view to weave together the stories of the protagonists and those around them. In the opening pages of the novel, events are seen through the eyes of each of the four protagonists. As the novel progresses, an omniscient, third-person voice enters and recounts parts of story. This narrator sometimes comments upon and interprets the events, but on occasion offers a more detached perspective. There is also a second narrative voice, which seems to be a collective one of the villagers of Ilmorog. In the early chapters of the novel, as Munira remembers his arrival in Ilmorog, his voice almost merges with that of the omniscient narrator. Indeed as each other character tells his or her story□whether old Nyakinyua or the lawyer, Karega or Wanja□the reader is drawn in and made to see the world from that personal standpoint. However, the reader must decide which voice and which version of the story to trust. In the context of a detective novel, the multiple points of view, overlapping timelines, and interrupted narratives make it difficult to piece together the "jigsaw puzzle" that will reveal the truth about the murders.

The fact that the story is told from very personal standpoints, often as confessions, also allows readers to understand characters not only as they are seen but as they see themselves. The revelations of characters also seeks to show how their lives are interrelated even as they speak from positions of isolation□it is in the retelling of their past lives Munira learns of his sister's affair with Karega, that Karega finds out that Abdullah fought with his brother in the resistance, etc. It is interesting that Ngugi never allows his villains to offer their perspectives; we learn only from the protagonists and the villagers of these men's horrible deeds.

Setting

Most of the action in *Petals of Blood* takes place in the north-central Kenyan town of Ilmorog. The town is in many ways one of the key characters in the novel. Its transformation parallels the transformation of the lives of its inhabitants and that of post-independence Kenya. None of the four protagonists comes from Ilmorog; all have fled to this dusty "wasteland" to escape their troubled pasts. Like the characters of the novel and like Kenya itself, Ilmorog is a complex place□it has been ravaged by colonial exploitation but still reflects communal values. Its traditional spirit is seen in stark contrast to the concern with money and power that is a feature of the city. The building of the Trans-Africa Highway through the town cleaves it into two and ushers in what seems to be its final destruction, as with the new influx of people and money it adopts shallow, urban materialistic values. However, at the end of the novel Karega offers hope for a reconstruction of Ilmorog□and Kenya□by calling for a revolution of the people to take back the land that was traditionally theirs.

Symbolism

The title of the novel is taken from a poem, "Spawn," by the West Indian writer Dennis Walcott. The poem describes a huge tree preventing a little flower from reaching out into the light. According to Ngugi in a 1977 interview in the Nairobi *Sunday Nation*, the contemporary situation in Kenya and the effects of colonialism and neocolonialism similarly prevent the peasants and workers in Kenya from "flowering in dignity and glory." In the novel, the flower represents the repression of workers, peasants, and students from reaching out and achieving their potential. One of Munira's students shows him a flower that has "petals of blood." Munira smothers the student's imagination by correcting him, saying "there is no color called blood," and throughout the novel the education system is seen as being repressive and stifling of students' idealism and curiosity. Joseph, once given the opportunity, does begin to grow and flower, and one of the questions of the novel is how he will respond to the challenges that his education brings.

The "petals of blood" figure again during the circumcision ceremony as Nyakinyua cooks up the traditional brew, Theng'eta. The secret ingredient in the recipe is the blood-colored flower petal. However, again the evil hand of capitalism and its collusion with foreign interests and corporations reaches out and appropriates what traditionally belonged to the people□the traditional drink is mass-marketed as a soporific to keep peasants and workers in check and uncomplaining of their exploitation.

Another symbol related to the petals of blood of the title is fire. Fire is used repeatedly in the novel as an agent of destruction but also as a mysterious and purifying force. There are many other powerful symbols in the novel that reinforce its central ideas. The Trans-Africa Highway, which is a subject of discussion from the beginning of the novel, finally splits the village in half and allows in the predators that transform the land. Its arrival is heralded by the airplane, another symbol of progress and negative transformation. The airplane at first scares Abdullah's donkey and finally kills it. The symbol of the journey in the novel points to positive transformation: the villagers' journey strengthens their communal spirit and Karega's travels around the country help him to find his calling. Many of the characters or their features are also symbolic. Abdullah's stump leg can be seen as a physical symbol of the psychological maiming that is a feature of so many of the characters. The murdered brewery directors are clearly symbols for the evils of capitalism, the villagers are symbols of traditional (although sometimes unenlightened and misguided) values, and Fraudsham is a symbol of the warped ideologies of British rulers.

Historical Context

Beginnings of Colonialism

In 1887 a private British company attempted to start a trading business near the Kenyan coast, modeling itself after the British East India Company which had for years monopolized highly profitable European trade in India. While the Imperial British East Africa Company, as it was known, soon went bankrupt, the British government itself took over the territory in 1895, and over the next decade gradually gained administrative control of most of modern Kenya. The British government encouraged English "settlers" to move to the fertile highland regions, where they created gigantic plantations while displacing hundreds of thousands of native Kenyans, mostly ethnic Gikuyus, from their traditional lands.

The Years Leading to Independence

For the next sixty years the economic, political, and social disparities between European settlers and native Kenyans gave rise to growing antagonism and conflict. It is estimated that by 1945 nearly twenty percent of Kenyan land (and clearly the most fertile) was owned by no more than 3,000 Europeans. Native Kenyans were used as laborers on these gigantic European plantations, or they were left to eke out a living on the remaining land that the Europeans found worthless. To make matters worse, the native peoples were treated by the ruling British as second-class citizens in their own land, forced to carry passports to travel from one section of the country to another, often restricted to certain areas of the land, barred from political office, and prohibited from voting and enjoying equal judicial rights.

The Gikuyu began organized protests against the British annexation of their traditional lands in 1924 with the formation of the Kikuyu Central Association (KCA). Throughout the 1920s the KCA organized peasants to demand that the discriminatory passport laws be dropped, and by the late 1930s led increasingly militant protests against the forced sale of their farm animals to the British government. The colonial government tried to squash these protests by banning the KCA in 1940, but by 1944 growing resentment among a broader spectrum of disenfranchised Kenyan ethnic groups came together to form the Kenya Africa Union (KAU). In 1947 Jomo Kenyatta was named the leader of the new KAU, and he soon came under the watchful eye of the British government for his demands that Kenyans gain greater political representation.

Revolution and Independence

By the early 1950s a growing segment within the KAU began to espouse violent revolt as the only means of freeing themselves from the tyranny of British colonialism. At the same time, the British government began to hear rumors of a covert association known as the Mau Mau. The group, they learned, was rapidly gaining converts who gave oaths

of their determination to wipe out the British settlers and government from Kenya. At first the British banned the secret Mau Mau organization, but this seemed only to add fuel to the revolutionary fire. British settlers became more concerned when in 1951 a white farmer was murdered, followed in 1952 by the assassination of Senior Chief Waruhiu Kungu, a Kenyan who was known for his denunciation of violent revolution. The settlers then demanded that the government take quick and decisive action to put down the revolt. In October 1952, a state of emergency was declared, and leaders of the KAU were rounded up and put on trial. Kenyatta himself was given seven years hard labor, although there was little evidence to support the colonial government's allegation that he advocated Mau Mau violence.

The jailing of their movements' leaders only intensified Kenyans' nationalism and the desire for revolution. Over the next four years rebel armies used acts of terrorism and guerrilla warfare to harass and intimidate the British administration as well as their Kenyan supporters. The British responded by reinforcing their troops, tightening restrictions on Kenyan movement, enforcing curfews, establishing holding camps, and executing Kenyans found guilty of carrying a weapon or taking the Mau Mau oath. By 1956 the last of the Mau Mau strongholds had been overrun, and in 1960 the state of emergency was ended.

The British colonial government came under considerable criticism both domestically and internationally for its tactics in ending the Mau Mau Uprising. Many Kenyans believed that the final deathcounts (11,503 insurgents and 590 British security force members) clearly showed the British to be the offending party, and an even broader range of Kenyans banded together to call for the end of British colonial government. The British agreed to these demands, and in February 1961 allowed Kenyans to vote for a new parliament. Kenyatta's party, the Kenya African National Union, won, but refused to take office until Kenyatta was released from prison. Six months later Kenyatta was finally freed, and when new elections were held after the country gained its formal independence on December 12, 1963, KANU easily won and named Kenyatta as the first president.

After Independence

Kenyan enthusiasm for a future freed from colonial exploitation soon became tempered by new issues, however. Within months of independence Kenya began a three-year war with neighboring Somalia over their common border. Domestically, the new government struggled to extend the school system to more rural communities and to redistribute some of the land and businesses that had been owned by Europeans and East Indians (many of whom were allowed to keep their property in exchange for taking Kenyan citizenship) to those Kenyans who had fought for independence. Increasingly, however, a large number of Kenyans began to believe that independence had done little to improve their lives, as a new set of rulers had simply taken over the few positions of power and wealth vacated by the British administration. The new government also grappled with how to build national unity out of a country of so many fragmented ethnic and social groups.

In 1969 Kenyatta alarmed many citizens when he dissolved the Kenya People's Union, an opposition party that had formed in 1966, claiming that their leaders engaged in antigovernment activities. The Kenyatta government's fear of dissent was also made clear with Ngugi's arrest in 1977. After Kenyatta died in 1978, the vice-president, Daniel T. arap Moi, became president. In 1982 Moi made it constitutionally illegal to form any opposition party to the KANU. Although protests finally reestablished the legality of the multi-party system in 1991, Moi used his considerable power base to be reelected to new five-year terms in 1992 and 1997. The Moi government has been harshly criticized by international human rights organizations for its silencing of various political dissidents using violent means.

Literary Heritage

Kenya is a country of dramatic variety, both in terms of its varied topography and cultural makeup. The land itself includes tropical coastline, largely uninhabited inland desert areas, and high fertile farmland bordered by the two tallest mountains in Africa. While nearly ninety-nine percent of the people are black Africans, there are broad ethnic and linguistic divisions that divide the native population into more than forty ethnic groups. The largest of these groups, the Gikuyu, of which Ngugi is a member, makes up twenty percent of Kenya's population of 32 million people. Other large ethnic groups include the Kalenjin, Kamba, Luhya, and Luo, all of whom can be distinguished by their unique languages or dialects. The remaining one percent of the population is made up of East Indians, Europeans, and Arabs. Many Kenyans are able to overcome language barriers between groups by communicating in Swahili, the national language, or English, the official language.

Traditional Kenyan literary forms are largely oral. Oral stories, dramas, riddles, histories, myths, songs, proverbs, and other expressions are used to educate and entertain as well to remind the community of ancestors' heroic deeds, the past, and the precedents for customs and traditions. Folktale tellers often use call-response techniques in which a praise accompanies a narrative with music. In *Petals of Blood*, Nyakinyua is one of the keepers of the cultural heritage. She is the village bard who tells stories and leads the community in song. During the circumcision she sings a witty, ribald song with Nguguna, which is seen in contrast to the vulgar verses sung by Chui and his modern friends. In the novel, Ngugi's use of different points of view and the recounting of events in the form of stories may be seen as his acknowledgment of traditional oral literary practices. In a 1980 essay, the author remarks that although the African novel uses a borrowed form, its great debt to the native oral tradition is narrative. Ngugi's 1977 play *I Will Marry When I Want*, which led to his arrest, was apparently most offensive to the government because of its use of songs to emphasize its messages. The play struck a chord with the Gikuyu-speaking audience because of its use of traditional literary techniques. After his imprisonment, Ngugi made a conscious decision to switch to writing in his native Gikuyu. He felt he must do this in order to more effectively reach the people for whom his writings are concerned□the peasant and working classes in Kenya.

Critical Overview

Petals of Blood was officially launched by the Kenyan government in July 1977, in a show of the Kenyatta government's commitment to the principles of free speech. However, it was clear that the ruling elite and many members of the upper classes in Kenya were disturbed by Ngugi's harsh criticism of the established social and economic order. In reaction to the novel as well as to his play *I Will Marry When I Want*, after his release from detention in 1978 Ngugi was not reinstated in his job at Nairobi University, was arrested on trivial charges on several occasions, and received death threats.

Despite its status as a controversial work, the novel was received warmly by most readers and critics. An anonymous early review in Kenya's *Weekly Review* entitled "Ngugi's Bombshell" said that the Kenyan reader might feel as though Ngugi had been "walking all over your soul" because of the way he portrayed the results of independence. The reviewer went on to call the work Ngugi's "crowning achievement" but also noted the work's lack of humor and the people's unconvincing absorption in socialism. Joe Khadi, writing in the *Daily Nation*, another Kenyan publication, declared that "no writer has yet been able to expose the evils of such a system in as bold and fearless a manner." Other early African reviewers noted the novel's political impact, praised its narrative richness, and often criticized its use of Marxist principles.

Many western critics were also complimentary of the novel when it appeared. Christopher Ricks in the *Sunday Times* of London hailed it as "remarkable" and "compelling" for its presentation of political issues and innovative use of language. Novelist John Updike, however, writing in the *New Yorker*, was not as generous, saying that "Whatever else political fervor has done for Ngugi, it has not helped his ear for English."

The novel has enjoyed considerable scholarly attention, and many critics have echoed the sentiments of early reviewers, acknowledging the novel's considerable strengths while pointing out its weaknesses. One persistent criticism has been that the novel's political message is too overt. In his discussion of Ngugi's writings, the scholar G. D. Killam, for example, says also that the novel "is open to the charge of political attitudinizing in places." He says the call to right the injustices done to peasants and workers with colonial and postcolonial rule is treated at times with a heavy hand. However, Killam finds that the political attitudes and questions examined in the book are tempered by Ngugi's humanism, as throughout the novel his pressing concern is not with the putting forth of a political ideology but to draw attention to the degradation of human beings.

Other critics, however, have seen the novel's didacticism, or effort to teach and put forward a particular viewpoint, as detracting from its power as a work of art. Simon Gikandi faults Ngugi for his "authorial intrusiveness," saying that it often forces situations and characters to fit into a "predetermined ideological position." He says, for example, that the character of Joseph is not given any psychological development but emerges as a symbol of the ideals of reform that are central to the work. Gikandi

suggests that this is a result of the novel being viewed by Ngugi as a means to "interpret, judge, and pattern the everchanging African reality" and as a useful social tool, much like traditional oracles, whose main purpose is to confront people with meanings and values. Gikandi does not criticize Ngugi's purpose, but finds that the authorial voice in the novel is often jarring. David Cook and Michael Okenimpke also notes the false notes in the novel when putting forward a social and political message, but conclude that the novel is a "bold and powerful attempt to combine the intimacy of the traditional novel with a public rhetorical manner in a new and perhaps itself artistically and revolutionary amalgam in order to analyze social injustice and the human dilemmas it creates, and to mark out a practicable path to social change."

Critics have paid a great deal of attention to the complex narrative style of the novel. Many reviewers have viewed it as a powerful device, despite the author's occasional intrusiveness, as has been discussed. However, Stewart Crehan considers that the technique is confusing and that it is difficult to follow the "bewildering threads" of the narrative. He complains that with each new perspective, "an expected sharpening of focus does not materialize." Crehan also criticizes the novel for its failure to live up to the standards of an epic, its stilted style with its use of stock phrases and "over-reliance of commonplace word," and the muffled political message.

Petals of Blood has also been criticized by some feminist writers for its one-dimensional portrait of women. Elleke Boehmer, for example, points out that while most male critics and Ngugi himself has have pointed out the presence of strong female figures in this and his other novels, there is a strong patriarchal cast to his ideas. She says that his discussion of the rights of workers in *Petals of Blood*, for example, Ngugi seems to assume that true "work" is the productive labor of men, and that women are excluded from this arena. Boehmer does point out, however, that Ngugi's female characters, such as Wanja and Nyakinyua, are pioneers in the field of African writing in English.

While many analyses of *Petals of Blood* point out its limitations, the general view by critics is that the novel is a significant work of modern fiction, and an important contribution to the debate about colonial and postcolonial conditions in Kenya. It is Ngugi's work that is seen as most representative of his radical political views and his humanist commitment to social reform.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3
- Critical Essay #4

Critical Essay #1

Kukathas is a freelance writer and a student in the Ph.D. program in philosophy at the University of Washington specializing in social, political, and moral philosophy. In the following essay, she examines how the narrative technique of Petals of Blood *is used to underscore its theme of alienation and soften the didacticism of its political message.*

Many critics who have offered analyses of *Petals of Blood* have called attention to the novel's unusual narrative structure. In the work Ngugi uses multiple points of view to weave together the tales of his four main characters and the people around them. Fragmentary bits of information are revealed by two narrators and persons of varying backgrounds, and the reader must fit together characters' confessions, reminiscences, reports, musings, and sometimes dim remembrances to understand the truth of the story. The cumulative effect of the many-sided narration is that the reader must decide what and who to believe, but at the same time is presented with a quite clear social and political message. This narrative technique seems at least to some degree to be Ngugi's nod to the Kenyan oral tradition, in which tellers recount stories□often in the form of an exchange with others□for the moral education of their audience.

Some commentators, notably Stewart Crehans, have found Ngugi's style in the novel to be aesthetically unsatisfying. Crehans says that the threads in the novel are not well tied together, that the text "never rests, pinpoints, or focuses attention. . .[I]t has a kind of fugitive, alienated, almost neurotically anxious quality. . ." While Crehans seems to be right about the disjointed and sometimes strained tone of the novel, what he seems wrong not to allow is that the tangled web of narration serves important purposes in the work. The disparate viewpoints, interrupted accounts, and shifting sense of time in *Petals of Blood* produce an effect of confusion and dissonance that underscores the sense of alienation and dislocation of the Kenyan peasantry that is at the heart of the novel. The narrative method is also an effective device in this mystery story where the pieces of a "jigsaw puzzle" must be fit together to solve the crime. And the multiple perspectives that are used to express the ideas in this deeply political novel may be seen as warning against unquestioning acceptance of any one point of view.

The feeling of dislocation is apparent from the beginning of the novel. It opens with the arrests of the four protagonists, in four different places, in quick succession. This back-and-forth movement continues throughout the book. The first voice that is heard is that of a third-person narrator, but others soon chime in. In addition to the voices of the characters that tell their personal stories, there is another unnamed narrator, the collective voice of the villagers of Ilmorog. This "we" voice stands above the characters and judges their actions from the point of view of the community and the values it embodies. The "we" voice expresses bemusement at the new teacher Munira, surprise at the appearance of the first car in Ilmorog carrying Wanja's belongings, and joy at the singing and dancing at the festival before harvest time. The other, omniscient, narrator is more detached and authorial, and offers judgments of a different sort: sometimes factual, sometimes ironic, sometimes damning. It explains, for example, the cycles of

rains on the land and comments on Munira's father's "holy trinity" of Bible, Coin, and Gun.

The four protagonists of the novel, the schoolteacher Munira, the shopkeeper and ex-freedom fighter Abdullah, the bargirl Wanja, and the activist Karega, reveal the details of their lives not only in their confessions to others but in their musings to themselves. The confessions in the novel are powerful and again reminiscent of tales told by oral storytellers, drawing listeners in and creating a heightened expectation of a dramatic revelation. Through the confessions readers learn of the remarkable events in the characters' past and also discover how their lives overlap. The characters' private thoughts also are revealed as they meditate to themselves. Munira, in particular, as he recounts the details of his twelve years in Ilmorog to the police (in a combined public and private disclosure) allows readers into his singular world. By juxtaposing each of the characters' private thoughts about themselves with the narrators' and the other characters' perceptions of them, Ngugi presents complex portraits of these often very troubled human beings.

Indeed, one of the striking features of the novel is the complexity of the four protagonists, all of whom turn out to be quite different than they at first appear and who in many ways remain enigmas to the end. Munira is not an idealist who comes to teach at this rural outpost, it becomes clear, but a weak and fearful man who has escaped from the derision of a cruel father. He shies away from action throughout the novel, but it is he who performs the final, decisive act. Abdullah, it turns out, is not the insignificant shopkeeper of the early chapters of the novel, but a brave man of action who fought for his country in its greatest time of need. Wanja, whose unswerving energy seems to bring the possibility of positive change to Ilmorog, is both temptress and savior, dreamer and practical-minded businesswoman. Karega is an idealistic young man carrying scars of the tragic loss of his first love and in search of an outlet for his intellectual and political energies. Detailed pictures of all four characters emerge not from a third-person description of their lives, but from the multiple perspectives that shed light on their most public actions as well as their private selfdeceptions.

Other characters in the novel also add to the narrative richness with their descriptions of events and situations. The old bard Nyakinya recites to the Ilmorog's grand past and tells of her husband's heroic struggle against the British. The lawyer explains to Karega what he thinks to be the political situation in Kenya and the best means to remedy it. All the viewpoints are, again, presented in quick succession, one following the other, sometimes with little or no indication of the narrative shift. The back-and-forth movement of the novel, the varied voices, and the explorations of Kenya's situation past and present have a sometimes dizzying effect. This sense of instability mirrors masterfully the alienation and disorientation in the lives of the villagers in the novel. Subjected to colonial rule, stripped of their land, forced to answer to corrupt governments unconcerned by their plight, their past values corroded by a new culture of money and power, this is a community in turmoil. The disorder in their lives is expressed not only through the details but in the telling of their story.

The narrative structure using multiple points of view also fits appropriately with the work as a detective story. At the beginning of the novel it is learned that three prominent businessmen have been murdered, and the four suspects are called in for questioning. Inspector Godfrey, in charge of the case, means to solve the problem like a "jigsaw puzzle." The details of the crime slowly unfold, with the various reports and revelations that are offered by the different characters and narrators, but readers, like the inspector, must be careful whose account to believe. It is interesting to note that Godfrey leaves Ilmorog thinking that he has in fact solved the case even though he is missing a crucial piece of the puzzle. He has learned that it was Munira who burned down the house with the three brewery directors in it. However, he does not know that Wanja in fact killed one of the three men before fire broke out. This information is only gleaned because readers are allowed insight into Wanja's private thoughts.

Many critics have faulted *Petals of Blood* for its overtly political message and for the didactic voice that emerges from the narrators as well as individual characters. They find that the damning tone of the book, as it criticizes capitalism, colonialism, and neocolonialism, detracts from the work's artistic integrity. It is also assumed by many commentators, including Eustace Palmer and Simon Gikandi, that the voice of Karega is the voice of consciousness in the novel, and that Ngugi endorses Karega's socialist analysis and solution. They find this to be a shortcoming for a piece of an imaginative literature in which the reader should not be *told* what to believe. However, it should be noted that although Karega is a character who is portrayed very sympathetically, he is not the most prominent figure in the novel. Most of the events are not seen through his eyes, but rather through Munira's. Also, interestingly, although Karega seems to be the voice that echoes that of the author, he in fact issues a warning against taking any person's viewpoint too seriously. When Munira insists that what children in the school should learn are "simple facts," Karega disagrees, saying:

> I cannot accept that there is a stage in our growth as human beings when all we need are so-called facts and information. Man is a thinking being from the time he is born to the time he dies. He looks, he hears, he touches, he smells, he tastes, and he sifts all these impressions in his mind to arrive at a certain outlook in his direct experience of life. Are there pure facts? When I am looking at you, how much I see of you is conditioned by where I stand or sit; by the amount of light in this room; by the power of my eyes; by whether my mind is occupied with other thoughts and what thoughts. Surely the story we teach about the seven blind men who had never seen an elephant is instructive. Looking and touching, then, do involve interpretation. Even assuming that there were pure facts, what about their selection? Does this not then involve interpretation?

So then even if the author does sympathize with the solution offered by Karega, he in fact uses the voice of this character to point out to readers that any solution must be scrutinized closely by those who are presented with it. And, he says, at all stages in humans' lives they are equipped to learn the truth for themselves. Karega himself, in searching for a solution to the pressing social problems he sees all around, does not unquestioningly accept the position of the activist lawyer, but seeks out his own understanding and answer. This emphasis on different interpretations, again underscored by the use of varying perspectives in the narration, seems to urge readers not to take at face value any political viewpoint but to sift through the different impressions and think through possible solutions. This appeal seems to soften the otherwise didactic thrust of the novel.

Of course the fact that Ngugi in his novel uses his unusual narrative device to achieve certain effects does not mean that the technique is without flaws. Certainly in some parts of *Petals of Blood* the language is stilted and ideas put into the mouths of certain characters jarring. But despite these failings, Ngugi's work offers a bold and original style that is eminently suited to its subject matter, and the unusual method of storytelling in *Petals of Blood* adds richness and depth to this ambitious and complex novel.

Source: Uma Kukathas, in an essay for *Literature of Developing Nations for Students*, Gale, 2000.

Critical Essay #2

In the following essay on Ngugi's Petals of Blood*, K.L. Godwin examines the genre of Commonwealth literature and the politicization of fiction in the quest for a balance between "national affection and intellectual pan-Africanism".*

Commonwealth literature is not everyone's notion of a viable or useful category, and some may think that it smacks of postcolonial cultural imperialism, but it is a wider (if less precise) category than 'world literature written in English' and has the advantage of admitting regional and national literatures that would otherwise have to find shelter under the notnecessarily appropriate umbrellas of the 'third world', 'black', 'Asian', or 'Pacific' writing. One does not have to approve of British (or Australian, New Zealand, or United States) colonial rule to recognise that its effects on education, legal systems, writing, and culture generally continue to be evident, so that there are still useful comparisons to be made between the literature of one former British colony and another. That does not mean, of course, that the comparisons are necessarily very important ones; certainly it does not mean that they constitute the most interesting features of the literatures. It does mean, though, that 'Commonwealth literature' still makes sense as a category, somewhere between national literature or the literature of one language and world literature (of necessity partly in translation).

One of the questions much debated over the past three decades has been 'How political should Commonwealth literature be?' To ask this question is to beg a great many more and to invite a multitude of glib, qualified, relativistic answers. 'What is the difference between literature and propaganda?'; 'Can we afford literature in desperate times and circumstances?'; 'Can worthwhile literatures be written in a corrupt society?' are some of the obvious questions. 'As political as the writer wants or the society needs'; 'As political as is compatible with literary (or permanent, or human, or social, or cultural, or. . . .) value': 'It doesn't matter' are some of the obvious answers. . . .

In studying the satirical allegory of Ngugi in *Petals of Blood, Devil on the Cross* and *Matigari* it would be possible to raise a number of rhetorical questions concerned with the blending of modes. It is sufficient at this stage to note that Ngugi moves effortlessly between realism, satire, farce, fantasy, and exhortation. Narrative fiction is not just for telling a story in a realistic mode; but can also discuss the telling of the story, raise questions about the reliability of the narrator or the speaker, and create spaces where the story is held while exhortation or discussion occurs. For Ngugi, fiction can both create its own illusion and strip away the illusion of others. That is why it is so dangerous to the authoritarian state. That is why, in *Matigari,* the Minister for Truth and Justice bans all dreams, desires, and songs (120, 125), why he attributes 'distortion' to fiction (103) and announces that 'All we are interested in here is *development*. We are not interested in fiction.' Ngugi's sense of irony makes him immediately follow that anti-fiction pronouncement with a fiction created by the Minister:

'. . . Let us now forget that such people as Matigari ma
Njiruungi ever existed. Let us with one accord, like

loyal parrots, agree that Matigari ma Njiruungi was
just a bad dream. That bid of history was just a bad
dream, a nightmare in fact. We have qualified professors
here who can write new history for us . . .'

Here is an example of the narrator creating a fictional character, the Minister for Truth and Justice, who creates the fiction that the fiction of which he is part does not exist. In putting things this way I am, of course, using 'fiction' in at least two different senses (narrative and falsehood), but the blurring of these two senses originates not with me but with Ngugi. It is, indeed, part of the fabric of his satire, for one of the major objects of satire in the novel is a government *Doublethink* or *Newspeak* that bears comparison with that found in *Animal Farm* or *1984* .

Satire, like metaphor, symbol, allegory, and myth, is a notoriously artful and intricate process. In this regard it is like *Newspeak*, one of its own targets. In other words, it partakes of the qualities of what it is condemning. This is an inescapable feature, because both the objects and the process of satire are conveyed by language, which is itself notoriously wayward and devious.

Ngugi's specific satirical purpose is made more intricate because he wants to condemn one kind of transnationalism while advocating another. He wants to condemn the transnationalism of the Theng'eta Breweries, which are foreign owned but to advocate a kind of trasnational romantic socialism based on small self-managed units, both rural and industrial. In such an ideal community of international socialism national boundaries would be transcended or atleast rendered inconsequential. The capitalist power struggle would be eliminated. It would be a world quite the converse of the one in which *Petals of Blood* is situated. In such a newly constructed world Wanja would no longer have to say 'This world. . . .this Kenya. . . .this Africa knows only one law. You eat somebody or you are eaten' (291).

The satiric target in *Petals of Blood* is a neocolonialism that represents economic and intellectual bondage. The economy of Kenya is controlled by multinational corporations that provide local directorships to government ministers and other capitalists. The education is represented by Siriana Secondary School (mentioned also in *Weep Not, Child*) where Cambridge Fraudsham has been replaced as headmaster by Chui, 'a black replica of Fraudsham'. *Petals of Blood* presents, then, an indictment of 'development', multinational corporations, international finance, and neo-colonial education.

In the novel, Karega (the Gikuyu name meaning rebel, or he who refuses) is not prepared to accept that there is no alternative to the law that 'You eat somebody or you are eaten.' His answer to Wanja is that 'Then we must create another world, a new earth'. When interrogated by Inspector Godfrey, he explains how this might come about:

'I don't believe in the elimination of individuals.
There are many Kimerias and Chuis in the country.
They are the products of a system, just as workers are

products of a system. It's the system that needs to be changed. . .and only the workers of Kenya and the peasants can do that.'

Karega has become disillusioned by the constitutional methods advocated by the compassionate lawyer who helped the people from Ilmorog when they came to Nairobi to petition their MP. According to Karega, the lawyer (who is subsequently murdered) placed too much faith in such institutions as parliament and private property. Karega is opposed to most sources of political and economic power. He abhors the venality and tribal manoeuvrings of parliamentarians; private ownership of land; the business-infiltrated trade unions; and the churches. Karega's final vision, at the very end of the novel, brings together most of these attitudes. Although cleared of complicity in the fire at Wanja's brothel, he is to be detained because 'I am suspected of being a communist at heart'. The young worker-girl who visits him in prison tells him of rumours that there will be 'a return to the forests and the mountains' to complete the revolution that the Mau Mau leaders, Stanley Mathenge and Dedan Kimathi, began. Karega's mind reviews the situation:

Imperialism: capitalism: landlords: earthworms. A system that bred hordes of round-bellied jiggers and bedbugs with parasitism and cannibalism as the highest goal in society. This system and its profiteering gods and its ministering angels had hounded his mother to her grave. These parasites would always demand the sacrifice of blood from the working masses. These few who had prostituted the whole land turning it over to foreigners for thorough exploitation, would drink people's blood and say hypocritical prayers of devotion to skin oneness and to nationalism even as skeletons of bones walked to lonely graves. The system and its gods and its angels had to be fought consciously, consistently and resolutely by all working people! From Koitalel through Kang'ethe to Kimathi it had been the peasants, aided by the workers, small traders and small landowners, who had mapped out the path. Tomorrow it would be the workers and the peasants leading the struggle and seizing power to overturn the system and all its prying bloodthirsty gods and gnomic angels, bringing to an end the reign of the few over the many and the era of drinking blood and feasting of human flesh. Then, only then, would the kingdom of man and woman really begin, they joying and loving in creative labour. . . .

The Christian Eucharistic imagery of eating flesh and drinking blood is consistently used here to convey predation and exploitation. God and angels are used as images for the demonic intentions and practices of capitalism.

For Karega and for Ngugi there is a particular reason for using Christian imagery with a demonic interpretation. Christianity, particularly in the charismatic form represented by Lillian's movement, is both a rhetorical and a political rival to socialism or communism. The school teacher, Godfey Munira, for instance, was obsessed by the notion of a new world, a notion expressed in the kind of language he had previously heard from his white Christian head master (Cambridge Fraudsham) and from his narrow, sanctiomonious, Christian mother and wife. Disillusioned with education, his work, and his whole life, he is a ready convert to Lillian's movement. The street evangelist preaches about a new earth, a new world, to be achieved through Christ.

For Karega and for Ngugi the apocalyptic imagery has to be recaptured for socialism. One of the best ways of discrediting the Christian interpretation and agenda is to appropriate and subvert basic Christian terminology about the Eucharistic feast and apply it to what is obviously evil.

The process of appropriation includes both subversion and re-direction. Some of the imagery (the signifiers) must be transferred from a favourable signification (or set of signifieds) to an unfavourable one. The primary example is that of the Eucharistic feast. Some must be retained with a favourable signification but transferred to a different set of referents. In other words, the connotation and ambience of the images have to remain auspicious and commendatory but what they refer to has to be shifted. The primary example is of the new heaven and the new earth, transferred from a Christian apocalypse to a socialist one. . . .

The delicacy of the manoeuvre that has simultaneously to subvert and retain well-known symbols is equally in evidence in the treatment of attitudes to nation, colour, class, and gender. Ngugi wants on the one hand to examine and criticise aspects of these cultural indicators, and on the other to redirect them towards his utopian vision of a socialist world. There is, I believe, a latent theory in Ngugi that cultural expression is bound up with, and can be an index of the quality of social and political life. In a simple form this theory can perhaps be attributed to John Ruskin. In a more complex form, involving the circular or unevenly reciprocal process of 'overdetermination', it might be attributed to such theorists of cultural production as Louis Althusser. The source is, however, of less interest than the fact of Ngugi's having such a belief. When *Petals of Blood* was launched in Nairobi, he stated, in rather Althusserian terminology, that

> Literature, as part of culture, is really a reflection of the material reality under which we live . . . I have come to realise that no people can develop a meaningful national culture under any form of foreign economic domination. (*Writers in Politics*)

Two other points can appropriately be made about the process of subversion and retention. The first is that, unlike parody, it does not□indeed must not if it is to succeed□destroy the efficacy of the original model; the power must remain though its object is altered. The second is that Ngugi did not himself invent the process of re-directing Christian symbolism in this way. In his 1973 paper, 'Literature and Society' he

draws attention to an identical process occurring among the Mau Mau revolutionaries in the 1950s:

They [the Mau Mau] took Christian songs; they took
even the Bible and gave these meanings and values in
harmony with the aspirations of the struggle. Christians
had often sung about heaven and angels, and a
spiritual journey in a spiritual intangible universe
where metaphysical disembodied evil and good were
locked in perpetual spiritual warfare. Christians sang:. . .
(*Writers in Politics*)

The example Ngugi gives is the Gikuyu version of the hymn 'Stand up! stand up for Jesus! Ye soldiers of the Cross'. He quotes the text from *Nyumbo cia K'uinira Ngia,* Hymn No. 115. Retranslated into English, one of the stanzas becomes:

Young men arise
Jesus calls you to
Take up spears and shields and to
Throw away your fears.
For what's the point of fear?
Go ye with bravery;
Led by Jesus
You'll be victorious.
In a song book published by Gakara Wanjau
about 1952, the words of Song No. 41 represent a realignment
of 'Stand up! stand up for Jesus!' towards
the Mau Mau cause. The translation offered by
Ngugi is as follows:
Young men arise
Mbiu calls you to
Take up spears and shields
And don't delay,
Get out quickly
Come help one another
The white people are foreigners
And they are very strong (i.e. well-armed).
This is clearly not a parody of the Christian
hymn, but a reorientation of it to a different worthy
object. In Ngugi's words:
It was as if the people of Kenya did to the Christian
universe and spiritual idealism what Marx did to
Hegel's dialectics: made them stand firmly on the
ground, our earth, instead of standing on their head.
The aim, in other words, is to change a people's world
outlook, it is to seize back the right and the initiative to
define oneself.

Christianity is, then, ripe for the appropriation of its imagery, its re-direction to other ends. It has a powerful hold on the cultural thinking of the people; it is foreign and multi-national; it is, as Karega says in *Petals of Blood,* a 'a weapon against the workers'; and it has many adherents among the neocolonial classes of parliamentarians, civil servants, and business people. But some of Ngugi's objects of satire are not readily amenable to the re-direction of Christian imagery. The British concept of the rule of law, for instance, has been satirised through exaggeration and absurdity in its own terms, as it is in the speech of the Minister for Truth and Justice in *Matigari*. The Christian doctrine of quietism and obedience to civil authority ('Render unto Caesar what is Caesar's, and unto God what is God's') cannot be re-directed. It has, on Ngugi's principles, to be opposed and rejected, for the allegory of *Matigari* leads to the discarding of the belt of peace and the return to the weapons used in the war of liberation. In order to have its due place in this allegorical meaning Christian quietism must be made to seem irrelevant or inappropriate (except for hypocrites), and this is the effect when the doctrine is enunciated by the priest to the earnest seeker Matigari. At the beginning of Part 3 Matigari thus comes to the conclusion that

> one could not defeat the enemy with arms alone, but
> one could also not defeat the enemy with words alone.
> One had to have the right words, but these words had
> to be strengthened by the force of arms.

In this final part, Matigari comes to the conclusion that distinctions and discriminations through colour, gender, class, and nationality have been imposed by colonialism and continued by neocolonialism. They must be abolished, an action which involves taking up arms against the privileged class of 'the imperialists and their retinue of messengers, overseers, police and military' by 'the working people'.

The status of one form of distinction is left ambiguous. Near the end of *Matigari* the children of the rubbish dump begin a chant against oppression, treason, the governmental doctrine of parrotology and parrotry, and 'nationality-chauvinism'. To what extent this is intended to be an anti-nationalist or pan-African slogan is unclear. It could be interpreted as that or it could be equally plausibly interpreted as a cry merely against jingoism and the equation of the national interest with the ruling party's interest. It may well be that Ngugi, in order to remain a credible alternative national leader, needs to obscure this point. It is just as ambiguous in *Petals of Blood* and *Devil on the Cross*. Perhaps the most succinct of the ambiguity occurs in *Petals of Blood,* where Karega, in one of his streams of consciousness, reflects on who should own the land:

> Why, anywhy, should soil, any soil, which after all
> was what was Kenya, be owned by an individual?
> Kenya, the soil, was the people's common shamba,
> and there was no way it could be right for a few, or a
> section, or a single nationality, to inherit for their sole
> use what was communal. . .

'Nationality' here primarily refers, of course, to the various peoples who inhabit Kenya□the Gikuyu, Luhya, Luo, Kamba, Kalenjin, and so on. But the statement does raise the question of how the boundaries of present-day Kenya were imposed and whether the European concepts of 'nationality' and 'nationhood' are appropriate. The dilemma of balancing national affection or acceptability with intellectual pan-Africanism affects not only Ngugi; it is the dilemma of many African patriots, whether pro-or anti-governmet.

Source: K. L. Goodwin, "Nationality □ Chauvinism Must Burn!: Utopian Visions in Petals of Blood and Marigari," in *The Literary Criterion,* Vol. XXVII, No. 3, 1991, p. 1-14.

Critical Essay #3

In the following essay on Ngugi's Petals of Blood*, Ayo Mamudu examines the narrative structures of the work as used to weave the past, present and futures of the characters into a portrait that illustrates the general history of human behavior.*

Time present and time past
Are both perhaps present in the future,
And time future contained in time past.

T.S. Eliot, "Burnt Norton"

Considered with his earlier novels, Ngugi's *Petals of Blood* shows a relative complexity which is inseparable from the ambitiousness of its author's aim and scheme: to examine the tangle of human relationships (and identify an underlying principle), to make clear patterns comprehensively observed in the history of a people (and show the *wholeness* of that history), and, above all, to achieve these objectives in a way that captures the changeable, dramatic and often chaotic qualities of life or history as it unfolds. Consequently, *Petals of Blood* shows a greater attention to form than Ngugi's earlier novels, of which he has said, "I put a lot of emphasis on content and language, not so much on form" (Ngugi, "Making of a Rebel").

Ngugi takes care to elaborate his view of human relationships, to which is closely related his view of the history of his society. He demonstrates the complexity of human relationships, exploring the whirlpool effect of people's actions, social interactions and personal dreams and schemes. Then, out of the confusion emerges a clear pattern described by Wanja in the image of the Siamese twins of love and hate:

Love and hate□Siamese twins□back to back in a
human heart. Because you loved you also hated: and
because you hated you also loved. What you loved
decided what you would have to hate in relation to
what you loved. What you hated decided the possibilities
of what you could love in relation to that which
you hated. And how did one know what one loved
and hated?

Further explanation is provided by the view of history that in the life both of the individual and the community, the past, the present and the future are dynamically interrelated, each melding with the others. In Karega's words to Wanja□"To understand the present . . . you must understand the past. To know where you are, you must know where you came from, don't you think?"□there is the appreciation of the necessarily basic links between past and present□without, perhaps, awareness of the dynamic qualities of those links. The awareness, underscored by the scope and pattern of events in the novel, is implicit in Karega's demand for a "critical" study of the past, not as a

museum piece but in order to secure "'a living lesson to the present"' (Awooner). Yet another view of history which the novel demonstrates is that in many ways the present (as by the force of logic, the future) tends to replicate the past. Thus, on the individual level, one life not only shows parallels to and repetitions of motions in another (past) life but also repeats aspects and moments of itself as it twists and turns in its career; on the national scale, the pattern of historical repetition and parallel all but acquires the qualities of cyclicalness, giving the impression of progression without progress.

In *Petals of Blood*, the past is a living and very active reagent in the life and events of the present; in the affairs of individuals and of the community, past (immediate as well as distant) and present explain, complement, reinforce and comment on one another. It is to achieve these aims that the story of the novel is served, as Munira says of one month of his life, "in broken cups of memory." And to give order to the lives of the leading characters as well as draw all into a pattern of unity and symmetry, Ngugi assigns a significant role in interpersonal relations to what may be described as the burdens of the past, what Munira refers to as the "claims of some shadowy connections in our past." Thus, to reveal the characters fully, the novel focuses less on their present and more on their past; for the greater part, it digs into the past in trying to understand the present. Sometimes, of course, the present sheds a new light on the past just as most other times, the past illumines the present; consistently, both past and present serve to fill out, clarify or complete the character sketch. In the process the story takes on a quality of complexity and the method of its telling is *revelatory*, moving from a position of seeing darkly to one of seeing clearly: a method not incompatible with the nature and means of the detective-story frame which loosely but clearly girdles the events of the novel.

One consequence of the *revelatory* method or approach is that the story gains in interest as rather profuse patterns of repetitions, parallels and ironies emerge. Bit by bit, a number of things are revealed, exposed, even explained; often the effect is surprise. The life and career of Munira may serve to illustrate this method, which draws attention to the complexity of things yet seeks to resolve the complex totality into comprehensible strands, which tries to find recurrent patterns in the life of the individual, in his relations with others and within the larger context of his society. Considered a non-achiever by his father, Munira is burdened with guilt; the feeling of guilt explains his choice of Ilmorog, "his rural cloister," as the place to settle down at as well as the devotion and enthusiasm he shows in working there. His feeling that he is part of the family without actually belonging to it is partly explained by, and says something for his admiration of his sister Mukami's rebellious spirit before her early death; and his attitude and moral position are implicitly comment ed on by the gradual disclosure of the dishonesty and mammonism which are the true foundations of his father's success. The notion of success or failure (real or apparent) provides the background to Munira's sense of achievement after setting Wanja's house on fire: "He, Munira, had willed and acted, and he felt, as he knelt down to pray, that he was no longer an outsider for he had finally affirmed his oneness with the Law." His willingness to surrender to "the Law" must be related to his youth with his over-zealous Christian father, to the influence of Lillian, the reformed prostitute (whom Munira himself patronized a number of times) and leader of a religious sect and, finally, his own persistent if unadmitted desire to evade responsibility.

It is interesting to observe that it takes the religious activities of a one-time prostitute to imbue Munira with a religious fervour that makes him see in the burning of Wanja's whorehouse an act of purification. His action and the moral intention which prompts it reach back to Munira's schoolboy days when, after patronizing Amina the prostitute, he built an imitation of her house and set it on fire as an act of atonement; then, he "watched the flames and he felt truly purified by fire." Ironically, fire has never been far from the thoughts of Wanja herself; she finds in fire a continual threat to her family, citing her aunt's death by burning, her own narrow escape from the flames at the Kamiritho Heavenly Bar (the very place where Munira the schoolboy had patronized Amina) and the little fire which mars her celebration in Ilmorog. But, curiously, she has always also found in fire something similar to Munira's thoughts on the night he sets *her* house on fire; a symbol of purification□

"□but I have liked to believe that she burnt herself
like the Buddhists do, which then makes me think of
the water and the fire of the beginning and the water
and the fire of the second coming to cleanse and bring
purity to the earth of human cruelty and loneliness."

There can be no over-emphasizing the sense of discovery which the revelatory approach creates in the reader as well as among the characters themselves; from past facts or actions and present knowledge, significances are built up and these draw further attention to the intricacy of the web of human relationships. There is something in the manner of telling which lends a startling quality to our knowing: that Karega is the son of Mariamu, a settler labourer on Munira's father's plantations whose other son Nding'uri was the friend and companion of Abdulla in the Mau Mau struggles; that the two of them were betrayed by Kimeria, who has since risen to become one of the three African directors of the Theng'eta Breweries; that Kimeria seduced and abandoned Wanja as a schoolgirl who, since coming to Ilmorog, loves Karega in preference to Munira, whose own sister Mukami had committed suicide when their father opposed her love for Karega; that Chui, another director of the Theng'eta Breweries, was as a boy expelled from Siriana together with Munira; that Munira taught Karega at Manguo, serving as referee when the latter applied for admission to Siriana; that Karega was later expelled from the school for leading a strike; that the Nairobi lawyer is himself a product of Siriana; that Abdulla, having found Joseph scavenging for food at a refuse dump (a thing Abdulla himself had done as a boy), will find part of his final satisfaction in life in Joseph's admission into Siriana, his fees paid by Wanja who makes the money as a prostitute from patrons who include Chui, Kimeria and Mzigo. . . . Thus utterances, actions and events which by themselves appear insignificant or ordinary are endowed with new meaning and new significance through the unravelling skein of the relationships between the individuals as well as through the interplay between the past and the present.

To achieve the interlacing of past and present, the separate worlds of memories and of present actions are mapped out, sometimes side by side and other times mounted one on the other; always, the strength of the links which bind the two worlds is clearly demonstrated. Occasionally, Ngugi draws attention to the concreteness of the realm of

memories, this other world which is as physical and solid as the plains of Ilmorog. Munira may thus be shown "absorbed in thoughts he did not know he had, speaking from a past he should have forgotten, crossing valleys and hills and ridges and plains of time to the beginning of his death. . . ." Abdulla seems to suggest, on one occasion, that to revisit that world is an exertion which registers on the features or that he is able to recall that world with a freshness which leaves its mark on his mood:

> Abdulla cleared his throat. His face changed. He suddenly seemed to have gone to a land hidden from them, a land way back in a past only he could understand.

Indeed, recognizable signposts are put up in the shape of face, the turn of thought or the sound of voice, pointing the way from the present to the past, from the world of the present to that of memories. In all, these signposts emphasize internal space as the ground for much of the action of the novel. Thus, recalling his school days in Siriana, Munira's voice could "become more and more faint with the prog ress of the narrative. But it retained the weight and power of a bitter inward gaze"; similarly drifting into the past, Wanja "lowered her voice a little as she said the last words and Munira could somehow imagine a tortured soul's journey through valleys of guilt and humiliation and the long sleepless nights of looking back to the origins of the whole journey." A character's transport from the one to the other world is easily recognized by the reader when the charcter becomes "absorbed in himself" or dwells "alone within that inward gaze" or when adverbs such as "thoughtfully" and "dreamily" occur in the narrative. The occasions or reasons for the frequent journeys into the world of the past do not always have to do with introspection or thoughtfulness; sometimes a face, a situation or an event may remind a character of something similar, analogous or explicatory, just as a story or an account of events offered by a member of a group may set off another member on such a journey. There is, besides, the unique night at Nyakinyua's when the drinking of Theng'eta seems particularly to sharpen the memory, shed inhibitions and loosen the tongue.

For the larger purpose of *Petals of Blood* the interconnections of past, present and future on a communal scale are stressed. Narratively, this purpose dictates the use of multiple points of view so that the vast expanse (in terms of time and place) of events either as lived out or filtered through the individual minds and memories can be adequately and convincingly reported and so as to emphasize the entwined complexities of the realities, facts or events which cumulatively constitute the history of a people. Although events are seen through the eyes of a number of other characters, there is the voice of a chief narrator whose role ought perhaps to be more properly regarded as that of a presenter. The absence of a clear definition of that role explains why the chief narrator, in relating communal events and developments, is sometimes an individual observer/ participant ("I"), sometimes a member of the participant group ("we"); at other times, he is the observer, aloof, omnipresent and omniscient; yet other times, he is the invisible recorder of folk history, the disembodied voice of the group.

Literally and symbolically the main characters relate to different generations and periods of the history of the people, in broad terms, the past, the present and the future. The very old characters Njuguna, Ruoro, Muturi, Nyakinyua, etc. are in the novel not as "decorative" background or even because they provide the nostalgia which hovers about the fringes of the novel. In their persons these characters make the distant past live and through their reminiscence and occasional use of legends the novel in effect encompasses the history of the Kenyan people right from the legendary founding patriarch Ndemi through the period of "the Arab and Portuguese marauders from the Coast." Abdulla advances the history through the "Mau Mau" struggles, bridging the past and present when the main actors are younger: the lawyer, Wanja and Karega, with the last two pointing the way to the future when the child Wanja is expecting alongside the unnamed children daily being born ("New Mathenges . . . new Koitalels . . . new Kimethis . . . new Piny Owachos . . . these were born every day among the people . . .") will take up the continual struggle.

The people's spirit to fight, to struggle, to reject what is objectionable in the social institutions represents in a deeper, less physical sense the continuity between the past, the present and the future. This fact supplies one rather subtle dimension to the description of Nyakinyua: "The old woman, strong sinews forged by earth and sun and rain, was the link binding past and present and future." Nyakinyua's husband, it must be remembered, had come back from the jungles of the Second World War a changed man, carrying with him the mysterious knowledge of the significance of the fire emitted by the fabulous creature that he and others had encountered in the jungles; in his words:

". . . When it spat out the light, I thought I saw sons
and daughters of black people of the centuries rise up
as one to harness the power of that light, and the white
man who was with us was frightened by what would
happen when that power was in the hands of these
black gods . . ."

Part of that "power" glimpsed by Nyakinyua's man was to be demonstrated during the Kenyan struggle against the British colonial government. And because the "black gods" of the vision turned out after independence to be considerably less than divine, even human, the struggle once again was taken up, to stop "the gigantic deception being played on a whole people by a few who had made it, often in alliance with foreigners." Nyakinyua plays a leading role as a member of Old Ilmorog people's delegation to the city; much older and much weaker in body, she demonstrates the same spirit in New Ilmorog when her land is in danger from the grasping hooks of the new economic forces. She summons her old spirit and courage, tries to rouse and rally similarly placed peasants and is let down; but she decides to fight alone: "I'll go alone . . . my man fought the white man. He paid for it with his blood . . . I'll struggle against these black oppressors . . . alone . . . alone. . . ."

Abdulla also symbolizes continuity in the history of a people through the spirit of struggle; but his significance is not confined to this role. A living, maimed testimony of

the people's struggle in the past when Kenyans took the oath□of which the new KCO oath is a perversion□Abdulla helps by association to extend temporally and spatially the history of struggle and resistance, recalling and evoking Ole Masai, Dedan Kimathi, Chaka, Toussaint, Nkrumah, Nasser, Cabral. Abdulla in addition demonstrates the cohesive force of the epic journey in the structure of the novel: besides its obvious symbolic signification of a search into the kingdom of knowledge (where Munira for one discovers "that man's estate is rotten at heart," the journey affords Abdulla an opportunity to relive his past as a battler, on the same old plains and valleys. Because of his activities on this journey, which parallel, recall and reinforce his activities during the nation's struggles in the past, he is "transformed" in the eyes of the people; every member of the delegation appreciates his courage, and

> Wanja, sitting just behind Nyakinyua and Abdulla,
> was particularly happy: she had always felt that
> Abdulla had had a history to that stump of a leg. Now
> it was no longer a stump, but a badge of courage
> indelibly imprinted on his body.

Even before Nyakinyua and Abdulla are dead, Karega proves to be an insurance that the spirit of struggle in the land is not about to die. He rejects the lawyer's liberalism as the answer to the problems of the land because of its inherent contradictions, contemptuously disregards Munira's (and Lillian's) offer of religious piety or even moral purity as the means of establishing justice on earth or of preparing the self for a future life after death, shares Wanja's rejection of the role of victim (but rejects what she sees as the solution, to join the exploiters if one cannot beat them) and believes firmly in the collective struggle as the one path to a New World, a New Earth. If the New Jerusalem is not reached today, Karega feels sure, the fighters among the children daily being born will struggle through into its walls tomorrow.

Because struggle has always remained one of the permanent realities of the history of the people, *Petals of Blood* may arguably be considered a celebration of the spirit of struggle and of the people's heroes who lead such struggle. Indeed, the impression is created that the fact of struggle can in itself be an end worth celebrating; because a single struggle or an act of defiance must send reverberations down the corridors of history, that struggle or defiant act easily acquires larger-than-life dimensions in the minds of the people. Hence the "epic journey" to the city is soon incorporated into popular history through songs so that, for instance, in singing about it, Nyakinyua is careful to emphasize the representative aspects and the timeless qualities of the experience:

> it was no longer the drought of a year ago that she was
> singing about. It was all the droughts of the centuries
> and the journey was the many journeys travelled by
> people even in the mythical lands of two-mouthed
> Marimus and struggling humans. She sang of other
> struggles, of other wars□the arrival of colonialism

and the fierce struggles waged against it by newly circumcised youth.

Yet, the truth is that if the fact of struggle and the act of heroism have consistently recurred in the history of the people, it is in part precisely because oppression, social injustice and disaffection have been also recurrent in the community. In other words, if the people can proudly point to a pantheon of heroes, past and present, it is because the community has known the presence of the Arab slave traders, the marauding Portuguese, the European settlers and colonial administrators□each group needing and obtaining the services and collaboration of some members of the community□and now (worse still) the new African elite, enjoying a disproportionate share of the wealth of the land. It is the fact of failure in the past, the respected past, as in the present which has always necessitated the act of struggle□and created the fabled and living heroes. In the description of the present state of the nation which Wanja gives in terms of Ilmorog countryside, the *past* she refers to is that of the period about the time of political independence; Munira's contribution to the discussion draws attention to the fact that there is nothing exactly new in the present disappointments:

"So green in the past," she said. "So green and hopeful . . . and now this." "A season of drought . .. so soon . . . so soon!" echoed Karega, remembering past flowers of promise. "It's the way of the world," said Munira. . . .

The disappointments (past and present) which constitute a major focus of interest in the novel always bear the marks of betrayal. Recalling her husband's observations about the struggle for political freedom, Nyakinyua remarks: "'There were a few traitors among them, those who wanted to remain porters at the gate, collectors of the fallout from the white man's control of that power . . . .'" Ezekieli, formerly Waweru, the father of Munira, is a surviving member of that group, living on as a materially bloated Christian. In general, the quality of life of most members of the community and the socio-economic structures which are accountable for the way things are turn Karega's thought to "'Massacres of hopes and dreams and beauty.'" To prove the point, there is Abdulla who in old age moved about in "the wilderness of his bitterness, of his consciousness of broken promises, of the wider betrayal of the collective blood of the Kenyan fighters for land and freedom."

One reliable piece of evidence that failure or disappointment betrayal (like victory and the feeling which attends it) is a self-repeating thing is Ngugi's frequent recourse, in reference to hopes, yearnings and desires in persons and social situations in the present as in the past, to phrases such as "new hopes," "new beginnings," "new horizons," even "new world" or "new earth." Obviously the frequent appearance of these phrases means clearly that a gap has frequently separated attainment and expectations. In frequently promising herself new starts in life and entertaining fresh hopes, Wanja's life becomes a metaphor for the career of the nation. Her coming to Ilmorog to settle, for example, is the result of one such promise: "Wanja had made a pact with herself. She would have a completely new beginning in Ilmorog." Her

discovery later in life is equally interesting as a metaphor for the conclusions to be drawn from a survey of the national history: "Maybe life was a series of false starts, which once discovered, called for more renewed efforts at yet another beginning." Additionally, of course, the discovery is significant because it helps to clarify and to make acceptable Karega's conviction that "There are times . . . when victory is defeat and defeat is victory." Together Wanja's discovery and Karega's conviction (itself a discovery for Karega) make possible the final vision of the novel which in turn allows the mood of optimism to predominate over that of despair.

In order to summarize comprehensively the cyclical patterns he observes in the history of Kenya (as well, of course, as to add local colour to events) Ngugi often turns his attention to the seasons and the human activities related to the different seasons; from these he draws images and metaphors. It is appropriate for instance that the people of Ilmorog (mostly peasants and herdsmen) live and feel in accordance with the rain-drought cycle; besides, in the prevalent season Ngugi finds metaphors with which to make statements about the quality of life of the people. In periods of drought Ilmorog is frequently described in terms such as "this wasteland" and "desert place"; in the rains, the metaphorical, even symbolic, possibilities multiply. For example, there can be the simple, direct descriptions of the peasants "busy putting seeds in the soil" and the combination of fact and symbol in a statement such as:

At the beginning of April it started raining. The eyes
of the elders beamed with expectation of new life
over Ilmorog. . . .

The process by which the fact takes on symbolic significance is illustrated in the linking of the journey to the city with rain and crop (in the sense of hopes and expectations):

Yes, it will rain. Crops will grow. We shall always
remember the heroes in our midst. We shall always
sing about the journey in the plains.

Steadily and cumulatively the significance of the cycles of the seasons is compressed into the symbols of seeds, flower and harvest.

These symbols are used with such freedom and flexibility that complications, if not confusion, could be the reward of the unwary reader. It is easy enough to see the relationship between effort and achievement in terms of seed-time and harvesttime as, on a personal level, Munira comes to Ilmorog in the hope of finding "a safe corner in which to hide and do some work, plant a seed whose fruits one could see . . ." It is also easy to understand the flower in terms of the period leading up to, or the expectations of, crop or harvest. It is not as easy to see or accept the flower in *Petals of Blood* as a symbol, among other possibilities, of disappointed hopes. The comments made by Munira, for instance, to his pupils reveal the startling use of the symbol of flower, the relevance of Munira's words to the social realities touches on hopes and disappointment and, by implication, the necessity to fight the oppressive agents who produce among the suffering masses a state of etiolated existence:

"Right. This is a worm-eaten flower . . . It cannot bear fruit. That's why we must always kill worms . . . A flower can also become this colour if it's prevented from reaching the light."

From this level, the mental leaps required of the reader become relatively easy: the flower as the state of promise actually or potentially unfulfilled, as when Karega remembers "past flowers of promise"; the flower as a symbol of destruction, spiritual or physical, as when Munira acknowledges his role as "a privileged witness of the growth of Ilmorog from its beginnings in rain and drought to the present flowering in petals of blood"; and the flower as the symbol of the means of achieving moral and social purification, as when Munira has set Wanja's whorehouse on fire:

He walked away toward Ilmorog Hill. He stood on the hill and watched the whorehouse burn, the tongues of flame from the four corners forming petals of blood, making a twilight of the dark sky.

Thus the promising state, even when unful- filled□now or in the past□and the means by which social or moral cleansing is or is thought to be carried out in order to build new hopes, are suggested in the flower, linking seed-time with harvesttime, and as recurrent as the seasons.

As with *flower, harvest*□together with its associated ideas such as harvest-time (a culmination of both seed-time and flowering), fruit and crop□is variously pressed into symbolic service. The love relationship between Karega and Wanja is, for example, on one occasion described in direct reference to the "new crops": "Their love seemed to grow with the new crops of the year." Besides, the anticipation of the happy rewards of a promising relationship can see the harvest in the flower. So, Munira, after arranging a tryst with Wanja, thinks: "Beautiful petals: beautiful flowers: tomorrow would indeed by the beginning of a harvest"; and when the rewards are anticipated in the form of the flesh, they produce a "trembling" in the body:

Her pleading voice had startled Munira out of his thoughts. He too wanted to stay the night. He would stay the night. A joyous trembling courses through his body. Aah, my harvest

□a description which, in a suggestion of the equality of all creatures great and small, is applied to cattle attempting to mate: "Sometimes the male would run after a young female, giving it no rest or time to eat, expecting another kind of harvest" □ another kind because the narrator has just shifted his gaze from women harvesting peas and beans. Yet another kind of harvest is the discovery of the significance of intertwined memories, such as dawns on Karega after drinking Theng'eta and making love to Wanja: "So many experiences, so many discoveries in a night and a half. Harvest-time for seeds planted in time past." A moment, any moment in the history of the individual or the community, may thus be seen as a harvest, the flower or the seed, but it may also be seen in terms

of any one of the three states relative to the other two; the reference may be to the seed, for example, in the sense that the seed looks forward to the flower which bears expectations of or hopes or potential for harvest which will itself look forward to the beginning of another season when the harvest provides the seed, etc.

Such are the cycles and the seasons that Ngugi traces in the history of the Kenyan people, bound apparently to a course in which successive waves of hope must crash on the shingles of disappointment. Of course, some achievements have been made even if these are generally more apparent than real and even when attainment has been far less fulfilling than anticipation. These achievements, for what they are worth, are the result of the people's struggles, the result of what Ngugi refers to as "the spirit of the land"; this spirit is the one guarantee of a better future for the people.

In brief then, *Petals of Blood* demonstrates not a cleavage but an integration of form and content in many ways. The telling of the story is convoluted because the properties of the story are; the complexity of human relationships and the tortuousness of the path of Kenyan history impose on Ngugi the manner of their telling. If that path, as Ngugi sees it, is far from resembling the trajectory of an archer's arrow (in a windless tunnel), it is not that of a mill either, it would seem to be a winding stair, meaning for the climber repetitive, circular motions at everincreasing levels linking the point of departure to that of arrival. Hence, even though Kenya's today may appear in essence the same as its yesterday, unhappy, unsatisfactory and prompting struggle among the people, yet both today and yesterday provide, through the spirit of struggle evinced, the basis for the expectations of a changed, happier tomorrow. To underline the ever-present links between past, present and future and to emphasize the necessarily repetitive motions of progression through them, Ngugi interweaves present and past, now and then, here and there, finding in the cycles of nature, the seasons and human activities related to them a reservoir of metaphors and symbols.

Source: Ayo Mamudu, "Tracing a Winding Stair: Ngugi's Narrative Methods in Petals of Blood," in *World Literature Written in English,* Vol. 28, No. 1, Spring, 1988, pp. 16-24.

Critical Essay #4

In the following essay, Jennifer Evans examines the development and portrayal of female characters in Ngugi's Petals of Blood*. Evans discusses how the African woman, so often sketched as a passive image, is in Ngugi's writing both repository of traditional values and active on the forefront of change; thus Ngugi's female characters act as the thread of historical continuity in his work.*

"The story of this heroic resistance: who will sing it ? Their struggles to defend their land, their wealth: who'll tell of it?" asks the narrator in Ngugi's *Petals of Blood.* Ngugi himself, as poet-historian, has taken up the challenge to tell the people's history. In his novels he presents the lives of ordinary Kenyan men and women, seen in the context of the vital continuity of past, present, and future, as the real basis of Kenyan history. He seeks consciously to correct "a history . . . distorted by the cultural needs of imperialism," which fosters the image of a weak people "who had not struggled with nature and with other men to change their natural environment and create a positive social environment," and "who had not resisted foreign domination." For Ngugi, struggle is the dynamic of history and society, and is central to his reappraisal of the African past. In *Petals of Blood* Karega, in his search for self-identity through black history, comes to the conclusion:

> The true lesson of history was this: that the so-called victims, the poor, the downtrodden, the masses, had always struggled with spears and arrows, with their hands and songs of courage and hope, to end their oppression and exploitation: that they would continue to struggle until a human kingdom came.

The African woman has particularly been the victim of a passive image since she suffers both colonial and male domination. Yet in Ngugi's novels women are shown to have a fundamental role in the struggle against oppression and exploitation, and often courage and hope are ultimately found in their hands. As Judith Cochrane has put it, Ngugi's women are "guardians of the tribe." They are presented as the central strength of the Gikuyu people, custodians of traditional culture, and symbols of authentic Gikuyu identity.

While almost all of Ngugi's female characters are consistently endowed with traditional virtues and values, his female images are not reactionary or static. He shows that women and their lives are changing, and heroines such as Nyambura, Mumbi and Wanja are seen in the forefront of social change. At the same time it is through female images that Ngugi shows historical continuity most effectively, and reveals how qualities drawn from the traditional world find their expression in the contemporary world.

The post-independence society depicted in *Petals of Blood,* and in some of the sharp and poignant stories in *Secret Lives,* appears to be ruthless, immoral, and ruled by money. Discussing contemporary Kenyan capitalism in *Homecoming,* Ngugi says:

It is the height of irony that we, who have suffered most from exploitation, are now supporting a system that not only continues that basic exploitation, but exacerbates destructive rivalries between brothers and sisters, a system that thrives on the survival instincts of dwellers in a Darwinian jungle. The writer cannot be exempted from the task of exposing the distorted values governing such a jungle precisely because this distorts healthy human relationships.

Ngugi exposes the distorted values governing human relationships in *Petals of Blood* most vividly through his portrayal of Wanja, the barmaid-whore, a female figure more complex than the women in any of his previous works. In her role as a prostitute Wanja succinctly reveals the exploitative materialism that dominates people's lives. Her humanity is reduced to a market commodity, and her personal relationships to financial transactions. The prostitute does have a kind of independence and freedom, but Ngugi shows these to be as negative and illusory as the so-called independence of a neocolonial state. Wanja appears to reflect society's conflicts and contradictions, strengths and weaknesses. Her career illustrates the very real dilemmas facing many Kenyan women in a rapidly changing society, but it can also be seen as a metaphor for the fate of Kenya, even of the African continent as a whole. The venerated image of Mother Africa is now found as a whore, abused and exploited by the men of the new black elite.

Ngugi's criticism is aimed not so much at individuals, as at the political and economic system in which, to quote Karega, "one could only be saintly and moral and upright by prostituting others." Certainly men such as Kimeria, Chui and Mzigo are corrupt opportunists who deserve little sympathy, but it would be a mistake to see Wanja simply as an innocent victim. Her potential is wasted and she is exploited, but she also exploits others, most obviously in running her own whorehouse. Her "eat or be eaten" philosophy is an expression of the destructive rivalry of capitalism, and is no more moral than the self-serving greed of the Kimerias. It is in this loss of innocence and idealism that Wanja differs from the heroines of Ngugi's earlier novels.

Female characters in Ngugi's first three novels have tended to be idealized. *A Grain of Wheat* presents a wider range of characters than the innocent young women and noble enduring mothers of *The River Between* and *Weep Not Child,* but the prevailing female image remains virtuous. We are never led to doubt that the heroines are motivated by anything other than idealism, and a desire for truth and justice. They remain innocent of any evil or destruction unwittingly resulting from their actions. Even Mumbi, the most fully realised woman in the earlier novels, despite her unfaithfulness to Gikonyo, retains a certain incorruptible purity. Perhaps it is this kind of female virtuousness that provokes Adrian Roscoe's criticism that the women characters do not receive "tough handling."

In *Petals of Blood* Wanja is not placed on such a pedestal. She is less perfect an more human than her predecessors. She has a generous warm personality, but can at times be selfish, callous and vindictive. Nevertheless Wanja's strengths are her dominant

characteristics, and in these she resembles Ngugi's previous heroines. She does possess the admirable qualities Ngugi associates with the true Gikuyu woman. As Eustace Palmer points out:

She belongs to that remarkable breed of Ngugi women□
Mwihaki, Nyambura, Muthoni, Mumbi,
Wambuku□all of them brave, resilient, resourceful
and determined.

Palmer's further assertions that none of these women are "really feminine," and that "it is more the masculine aspects of Wanja's character that are stressed," appear to lack justification, unless the women's remarkable qualities and lack of passivity are regarded as essentially masculine traits. Women such as Muthoni, Nyambura, Mumbi and Wanja are involved in creating new feminine roles and changing attitudes to womanhood. The "new" Mumbi who demands respect and equality in her relationship with Gikonyo at the end of *A Grain of Wheat,* is very much a kindred spirit to Wanja, whose life is a constant struggle for respect and independence as a woman. As Wanja puts it:

If you have a [c□□]excuse my language, but it
seems the curse of Adam's Eve on those who are born
with it□if you are born with this hole, instead of it
being a source of pride, you are doomed to either
marrying someone or else being a whore.

Mumbi's is the protest of the subordinate wife, Wanja's that of the whore. Both feel they are entitled to expect something more from life. If we can see the hopeful and ardent Mumbi as an image of the new nation in 1963, then Wanja can be seen as the rather tarnished version of that image in the late sixties and seventies.

Although Mumbi and Wanja can both be described as new types of women, they do not represent a denial of their traditional heritage, but its modern expression. The close and harmonious relationship each of these young women enjoys with an older woman who is the epitome of tradition, ex- presses their identification with a feminine heritage. The nature of these relationships between women derives from traditional notions of community, and appears as saving and exemplary in the contemporary context of developing capitalism. In *A Grain of Wheat* the quality of feminine cooperation, solidarity and understanding between Mumbi and Wangari shows mother-in-law and daughter-in-law not as contrasting figures, but as complementary images of two ages of Gikuyu womanhood. In *Petals of Blood* the close relationship between Wanja and her grandmother Nyakinyua has a similar function.

Critics have commented on Nyakinyua as the embodiment of traditional values. As traditional woman *par excellence,* Nyakinyua's portrayal strongly refutes the stereotype of the traditional woman as the silent passive burden-bearer. This is a woman who makes her protest by [sh□□ing] a mountain in Munira's schoolyard, who excels in the poetry of "erotic abuse" in circumcision songs, who leads the women in attacking KCO officials, who convinces the elders they should support the march to Nairobi, and who

takes an enthusiastic part in it. Even her death can be seen as a final protest against the loss of her land. Wanja has inherited Nyakinyua's courageous and defiant spirit, but whereas Nyakinyua appears a woman of the past, acting throughout the novel as the voice of the people's history, Wanja is very much a woman of the present. She intrigues the people of Ilmorog when she arrives by car with her modern possessions, among them the first pressure lamp to be seen in the village. Wanja initiates action and brings changes. She revives Abdulla's shop, sends Joseph to school, and sparks off Ilmorog's economic growth by selling Theng'eta. She is praised in popular songs for turning "a bedbug of a village into a town." Not only does Wanja change the things around her, she is also constantly changing herself. Part of her complexity is that she is both the "city woman" that the villagers initially take her to be, and the rural daughter of the soil. As Abdulla jokingly puts it, she is a "barmaid farmer."

It is through working in the fields that Wanja and Nyakinyua come together most closely, and Wanja's enthusiasm and involvement in this practical labor show her affinity with the earth, the basis of the people's tradition and identity. A short period with the soil entirely changes Wanja's bearing and appearance. Karega observes on the march to the city:

> Over the past few weeks he had witnessed the gradual
> withering away of her earlier calculated smoothness,
> the practised light in her eyes, and the birth of a
> broken-nailed lean beauty.

After the return to Ilmorog, Wanja is strongly involved with the women's farming cooperative, the Ndemi-Nyakinyua group. At times such as this, when Wanja is giving of herself to the community and not selling her body to men, she appears most beautiful and most fulfilled. Both Munira and Abdulla wonder at her "utter transformation."

The climax of this period of transformation is Wanja's love affair with Karega. This has an idyllic, pastoral quality and is shared with delight, with the exception of Munira, by the whole of Ilmorog:

> But we were soon intrigued, fascinated, moved by the
> entwinement and flowering of youthful love and life
> and we whispered: see the wonder-gift of God. Crops
> will sprout luxuriant and green. We shall eat our fill
> and drink Theng'eta at harvest-time.

The involvement of Karega and Wanja dominates the village, and in turn reflects a new mood of communal confidence and optimism. Yet the promise of these halcyon days is not fulfilled. The untimely departure of Karega and the death of Abdulla's donkey mark the beginning of the end for the community of the old Ilmorog, and the dissolution of Wanja's identity as daughter of the soil.

Ironically, Wanja's further transformation to wigged and painted whorehouse madam finally turns upon her redemption of Nyakinyua's land. Following Nyakinyua's death, Wanja sells her share of the new business with Abdulla in order to get the land back.

This gesture is meant to serve Nyakinyua's memory and somehow honor the family tradition of resistance for which Wanja's grandfather had died, but Wanja builds on her land a whorehouse to service the needs of the new black masters such as Chui, Mzigo and Kimeria, the betrayers of the people. Outside "Sunshine Lodge" the grass is cut to bear the words "Love is Poison," as if Wanja must carve in the earth itself the poison that is eating her heart. This is a perverse display of her estrangement from the soil, which earlier had brought her happiness when she had sowed and harvested with Nyakinyua, and loved Karega.

Only after Karega's return to Ilmorog does Wanja come to understand the meaning of Nyakinyua's dying words:

he will return, only I fear that you may not be *there*
to receive him. . .

Wanja, the daughter of the soil, is not "there." She has betrayed Nyakinyua's spirit and her grandfather's heroism. Rejecting her true Gikuyu heritage, Wanja is following instead in the steps of her cowardly, greedy father. In opening her whorehouse she seeks revenge against men and a society that has failed her. Yet her prostitution of herself and others is not a challenge to corrupt capitalism, but an accommodation to its values. She becomes cynically committed to financial profit and selfinterest, "Wanja first" as she calls it. Abdulla feels at this stage that Wanja has "lost that firm grasp, that harmony with the invisible law." She no longer contributes to the well-being of the community, but grows wealthy at its expense. In Karega's terms Wanja has "chosen sides." She has joined the world of the Kimerias and Chuis, those who rob the people.

Govind Narain Sharma contends that

Karega's chief failure, hardened as he is by unhappy
experiences and his doctrinaire rigidity, lies in his
inability to understand Wanja and to return her love.

Karega does possess a certain moral righteousness of the young and innocent, but his critical attitude towards Wanja is perhaps a virtue rather than a failure. It is only through the confrontation with Karega in her old hut that Wanja honestly confronts herself, and comes to terms with what she is doing and what she has become. She is then able to take responsibility for the choices and actions she has made throughout her life, to see that "at least she could have chosen to fight differently," and that her revenge and her financial success have been no victory at all.

Wanja, like Gikonyo in *A Grain of Wheat,* becomes wealthy at the cost of losing whatever real value there was in her life. Munira describes the new wealthy Wanja as "that bird periodically born out of ashes and dust," but it is not until the burning of the whorehouse that the image of Wanja as phoenix, continually associated as she is with fire and new beginnings, reaches its cathartic culmination. After this fire Wanja appears as if born again, purified and bearing new life within her. Munira had intended to save others from Wanja, but she is the one who is saved. All three men, who in some way

seek personal salvation in Wanja, are finally instrumental in her redemption. Karega brings her to an intellectual understanding of her invidious position, Munira satisfies her spiritual craving for purification by fire, while Abdulla physically drags her body from the burning house.

Munira watching the whorehouse fire from Ilmorog Hill sees

the tongues of flame from the four corners forming
petals of blood, making a twilight of the dark sky.

Wanja's identification with fire is part of the complex pattern of imagery that associates her with the title phrase "petals of blood." Wanja makes her first appearance in the novel immediately after the first explicit reference to "petals of blood" when a red flower is discovered during a nature lesson, and Munira is left to wonder about questions provoked by the "flower with petals of blood" and the visit of the "stranger girl." One flower found by the school children does not have full color, and because it is worm-eaten has no stigma or pistils. Munira explains that this flower "cannot bear fruit," and that "a flower can also become this color if it's prevented from reaching the light." The condition of the flower indirectly reveals the condition of Wanja, who in her life of wasted talent is like a flower kept from the light, and has come to Ilmorog to try and regain her procreative powers. At another level both Wanja and the flower reveal the condition of a corrupt, unhealthy society. Only later in the novel is the "flower with petals of blood" shown to by Theng'eta, which again is strongly associated with Wanja. Significantly it is her idea that Theng'eta is brewed for circumcision day, a ritual time for shedding blood and fertility rites. This first brewing, made possible by Wanja's energy and Nyakinyua's skill and knowledge, produces the visionary "holy water" of legend. The degeneration of Theng'eta into a cheap, commercial, Kill-me-Quick liquor that numbs the senses, parallels Wanja's own decline into whoredom.

Munira's attraction to Wanja is complex and contradictory, but from the beginning it is colored by a sense of sin. He sees his relationship with Wanja taking him on a journey to "the sindom of pleasure." The ambiguity and curious wickedness of her charm, as she appears to Munira, is expressed in terms of a perverse virginity and allusions to "petals of blood":

Munira felt her even more remote: as if he had never
touched her: her taunt had the same alluring power as
the beckoning coquetry of a virgin: he could touch her
only by deflowering her by force and so himself
flowering in blood. A virgin and a prostitute. Why
couldn't she carry an advertising label on her back:
Drive a VW: Ride a Virgin Whore. Or VIP: Very
Interesting Prostitute.

Munira's thwarted sexual desire for Wanja later seems to be converted into a religious zeal, in which she remains a dominant image. This fusion of spiritual and sexual passion is seen in the nature of Munira's "conversion," for his new spirituality is aroused

by the preaching of Lillian, a woman he had formerly used as a sexual substitute for Wanja. It is also seen in the strange mixture of religious and sexual motives that lead him to set fire to Wanja's house. The fire itself is a re-enactment of Munira's earlier ritual burning of the model of the house of Amina, the prostitute with whom he lost his virginity. Apart from being attempts to purge evil from the world, both fires are attempts to exorcise his sexual guilt, and overcome his feelings of failure and inadequacy. Munira's vengeance incidentally brings a grim kind of poetic justice to Wanja, for Kimeria, the man who had flowered in her virgin blood, meets a bloody death at her hands shortly before the fire destroys all evidence of this murder. On the same evening Abdulla had been possessed with the idea that he must kill Kimeria in order to regain his manhood, but it is Wanja who kills him, and regains her womanhood.

Although Karega protests that individual assassinations are pointless and will not change the system, the way in which the death of Kimeria is presented suggests that justice has been done. Wanja's act of violence in this instance is an act of personal liberation, a kind of cleansing and revitalizing Fanonist violence. Wanja's earlier murder of her new-born child is, by contrast, an abuse of both her power to destroy, and to create. This action goes against a basic tenet of Gikuyu womanhood stated in *A Grain of Wheat* □"a child from your own womb is never thrown away." Wanja comes to feel that in choosing to murder her own child that she "had murdered her own life." Her barrenness is not simply physical, but expressive of a far deeper spiritual and emotional lack of fulfillment. At the height of her affair with Karega, Wanja feels she is "about to flower," but is deprived of her opportunity. It is only after the fire that this finally comes about. Having positively renounced her exploitative role, Wanja approaches the world with a new consciousness. Her pregnancy and her reunion with her mother, while a little contrived and melodramatic, are meaningful expressions of her new flowering. Wanja is no longer the "outsider" the meaning of her name implies. She experiences a homecoming and reaffirms her identity with her Ilmorog origins. Now heeding the voice of Nyakinyua, Wanja is restored as her mother's daughter and daughter of the soil, and regains her life-giving potential. Like the image of the pregnant woman Gikonyo plans to carve in *A Grain of Wheat,* Wanja's pregnancy is a symbol of hope and regeneration, a promise for the future. Mumbi and Wanja, as fertile female images, represent Mother Earth, Mother Africa, and the survival of the people, both in body and soul. As the exemplary female fighter and mother, the Woman, in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi,* says of Kimathi's spirit:

> Kimathi was never alone . . . will never be alone. No bullet can kill him for as long as women continue to bear children.

It is fitting that the father of Wanja's child should be Abdulla, the unsung Mau Mau hero who fought with Kimathi, a man whom Karega comes to regard as "the best self of the community, symbol of Kenya's truest courage." In terms of the changes in Wanja, it is significant that Abdulla sees his relationship with her in images of an elemental union with the earth:

> Only that for him now, a woman was truly the other world: with its own contours, valleys, rivers, streams, ridges, sharp turns, steep and slow climbs and descents, and above all, movement of secret springs of life . . . A woman was a world, the world.

The exact nature of the future relationship between Abdulla and Wanja is left undefined. Conventional marriage is not offered as a facile solution to Wanja's predicament as a whore. Her liberation is not to be achieved through her union with a man, but through her fulfillment as an independent woman. In reply to her mother asking whose child she is bearing, Wanja does not give a straightforward answer, but draws a picture in which the image of Abdulla is merged with other images of the people's struggle:

> For one hour or so she remained completely absorbed in her sketching. And suddenly she felt lifted out of her own self, she felt waves of emotion she had never before experienced. The figure began to take shape on the board. It was a combination of the sculpture she once saw at the lawyer's place in Nairobi and images of Kimathi in his moments of triumph and laughter and sorrow and terror□but without one limb. When it was over, she felt a tremendous calm, a kind of inner assurance of the possibilities of a new kind of power.

Through her drawing Wanja feels for the first time the exhilaration of her creative power, expressed both in her artistry and her pregnancy. Her confidence no longer comes from the cynical manipulation of the power of her body over men, but from a new sense of worth and self-respect. The sculpture Wanja mentions had puzzled the marchers from Ilmorog because it was a figure that possessed both male and female features, "as if it was a man and a woman in one." Nyakinyua eventually settles the argument about it:

> "A man cannot have a child without a woman. A woman cannot bear a child without a man. And was it not a man and a woman who fought to redeem this country?"

The allusions inherent in Wanja's reference to the sculpture suggest that she has come to understand that men and women must stop exploiting each other, and instead work together to destroy capitalism's "Darwinian jungle" and realize Karega's socialist "human kingdom": "The kingdom of man and woman, joying and loving in creative labor."

The hopeful image of a new life resulting from the union of Abdulla and Wanja is complemented by the beginnings of a new united workers' movement in Ilmorog. Karega learns of this development from Akinyi, a factory girl who has been sent by the workers to visit him in jail. The girl's optimism rescues Karega from the depression and

despair caused by the news of his mother's death, and revives his hopes for the future. His vision is restored in a series of female images in the closing words of the book:

"You'll come back," she said again in a quiet
affirmation of faith in eventual triumph.

He looked hard at her, then past her to Mukami of
Manguo Marshes and again back to Nyakinyua, his
mother, and even beyond to Akinyi to the future! And
he smiled through his sorrow.

"Tomorrow . . . tomorrow . . ." he murmured
to himself.

"Tomorrow . . ." and he knew he was no longer
alone.

This "affirmation of faith" echoes the tone of tempered optimism found in the "Acknowledgments" at the very beginning of the novel, where Ngugi gives thanks to:

Many others
One in the struggle
With our people
For total liberation
Knowing that
However long and arduous the struggle
Victory is certain.

The female images employed in *Petals of Blood* suggest that in this struggle for total liberation women have a vital role to play.

Source: Jennifer Evans, "Mother Africa and the Heroic Whole: Female Images in Petals of Blood," in *Annual Selected Papers of the ALA,* Series Ed. Stephen H. Arnold, Three Continents Press, 1983, pp. 57-66.

Topics for Further Study

Research the history of Kenya from the first European settlements in the 1800s to the present day. Compare the political situation in Kenya today with that depicted in *Petals of Blood*.

Examine the economic theories of capitalism and socialism. Explain why some people, like Karega in the novel, think that a socialist system would eradicate the economic inequalities that exist in a capitalist society.

Investigate the role of women in traditional and modern Kenyan society, and compare it to that of women in the United States today.

Research the independence movement in Kenya and the overthrow of the British rule. Compare the Kenyans' struggle for political freedom with that of other colonized peoples, including those in the Americas.

Compare and Contrast

1930: Few Kenyans are given opportunities to study in the English colonial schools. Those who do are forced to accept a curriculum heavy on European classics and short on African traditions or texts.

1963: The newly independent Kenyan government responds to popular demand by building many new schools, including some in remote areas. Private citizens also found schools to meet the demand.

1969: Students at Nairobi University protest in opposition to the western bias in the educational curriculum.

Today: There are three national universities in Kenya. While schooling is not compulsory, eighty percent of children receive at least an elementary- level education. Works by African authors and scholars are featured in the curriculum.

Today: Education is compulsory up to age sixteen for children in the United States. Schools respond to a growing demand for a multicultural curriculum to reflect the diversity of the population.

1900: European settlers control twenty percent of all Kenyan land, which is most of the rich agricultural land suitable for farming. Native Kenyans are forced to work as laborers on European farms. They do not enjoy rights as full citizens under the law.

1965: The newly independent Kenyan government takes over many farms and businesses owned by non-Africans, and sells or rents them to non-Africans. Non-Africans who become Kenyan citizens are allowed to keep their property. Many Kenyan peasants continue to work on land owned by Europeans or wealthy Africans to eke out a living.

Today: About forty-five percent of the total area under cultivation in Kenya is occupied by large farms that employ laborers who earn low wages. Most of the rest of the land is held by cooperatives or subsistence farmers. Three-quarters of Kenya's population lives in rural areas and most people are employed in agriculture. Meanwhile, the United States Constitution guarantees the rights to private property. However, almost half of all Native Americans, the original inhabitants of the country, still live on reservation land, where unemployment, birth, and death rates are high, and suicides occur at twice the national rate.

1776: The United States gains independence from Britain.

1895: Kenya becomes a colony of Britain.

1965: Kenya achieves independence from Britain.

Today: There are still countries under direct or indirect control of foreign powers and whose people (although not always unanimously) call for self-rule. For example, Tibet calls for independence from China, Ireland from Britain, Puerto Rico from the United States, and East Timor from Indonesia.

What Do I Read Next?

The novels *Things Fall Apart* (1958) and *No Longer at Ease* (1960) by the Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe depict Nigeria's experience with colonialism, from first contact with the British to the 1950s.

The West Indian poet Derek Walcott, from whose poem "Swamp" Ngugi takes the title of his novel, discusses the conflict between his loyalties to Africa and to Britain in his poem "A Far Cry from Africa" (1990).

In Ngugi's novel *The River Between* (1965), Christian missionaries attempt to outlaw the female circumcision ritual and create a rift between two Gikuyu communities, and people are torn between accepting Western and Christian ideas and holding on unquestioningly to their traditional ways. The growing conflict brings tragedy to a pair of young lovers who attempt to bridge the chasm between the people.

A Grain of Wheat (1967) is Ngugi's compelling account of five friends who make different choices when the Mau Mau Rebellion erupts in colonial Kenya.

Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary (1981) records Ngugi's thoughts and experiences while in prison, where he was held by the Kenyan government for a year without being charged for a crime.

Ngugi describes *Decolonising the Mind* (1986) as "a summary of some of the issues in which I have been passionately involved for the last twenty years of my practice in fiction, theatre, criticism and in the teaching of literature." In the book Ngugi explains why he stopped writing in English in favor of his native Gikuyu.

I Will Marry When I Want (1982) is Ngugi's translation of his 1977 Gikuyu-language play that he staged at his hometown of Limuru. The play, about the appropriation of land from peasants by wealthy landowners and the struggle of workers at a factory, was hugely popular with the people and led to Ngugi's detention without trial at the end of 1977.

In stark contrast to the protest literature of African and Asian authors, the poem "White Man's Burden" (1899) by Rudyard Kipling expresses the common nineteenth-century view that white Europeans had a duty to "civilize" the "less enlightened" inhabitants of the non-Western world.

The novel *Out of Africa* (1937) by Isak Dinesen, a Danish aristocrat who lived on a coffee plantation in Kenya, presents a portrait of the land and people in British East Africa before World War II from the point of view of a wealthy European woman.

Further Study

Chileshe, John, "*Petals of Blood*: Ideology and Imaginative Expression," in *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, Vol. 15, No. 1, 1980, pp. 133-37.

Explores the conflict of authorial ideology and literary mode of expression in *Petals of Blood* and says that it is in part due to historical factors.

Killam, G. D., "A Note on the Title of *Petals of Blood*," in *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, Vol. 15, No. 1, 1980, pp. 125-32.

Discusses how Ngugi uses the resources of Walcott's poem "Swamp" in *Petals of Blood*.

Kozain, Rustum, "Form as Politics, or the Tyranny of Narrativity: Re-Reading Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Petals of Blood*," in *Ufahamu*, Vol. 18, No. 3, 1990, pp. 77-90.

Offers a reading of *Petals of Blood* analyzing its form in relation to its political content.

Ogude, James, *Ngugi's Novels and African History: Narrating the Nation*, Pluto Press, 1999, 183 p.

Discussion of Ngugi's novels placing them in their contemporary historical and social contexts; includes a detailed discussion of women as victims in *Petals of Blood*.

Palmer, Eustace, "Ngugi's *Petals of Blood*," in *African Literature Today*, Vol. 10, 1979, pp. 152-66.

Critical overview of the novel that sees it as Ngugi's most ambitious work, noting the novel's strengths and weaknesses.

Sicherman, Carol, *Ngugi wa Thiong'o: The Making of Rebel: A Source Book in Kenyan Literature and Resistance*, Hans Zell Publishers, 1990, 486 p.

A source book that traces the historical, political, and cultural background of Ngugi's work, with a chronology of his career as well as documents that provide insight into Kenya's history.

Smith, Craig V., "'Rainbow Memories of Gain and Loss': *Petals of Blood* and the New Resistance," in *Paintbrush: A Journal of Poetry, Translations, and Letters*, Vol. 20, Nos. 29-30, Spring/Autumn, 1993, pp. 92-108.

Says that the revolutionary desire in *Petals of Blood* revises the past.

Stratton, Florence, "Cyclical Patterns in *Petals of Blood*," in *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, Vol. 15, No. 1, 1980, pp. 116-24.

Sees the novel as an interpretation of history that is applicable in all times and places.

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Cook, David, and Michale Okenimpkpe, "Petals of Blood," in their *Ngugi wa Thiong'o: An Exploration of His Writings*, Heinemann Educational Books, 1983, pp. 87-112.

Crehan, Stewart, "The Politics of the Signifier: Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Petals of Blood*," in *Postcolonial Literatures*, edited by Michael Parker and Roger Starkey, Macmillan Press, 1995, pp. 101-26.

Gikandi, Simon, "The Political Novel," in his *Reading the African Novel*, Heinemann Kenya, 1987, pp. 111-48.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Literature of Developing Nations for Students (LDNfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, LDNfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and

undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of LDNfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of LDNfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in LDNfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by LDNfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

LDNfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Literature of Developing Nations for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the LDNfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the LDNfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Literature of Developing Nations for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Literature of Developing Nations for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from LDNfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Literature of Developing Nations for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from LDNfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Literature of Developing Nations for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of LDNfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Literature of Developing Nations for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

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