

**BOOK REVIEW: THE WIZARD OF THE CROW. BY NGUGI WA THIONG'O**

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The Lord works in mysterious ways, His wonders to perform. True! *Haki ya Mungu*

These are often repeated phrases among those that frame Ngugi wa Thiong'o's complex, multi-layered novel which follows a sequence of events surrounding the power structure and struggle in the Republic of Arbruria, a fictional African country in which the greed induced schemes of an all-powerful Ruler and his Ministers threaten the existence of the country and of all who do not follow his desired ends. As you read, the many fabled elements of the story become indistinguishable from and serve to underline the reality: a state of being, that, without change, has no past, no future, and no end. The clashes of formal versus informal power express the current struggle of many African nations in self-realization amidst changing culture and a changing world.

Power is a key theme in the novel and is given two conflicting and very different representations. One is the explicit, overt, and often abused power of the state. This is personified in the Ruler, self-styled Lord of the land and of all things, and in those of his officials who manage to attract his notice and favor. He reinvents history to define himself as the Country, as its beginning and end. He sets himself up as God, and believes that he is the beginning and the end of Arbruria: time did not exist before him and will not continue if he is gone. The Ruler's strange illness begins the novel and even in the end the mystery is not completely resolved. True to his word, though, his power and the reality of his reign does not end: the structure of fear, greed, and corruption continues unabated, with hardly an

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acknowledgement of change. His power is complete, but although it does not change you understand that it is undermined and is not in itself a force.

The opposition to this institution is manifested in The Movement For the Voice of the People – seen through Nyarwira, her group of activist women, and through the accidental influence of the Wizard of the Crow. Nyarwira, with her university training, Marxist leanings and political activism, represents an educated Africa that, realizing the impossibility of finding a job and the meaninglessness of the Ruler's statements, work to improve themselves and others, in a mixture of class struggle and anti-Western thought. Kimiti, though he is trained abroad and well educated, represents a different power, and one that does not come from his university education. His power comes from the allegiance of the people, even of the modern, post-modern, *post-colonial* to African thought and knowledge. Though he holds no actual power and does not even ask for money, he influences events more so than does the Ruler, holding all power and all force. His influence slowly gains over that of the Ruler, and is in a way complete when the Ruler is forced to call for his assistance in healing his illness. Kimiti's power undermines that of the Ruler and is able to undo the influence, illness of power in that it seeks to remove greed and the pursuit of power.

The evolution of power in the eyes of the reader mirrors that which Wa 'Thiong'o seeks to show. The story begins in a tone of so much desolation and hopelessness that you wonder as a reader if you will survive the next 700 pages, despite the beautifully crafted language. As you read, and though the essential facts of the country are unaltered, nonetheless you gain hope through the realization of what underlies each force. The magic of the Wizard of the Crow that undermines the Ruler and takes over his importance in the novel, involves healing of the desire for power which traps individuals in their own minds and in unhappiness. The power of the Ruler is based on fear and greed, and is made to feel more unstable than that of the jobless and insignificant Wizard. The illness, which inflicts Africa, then, can be said to come from the formal power structure that is the residue of colonial rule, fear, and greed. The cure, it seems to say, lies within Africa itself; it may not be readily visible or understandable, but its effects are those that last and those with an impact.