

Devil On The Cross Summary By Chapter

DEVIL ON THE CROSS

INTRODUCTION

First published in Gikuyu in 1980, *Devil on the Cross* is a powerful fictional critique of **capitalism**. It tells the tragic story of **Wariinga**, a young woman who moves from a rural Kenyan town to the capital, Nairobi, only to be exploited by her boss and later by a corrupt businessman. As she struggles to survive, Wariinga begins to realize that her problems are only symptoms of a larger societal malaise and that much of the misfortune stems from the Western, capitalist influences on her country. An impassioned cry for a Kenya free of dictatorship and for African writers to work in their own local dialects, *Devil on the Cross* has had a profound influence on Africa and on post-colonial African literature. The novel was written secretly in prison on the only available material — lavatory paper. It was discovered when almost complete but unexpectedly returned to him on his release. Such was the demand for the original Gikuyu edition that it reprinted on publication.

SETTING

The Cave

The Cave in Ilmorog is where the Devil's Feast takes place. Despite its name, the cave is a very nice and luxurious space. As the narrator reflects: "But was it really a cave—or the finest of houses?" (92). The floor is polished and clean, and the barmaids are dressed like Playboy Bunnies. However, the fact that it is called a cave emphasizes the seedy underside of the Thieves and Robbers' activities. The cave emphasizes the way in which it acts as a kind of lair, from which the greedy capitalists of the novel are able to plot and boast about their schemes.

Nairobi

The young man who prevents Wariinga from committing suicide at the beginning of the novel describes Nairobi as "large, soulless and corrupt" (15). Thus it is experienced, especially for the novel's female characters. For example, Wariinga experiences Nairobi as a place of abuse and corruption.

PLOT SUMMARY

Originally published in the author's native language of Gikuyu as *Caitani mũtharaba-Inĩ*, the author focuses on the corrupting influences of international money and culture on Kenya following its independence. The novel opens with the narrator accepting his duty to tell a sad, perhaps shameful, story of an incident in Ilmorog.

In **Chapter Two**, the novel introduces the reader to its protagonist: **Jacinta Wariinga**, a woman who has recently lost her secretarial job and boyfriend. When she attempts to kill herself, the man who rescues her hands her an invitation to the "Devil's Feast" in her parents' hometown.

Devil on the Cross is a profound novel by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o that explores the themes of colonialism, capitalism, and the struggle for identity in post-colonial Kenya. The narrative unfolds through the eyes of the protagonist, Wariinga, who finds herself in a world rife with moral dilemmas, societal injustices, and the quest for personal freedom. Below is a detailed summary of *Devil on the Cross* chapter by chapter, providing insights into the characters, themes, and significant events.

Chapter 1: The Arrival of the Devil

In the opening chapter, Wariinga is introduced as a strong yet conflicted woman. The narrative begins with her reflections on her life, particularly how she has been shaped by

the socio-political landscape of Kenya.

- Setting the Scene: The story starts in a small village, where the impact of colonialism is evident.
- Wariinga's Background: We learn about her education, her job, and her relationships, particularly her tumultuous affair with a wealthy man named Gikonyo.
- Foreshadowing: The chapter hints at the theme of sacrifice, as Wariinga grapples with her identity and the expectations placed upon her.

Chapter 2: The Crossroads of Life

As the narrative progresses, Wariinga faces a critical decision that will alter the course of her life.

- Conflict with Gikonyo: The chapter delves into Wariinga's struggles in her relationship with Gikonyo, showcasing the male-dominated society that often undermines women's autonomy.
- Encountering the Devil: Symbolically, the 'devil' represents the corrupt forces of society, including greed and exploitation. Wariinga's internal conflict intensifies as she contemplates her future.
- Themes of Betrayal and Sacrifice: Wariinga's reflections reveal her deep sense of betrayal, not only by Gikonyo but also by societal expectations.

Chapter 3: The Gathering of the Elites

In this chapter, Wariinga attends a gathering of affluent individuals, where the themes of capitalism and moral decay are explored.

- Character Introductions: Key characters, including Mzee Ngoya and the corrupt businessman, are introduced, highlighting the disparity between wealth and morality.
- Critique of Capitalism: Ngũgĩ uses this gathering to critique the capitalist motives of the elite, who exploit the working class.
- Symbolism of the Cross: The gathering serves as a metaphorical 'cross' where individuals must confront their moral choices.

Chapter 4: The Devil's Bargain

The narrative takes a darker turn as Wariinga witnesses the consequences of the elite's greed.

- Corruption and Violence: The chapter illustrates how the pursuit of wealth leads to violence and corruption, affecting the lives of ordinary people.
- Wariinga's Dilemma: She is faced with moral dilemmas that challenge her beliefs and values.

- Imagery of the Devil: The devil in this context represents the materialistic values that dominate society, forcing Wariinga to confront her own complicity in these systems.

Chapter 5: The Return to Tradition

Struggling with her identity, Wariinga reflects on her cultural roots and the importance of tradition.

- Cultural Identity: The chapter emphasizes the significance of African traditions and the need to reconnect with one's roots.
- Contrast with Modernity: Wariinga's internal battle between embracing modernity and honoring her heritage is central to this chapter.
- Dream Sequences: Ngũgĩ employs dream sequences that reveal Wariinga's subconscious fears and desires, further illustrating her identity crisis.

Chapter 6: The Rebellion of the Oppressed

As Wariinga continues her journey, the narrative shifts towards collective resistance against the oppressive systems.

- Emerging Unity: The chapter portrays the awakening of the oppressed, who begin to recognize their shared struggles.
- Role of Women: Wariinga becomes a symbol of resistance, and her journey parallels the awakening of women in society.
- Mobilization: The oppressed begin to mobilize, setting the stage for a broader rebellion against corrupt forces.

Chapter 7: The Cross of Sacrifice

The culminating chapter revolves around the theme of sacrifice, both personal and collective.

- Wariinga's Transformation: Wariinga undergoes a significant transformation, emerging as a leader of the oppressed.
- Collective Sacrifice: The chapter emphasizes the importance of sacrifice in the fight for justice and equality.
- Final Confrontation: A climactic confrontation occurs between the elites and the oppressed, symbolizing the struggle for liberation.

Chapter 8: The Aftermath and Reflection

In the final chapter, the aftermath of the rebellion is explored.

- Consequences of the Rebellion: The chapter reflects on the consequences of the uprising, both positive and negative.
- Wariinga's New Identity: Wariinga emerges with a newfound sense of purpose and identity, having grappled with her past and embraced her role in the community.
- Hope for the Future: Despite the challenges, there is a sense of hope as the oppressed begin to envision a future free from corruption and exploitation.

Thematic Analysis

The themes woven throughout *Devil on the Cross* highlight the complexities of post-colonial identity and the moral dilemmas faced by individuals in a rapidly changing society.

- Colonial Legacy: The novel critiques the lingering effects of colonialism and how they manifest in contemporary Kenyan society.
- Gender and Power: Gender dynamics are central to the narrative, with Wariinga representing the struggles of women in a patriarchal society.
- Capitalism vs. Tradition: The tension between modernity and tradition is a recurring theme, illustrating the characters' internal and external conflicts.

Character Development

The character arcs in *Devil on the Cross* are crucial to understanding the overarching narrative.

- Wariinga: She evolves from a conflicted individual to a symbol of resistance, embodying the struggles and hopes of her community.
- Gikonyo: His character represents the complexities of love and betrayal, serving as a foil to Wariinga's journey.
- The Elites: Characters like Mzee Ngoya illustrate the moral decay of the upper class, contrasting sharply with Wariinga's growth.

Conclusion

Devil on the Cross is a powerful exploration of the human condition in the face of systemic oppression. Through Wariinga's journey, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o provides a poignant critique of the forces that shape identity and morality in a post-colonial context. The novel serves as a reminder of the importance of collective resistance and the enduring spirit of hope in the struggle for justice and equality. As readers delve into each chapter, they are invited to reflect on the complexities of their own identities and the societal structures that influence their lives.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the main theme of 'Devil on the Cross'?

The main theme of 'Devil on the Cross' is the critique of corruption and the exploration of moral and ethical dilemmas in post-colonial Kenya.

How does Ngugi wa Thiong'o use symbolism in the first chapter?

In the first chapter, Ngugi uses the symbol of the cross to represent oppression and suffering, setting the stage for the struggles faced by the protagonist, Wariinga.

What significant event occurs in Chapter 2 of 'Devil on the Cross'?

In Chapter 2, Wariinga recalls her past, including her experiences with love and betrayal, which highlight the societal issues that she faces as a woman in a patriarchal society.

How does the character of Wariinga evolve throughout the novel?

Wariinga evolves from a victim of societal oppression to a strong, independent woman who seeks justice and empowerment, reflecting the broader struggles of her community.

What role do the political elites play in 'Devil on the Cross'?

The political elites in 'Devil on the Cross' symbolize greed and corruption, as they exploit the masses for their own gain, illustrating the broader themes of betrayal and social injustice.

What is the significance of the title 'Devil on the Cross'?

The title 'Devil on the Cross' signifies the juxtaposition of good and evil, as well as the idea of suffering and sacrifice in the fight against oppressive forces.

How does Ngugi wa Thiong'o address feminism in the novel?

Ngugi addresses feminism through Wariinga's struggles for autonomy and respect, highlighting the intersection of gender and class issues in Kenyan society.

What are the consequences of Wariinga's decisions in the latter chapters?

Wariinga's decisions lead to a deeper understanding of her own identity and purpose, ultimately driving her to confront the oppressive systems that have harmed her and her

community.

How does the narrative structure of 'Devil on the Cross' affect the story?

The nonlinear narrative structure allows readers to see the interconnectedness of personal and political struggles, enhancing the emotional impact and thematic depth of the novel.

What is the role of storytelling in 'Devil on the Cross'?

Storytelling serves as a means of resistance and empowerment in 'Devil on the Cross', allowing characters to reclaim their narratives and challenge the status quo.

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Devil On The Cross Summary By Chapter

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