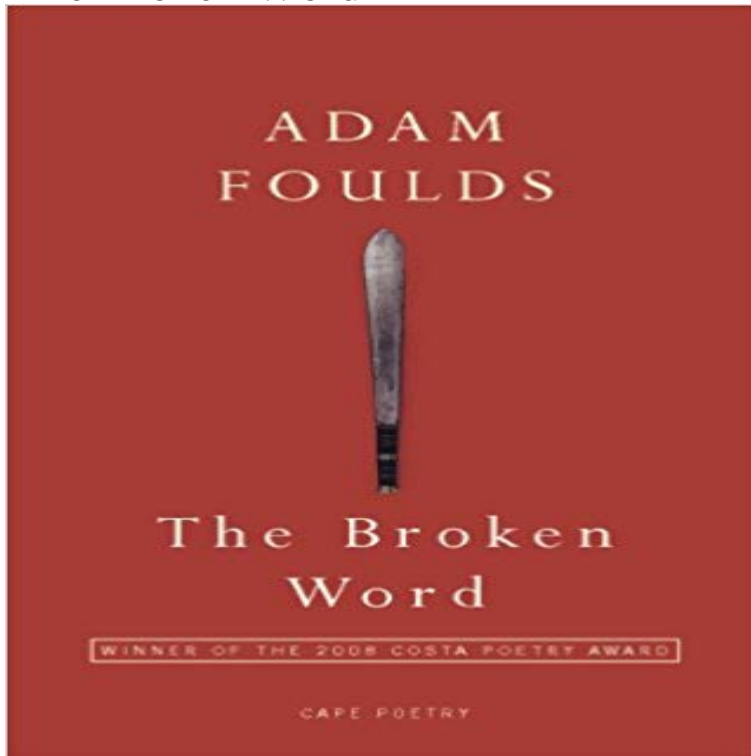


The Broken Word



Set in the 1950s, *The Broken Word* is an extraordinary poetic sequence that animates and illuminates a dark, terrifying period in British colonial history. The combination here of language and imagery that feel utterly contemporary, and subject matter - tribal violence and subsequent retribution - that seems almost Homeric, gives the narrative all the febrile energy of classical drama, re-charged and re-imagined. Tom has returned to his family's farm in Kenya for the summer vacation between school and university when he is swept up by the events of the Mau Mau uprising. Beginning with sporadic, brutal attacks by dispossessed Kikuyu on the British now occupying their land - attacks often executed with nothing more than traditional panga knives - the conflict escalates as the terrified British stop at nothing to re-impose order, eventually driving most of the Kikuyu population into the prison camps of what has become known as Britain's Gulag. As Tom is propelled into violence and horror the poem mutates into a meditation on the inheritance of conflict, the destruction of innocence and the impossibility of afterwards saying what one has seen. Written with rigour, intelligence, and a fierce, unsparing clarity, this is profound, lyrical work with that rare confidence and thrilling originality that announce the arrival of a significant new voice.

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