

Ngugi wa Thiong'o. *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*. (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1986) xiv, 114 pp., \$10.00 paper.

"This book, *Decolonising the Mind*, is my farewell to English as a vehicle for any of my writings. From now on it is Gikuyu and Kiswahili all the way." This declaration by Ngugi wa Thiong'o is one he has every right to make. Many of us, however, will hear it as a casting-off of the large and appreciative readership he enjoyed from the days when, as James Gugi, he instructed and enriched us with *The River Between* and other fine works of art. To be sure, one can sympathize with any African's hatred of colonization, can feel with him a rage against the West, the whites—Europeans and Americans—even when he over-generalizes and reifies his feelings. One may not agree with him, but one can understand his wish to "hit back." One can also understand his desire to devote himself wholly to writing to and for his own people, to entertain and instruct them in their own language. One can understand these feelings even though one may not share them.

But when Ngugi wa Thiong'o tries to persuade one that the noblest and most effective way to combat "imperialism, led by the U.S. [which] presents struggling peoples of the earth and those calling for peace, democracy and socialism with the ultimatum: accept theft or death" is to cease writing in English to that language's many potential reformers and reformees and instead to write to a much smaller number who may read Gikuyu and Kiswahili, one must disagree. And when he further asserts that the African peoples "have to speak the united language of struggle contained in each of their languages" because "a united people can never be defeated," one must question just *how united* are the various peoples speaking 600 to 800 different and alien languages (most of which lack devices for written expression). If each group maintains devoutly its own language and refuses a continued use of a major European written language for at least some of its educational and societal needs, how will any group even discover any other group's structure and culture? How would it learn whether there are similarities or diversities, whether they are compatible or incompatible? After all, Hausas, Ibos, and Yorubas recently fought a savagely bloody war.

Somewhat paradoxically the substance and structure of Ngugi's book are both a virtue and a defect. "The lectures on which this book is based have given me a chance to pull together in a connected and coherent form the main issues on the language question in literature," writes Ngugi. These lectures, as a matter of fact, were occasioned by historical events and are worth remembering. They evoked a lot of impassioned oratory—at times unclear and abstruse—concerning "rights" and "values" of "native" languages. What Ngugi's part was in these various colloquia should be remembered. At the same time, lectures are less well documented, less analytical than critical essays not directed to an assembled

group of persons who may be expected to listen less attentively to another person's paper than to concentrate upon the opinions which *they* wish to assert. The colloquium provides, therefore, a temptation to overassert and falsely to generalize which is difficult for most people to resist.

Hence, the present book reiterates—as the lectures did—and is less a “pulling together in a connected form” than one might wish. In closing, Ngugi quotes a poem of Bertholt Brecht which urges man to overthrow all masteries over man. Ngugi adds, “That is what this book on the politics of language in African literature has really been about: national, democratic, and human liberation.” To Brecht's and Ngugi's desire for such a truly brave new world of men and women, one easily adds one's own—even though one is not persuaded that Ngugi's “native languages” provide a way towards it.

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**Lydio F. Tomasi, ed. *Italian Americans: New Perspectives in Italian Immigration and Ethnicity*. (New York: Center for Migration Studies, 1985) x, 486 pp., \$17.50.**

There are those who have heralded the 1980s as “The Decade of the Italian American” as many of the 20 million Americans of Italian descent achieve increasing prominence in politics, business, education and the arts. This new role assumed by Americans of immigrant stock has necessitated revised patterns of investigation addressing the impact of socio-economic mobility, the effects of transmigration and the growing phenomenon of exogenous marriage. For example, of the Italian American women born since 1950, between two-thirds and three-quarters have married outside the ethnic group. Finally, the size and multi-generational sampling provided by the Italian American population invites careful study of rural versus urban assimilation patterns, analysis of the relationship of sojourner settlement patterns to politico-economic conditions in the homeland, and an investigation of the myriad variations of acculturation affected by class, age and extent of social support network.

All of these subjects are addressed in an extraordinary volume of proceedings of the Conference of the Italian Experience in the United States held at Columbia University in 1983, sponsored by the Italian Government and organized by the University's Center for Migration Studies. Thirty of the papers presented are compiled in this handsome, well-indexed and well-annotated volume accented by an artistic rendering by Frank Stella.