

*Shores of the Polar Sea in the Years 1819, 20, 21 and 22* is inaccurate on a number of counts — both bibliographic and historical — and it is ambiguous on others. Similarly, while the annotation to Franklin's 1828 *Narrative of a Second Expedition* praises the author's "respect for the native people" (46), the public narrative is decidedly more condemning and disrespectful of indigenous peoples than what Franklin records in his private journals. The annotation's distortion arises, perhaps, from the insistence upon putting travel writing in a positive light. Another such instance of troublesome detail appears in the entry for A. G. Doughty and C. Martin's edition of *The Kelsey Papers*. The annotation reports that Kelsey kept "a diary in doggerel" (204). The reader should be aware that only the preface — not the diary — aspires to the poetic form. At least two important nineteenth-century books about Frederick Schwatka's arctic travels are missing from the bibliography, although a recent translation of Heinrich Klutschak's *Als Eskimo unter den Eskimos* is included, making clear that the accounts of Schwatka's search belong in this volume. Significantly, one of the missing books is by the leader of the expedition, the other by the *New York Herald's* official correspondent, surely a corporate connection not to be overlooked in a bibliography of popular travel writing.

In spite of these shortcomings, *The Travellers* is a welcome addition to my own library. And I am certain it will prove extremely useful to the growing number of scholars and students who are giving travel and exploration literature the critical scrutiny it deserves. The virtue of this book is that it makes accessible many titles that would otherwise remain hidden. Once a specific title is located, scholars need to rely for detail on the primary text itself, not on the bibliographic guide that led them to the text. So long as this caution is borne in mind, *The Travellers* will prove a most welcome reference tool for Canadianists of many colours and for students of travel writing.

RICHARD C. DAVIS

Ngugi wa Thiong'o. *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*. London: Heinemann, 1986. pp. xiv, 114. \$18.50 pb.

Ngugi wa Thiong'o is one of the foremost participants in the debate on language in African literature. In *Decolonising the Mind*, he eloquently argues for the use of indigenous rather than colonial European languages. His most eloquent argument is his own rejection of English. In an opening statement, he promises to write all future works, both polemic and creative, in Gukuyu and Kiswahili. *Decolonising the Mind* collects three essays written from 1981 to 1985 —

which were first heard as the 1984 Robb lectures at Auckland University — and adds a new essay as the final chapter.

“The Language of African Literature,” the first and unquestionably the best essay, is a tightly woven expression of the dilemmas swirling around the choice of language, audience, publication, and politics on the African continent. Ngugi unashamedly uses his own volatile life as a metaphor for the development of African literature. Often, it is an appropriate one: while his life narrows the perspective, it also focuses the argument.

The former James Ngugi started as a pastoral writer. As expected, he wrote in English and about rural life. And, as expected, he went to England for university. Not expected was his immersion there in working-class European Marxism and his abandoning his English name. His Marxism has irritated, even offended, several critics. In some of his fiction, it is intrusive. In this book of essays, it plays an important role in analyzing postcolonial African society. Even if the reader cannot accept his Marxist framework, disagreeing with his pointed observations is difficult. Postcolonial Africa is undoubtedly searching for an identity. Ngugi successfully advocates using literature, in the languages of the people, as one key to that identity:

We African writers are bound by our calling to do for our languages . . . what all writers in world history have done for their languages by meeting the challenge of creating a literature in them, which process later opens the languages for philosophy, science, technology and all the other areas of human creative endeavours. (29)

In “The Language of African Theatre,” Ngugi extends his discussion on the need for literature in the vernacular to one on the need for theatre accessible to peasants and workers. His vow to write in his own language is particularly admirable since this otherwise natural act has earned him only jail, exile, and a peculiar respect. His advocacy of theatre from and of the people rings true; literature is more subversive if the intended audience can read it. Unfortunately, Ngugi’s almost exclusive use of his experience in creating *Ngaahika Ndeenda* (*I Will Marry When I Want*) to illustrate his points prevents this essay from being about “African Theatre.” It is only about a particular watershed in African theatre.

*Ngaahika Ndeenda* was an important collaboration between two famous Kenyan authors and the villagers who wondered what relevance literature had to their lives. Ngugi and his colleague, Ngugi wa Mirii, learned to talk to the same sort of villagers who populated their previous works. The villagers themselves developed a new sense of identity, but kept the writers honest, both historically and emotionally. The popularity of the play was unquestioned. The Kenyan government recognized that by shutting the open-air theatre after six weeks and six weeks later arresting Ngugi wa Thiong’o.

"The Language of African Fiction" suffers from the brilliance of the first essay, "The Language of African Literature." Ngugi's discussion on the unity of African fiction is overshadowed by his previous arguments. Fiction is a relatively new genre. Much of Africa's literature before colonialism was oral, full of memorized richness. Oral literature's love of myth and metaphor found a harmony with biblical stories and religious works, such as *Pilgrim's Progress*. Early African works, written in African languages, were recreations of African morality stories or biblical lessons. They were curiously accepted by European missionaries who saw the importance of speaking to people in their own languages. Only when civil servants joined the colonial mix did the language, and the forms, of creative writing change. Colonialists needed English speakers. Now African authors are trapped into persuading their compatriots to read their own literature, but in a foreign language.

The concluding essay, "The Quest for Relevance," usefully ties the book together. Once again, Ngugi focuses on personal experience. East African Universities have tried to make African literature the foundation study in their curricula — not just literature by Africans, but literature in African languages. "A sound educational policy is one which enables students to *study the culture and environment of their own society first*, then in relation to the culture and environment of other societies" (100). Literature is important when it is relevant to the readers. Being introduced first to the literature of foreigners and only possibly to the literature of one's own society is alienating. Many African writers have alienated themselves from their natural audiences through their choice of the languages of their colonisers.

The issue of language has become a contentious one for African writers. Ngugi wa Thiong'o is among the strongest advocates of eliminating European languages from primary expression of African ideas. His arguments are compelling. Other authors have stayed with the European languages in which they were educated and with which they are most comfortable expressing themselves. They also find better markets in these languages. Reasons such as these only return us to Ngugi's argument — that African countries will never develop fully if they do not encourage their own well-defined cultural environments. Questions of cultural identity cannot be definitively answered. *Decolonising the Mind* is an important contribution to the debate.

JUDITH UMBACH