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Critical Perspectives on Ngugi wa Thiong'o by G. D. Killam

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Kenya

Critical Perspectives on Ngugi wa Thiong'o. G. D. Killam, ed. Washington, D.C. Three Continents. 1984. viii + 322 pages, ill. \$24 (\$14 paper).

Acknowledging the vast and continuing "realignments of power and long overdue reassessments of the cultures of the third world," the editors of the *Critical Perspectives* series propose, through a projected thirty-six critical monographs, to provide Euro-American audiences with the "documents and polemics" which reflect the reality of these realignments and reassessments. The thirteenth volume to appear in the series, *Critical Perspectives on Ngugi wa Thiong'o*, is one such document, comprising twenty-four essays by and about Ngugi, East Africa's foremost novelist and social critic (see *WLT* 59:1, pp. 26-30). Divided into six sections, the volume contains interviews with Ngugi and general critical articles, including his own well-known essay, "Literature and Society," as well as various critical and historical commentaries on and analyses of his four major novels—*Weep Not, Child* (1964), *The River Between* (1965), *A Grain of Wheat* (1967), and *Petals of Blood* (1977; see *WLT* 52:4, p. 681)—and his first book of nonfiction, *Homecoming* (1972).

The selected essays, most of them dating from the 1970s, aptly represent a substantial body of criticism on Ngugi's writing and offer, in light of the series's intent, some of the most important critical commentary available on the major themes of his fictional and nonfictional writing: namely, the issue of the disintegrative influence of Christianity, the importance of history in society, the question of the adoption of an international language as the medium of artistic expression, and the source and nature of Ngugi's artistic and political influence.

As with any selection, one wonders if the essays and reviews, particularly those on the four novels, could not have been more current, given the book's 1984 publication date. Nonetheless, Killam's apt choice of Ngugi's "Literature and Society" as the lead essay, as well as the inclusion of Ime Ikeddeh's "Ngugi wa Thiong'o: The Novelist as Historian," makes the volume a significant contribution to the continuous search for an African esthetic and to the whole question of cultural and literary liberation raised by Chinweizu, Onwuchekwa Jemie, and Ihechukwu Madubuike, the self-proclaimed *bolekaja* liberators of African culture and literature, in their daring publication, *Toward the Decolonization of African Literature* (Howard University Press, 1984; see *WLT* 58:2, p. 313).

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