

New Tendencies in the Development of Anglophone Novel in East Africa

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Abstract:

According to the statements made by a number of scholars, in the 80's East African Anglophone novel, which once received a nickname of "social documentary", began to lose gradually its social commitment. Many of the writers known previously as the most active supporters of the social trend, moved their attempts to other literan areas - criminal novel ("Weapon of hunger" by Meja Mwangi, 1989), love story (Yussuf Dawood's "Off my chest", 1988), even children's literature (books for children in Gikuyu, written by Ngugi wa Thiong'o). However, in the late 80's and early 90's East African Anglophone novel stepped onto a new level of social trend, moving from "social documentary" to "social epic". The authors now are trying to sum up the historical experience of East African countries over a large time span, and to that effect appeal mostly to elaborate and spacious literary forms, such as epic novel. These authors, although chosen one and the same literary form, are showing clearly their inclinations towards different styles of writing. For example, Tanzanian author Moyez Vassanji in his novel "The gunny sack" (1989) makes a rather convincing attempt to replant on East African soil the method of "mythological writing", previously used by such author as Gabriel Garcia Marquez. The novel definitely appeals not only to local reader, but to a wider international audience; on its pages the author manages to restore not only the fate of several generations of Indian family, but even the slightest details of their mentality, using myth as one of the basic means for changing the dimensions of time and space, according to the logic of the narration. The development of Kenyan novel in the early 90's confirms also one of the main tendencies in modern literature - bridging between "elite" and popular fiction. The first attempt of an epic novel in Kenyan Anglophone literature was, oddly enough, made by the veteran of Kenyan popular fiction David Maillu in his "Broken drum" (1991). The novel hardly aims the widest reading public - nevertheless, stylistically it bears distinct features of popular fiction, such as crime story, romance, etc. Popular novel in East Africa also shows certain inclination towards urgent social themes, but the authors inevitably uses the artistic means they feel most happy with - that is, the style of popular fiction. For example, the "clash of cultures" - the experience of young Africans studying abroad - is presented in the form of a picaresque ("Times beyond" by Omondi Makoolo, 1992) or love story ("The girl from Uganda" by Tengio Urrio, 1993); feministic problems are spiced with sentimentalism ("Judy the nun" by P. Waweru, 1990); the thoughts on the hardships of younger generation are guised in Bildungsroman ("The plight of succession" by a Tanzanian Prosper Rwegoshora, 1990). At the same time, some authors, who have been ploughing successfully the field of pop fiction for a few decades, show their interest in more elaborate literary forms ("Dedan Kimathi: the real story" by Samuel Kaluga, 1990). All the mentioned facts do not allow us to state that the division into popular and elite novel will disappear within the foreseeable future. However, the most interesting developments seem to take place precisely in the field of bridging between these two branches of East African fiction

