ABSTRACT

This Study attempts to contribute to the on-Doing debate over the criteria of criticism of the African novel. Efforts have been made to review the categories of Afro and Euro-centric criteria and their short-comings observed. The study attempts to show that if the devices of realism were used, the African novel would be properly situated within the mainstream of the novel world-wide. Realism is regarded in this study as an all enveloping term covering all novels across the world. The study relies reasonably on David Huck's definition of Realism which shows realism as imaginative writing that attempts to accurately reflect life as it was lived in the past or could be lived today. Everything in such a story can conceivably have happened to real people living in our natural physical world. To this extent, the African novel, judged with the properties of realism can reveal itself without recourse to racial critical prejudices. In pursuit of this study, three main categories of realism have been proposed, viz: realism of theme, realism of technique and socialist realism which handle the political aspect of writings that have responded radically to the socio-economic conditions of Africa and have adopted clearly radical positions. Altogether nine novels have been selected for this study. Soyinka and Armah have been found to be specifically suited for the technical aspects of realism. Consequently, their technical sophistry seen through their unique use of language, settings and characterization have been explored. Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, Sembene Ousmane and Festus Iyayi have been interpreted as radical writers espousing the Marxian theories of socialist realism based on the clear identification of class relations in the societies depicted. Finally, Achebe, Mariama Ba, Peter Abrahams, and Mbulelo Mzamane have been used to explore the purely thematic aspects of realism. The highly topical concerns of these writers, their situational plots, characters and setting have been isolated for examination. In all cases, the study has paid attention to both form and content. The entire work attempts to examine the African novel as a contribution to world literature with its own characteristics that are necessarily a nature of the regional aspects of art. It is reasoned that realism can be used to interpret not only non-African works but also African novels.