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Author

Mativo, Kyalo

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ISSUES

THE NOVEL BY ANY OTHER NAME

by

Kyalo Mativo

If it were not for its delirious quality, *Theoretical and Historical Forms in and of the Novel* (Towards a Theory of Narrativity and Modality) by Ntongela Masilela, (*Ufahamu* VII, No. 2) would not require anything more than a casual glance.

The article tells us that "the novel" - and we shall discover for ourselves what that means - "like any other literary object (?)" has in its lifetime acquired different forms. These include the Greek epic, the Roman epic, the Italian novella and the French novelle. But then we find out that the novella's development gave rise to "the novel." Which amounts to saying that "the novel" is a form of "the novel" since the novella, like the epic and the novelle, are stages of which "the novel" is one. At one point we think we understand that "the novel" appears to be a stage of itself. But...ah, pardon me, I almost forgot the Hegelian Dialectics by which "the novel" like the abstract Hegelian absolute idea is a "process of becoming." In fact, "the novel as genre with particular forms...is a process of dialectical interfusion or interpenetration..." And with that we can rest assured that "the novel" is something like an idea that exists and moves all by itself, conquering all and sundry. Those are then the "Theoretical and Historical forms 'IN' the novel." And what "OF" it? Well, there is "The historical novel," mark you, we are now dealing with "theoretical and *historical* forms of "the novel." So now we have this historical "historical novel," which would sound more powerful as HISTORICO-HISTORICAL (-NESS) (-ITY), if you are so inclined, and then there is "the psychological novel." And that's not all. There are "sub-genres" of "the novel," "historical," (once again) "gothic" and "psychological," so that the "sub-genre" of the "psychological novel" is a "psychological-psychological novel;" or better still, "PSYCHOLOGICAL-PSYCHOLOGICAL." Add your own suffix to taste. But these "'sub-genres' do not by any stretch of the imagination exhaust the complex forms of the novelistic genre," because apart from the elusive forms "the novel" has something called "the historical problematic" in its "structuration." And you can even "classify the structure of the novel into two modes, the monological structure of the homophonic novel, and the dialogical structure of the polyphonic novel." That is its "modality." And what is its "narrativity?" Well, this "is the system that unifies the different variants of the novel; it acts as a mediating process between the temporal and the spatial dimension..."

And what is a crocodile or a hippopotamus or a water-buffalo or a rhinoceros? ".....it is a dialectical movement that gives coherence, precision and wholeness to the structural organization of the novel." And verily, verily I say unto you, "A narrative process is a system whose unity of action is governed by movement of the temporal and spatial dimensions and is, therefore, constituted by the chronological and non-chronological successive movement of *time* within the *space* of the novel."

Somehow, somewhere you get the feeling that you are being told something, and you know this something is about "the novel." But what is it? What is this incomprehensible something that is more difficult to detect than the Russian MiG 25? Suddenly you realize that "Theoretical and Historical Forms IN and OF the novel," like "the novel" itself is a "process of becoming, a form that is PROBLEMATICAL without having a problematic.(!)" Obviously we will get nowhere by trying to discover what we are being told here. What, therefore, the author purports and fails to tell us can only be unearthed from the original sources on which the author's academic mentors base their analyses of "the novel." But it is necessary first of all to straighten out some important technical terms which in the "Theoretical and Historical Forms" are misused.

"The novel, like any other literary object, is constituted by the unity and the continual transformation of content into form and form into content."

The key words are "transformation," "form" and "content." As they appear here it is difficult to discern their meaning. What is then meant by form and content as they are used in art and literature? The art form of a literary work refers to symbols or socially recognized values. These constitute such factors as syntax and traditional features such as the rigid fourteen lines of the Shakespearian sonnet arranged in the order ab, ab, cd, cd, ef, eg, gg. The tonal scale of the Western music is another example of art form. The different kinds of the African drum-beating can serve as an illustration. A certain African people have two types of drumming. One type is performed by beating the drums at a high tempo in a strictly defined formation which requires agility and an energetic movement. The rapid succession of the drum-beat and the explosive, but restrained, intensity it produces finds its expression in the dancers' equally energetic agile movement. This *form* of drumming is performed by young people, because their bodies are best suited to the demands of the drum-beats. The other type is less demanding. The beats are slow, and their succession is punctuated by long pauses. The drummers can even afford to relax and hum a tune to themselves. Even the drums are shaped in such a way that the drummers have to sit on them. This *form* of drum beating, needless to say, is designed for old women who have only to shake their shoulders on a fixed spot. All these are

socially recognized values in dances involving drums. And, of course, they have undergone many modifications over time.

The content of a work of art, on the other hand, refers to the subject matter, the material for which the form exists. In the case of the two types of drum-beating, the art form of type one corresponds to happy moods and jubilant feelings combined with anxiety, all of which are properties of youth. The content for this type of mood tends to be shown of one's own physical ability in front of a partner of the opposite sex. The second type is associated with pride of experience which need not be physically demonstrated to be real, but rather talked about in a relaxed mood; hence, the singing. The form, therefore, suits this content. Biologically speaking, the form and content of a work of art relate to one another as the bone-structure of the human body - or of an animal or bird for that matter - to the flesh and blood. Content and form of a work of art are socially determined values, and as such indispensable to one another. Transformation, on the other hand, pertains to change of form and content; that is to say, it defines the property and concept of form and content. When a thing undergoes transformation, and if that transformation is a linear one, e.g., it does not involve change of elements which constitute the thing, it does not, thereby, lose its essential characteristics. In higher mathematics, for example, linear transformation is a transition from a given set of values to another set in such a way that the values of the old set acquire a new expression in terms of the new. To put it in another way, the new set of values expresses the old. The old lives in the new and the new in the old. This means nothing more than the concept and the property of these two sets of values are associated with, if not similar to, one another. They differ only in their magnitude, in their coefficients, e.g., the letters denoting their quantity. The result of this kind of transformation is a set of values whose justification for existence is maintaining the essential elements which made up the old set. That is to say, the frame-work, the features and even the arrangement of the old set are left intact. (We shall see later how this principle applies to Africa in relation to the West.)

If I change clothes either because I am expecting visitors or because I am going to a party or because it is cold, or even because I want to play soccer, that does not change me into somebody else. I may look different in different clothes, but the clothes can't either make me grow a beard if I am hairless, or grow a belly or lose one, or acquire a deeper voice if my natural one is like that of a billy-goat. I remain essentially the same person with each set of clothes which has to be of the same size to fit me. Even when a chameleon changes colour, it remains the old self-same chameleon in the new colour. One more example and we shall be through. In 1765, Germany made technical improvements of the gun which resulted in the shortening of the

barrel so that it could be more easily and accurately aimed. This improvement fell out of synchronization with the military tactics of the time, with the hitherto accepted form of fighting. The old tactics, therefore, had to be changed to correspond to the new type of weapon. The form had to change in order to express the new content. This meant introducing irregular formations instead of the old ordered line. The result was a linear transformation of the German army. Linear because technical improvements of the gun and the corresponding change of tactics did not change the German army either into the British or the French or the Russian army. It remained German, but this time better armed. But what does all this have to do with "the novel?"

Let us look back at our question from "Theoretical and Historical Forms." "The novel.....is constituted by the unity of the continual transformation of content into form and form into content." In the first place, transformation is a result of change of form and content; it is the effect of that change. It does not itself belong to the set of values in which change is taking place. It is rather the phenomenon, the fact that change has taken place; a condition of change, much in the same way we say "it is hot, it is raining, the sun is shining," etc. etc. in describing the change of weather. Secondly, content does not change into form or form into content in the sense that each exists in shape of the other. Military tactics cannot change into weapons nor the weapons into the tactics. X is not and cannot be Y as a symbol, that is, as a sign. But X can be expressed in terms of Y and Y in terms of X. Military tactics are given their value by suitable weapons and weapons by suitable tactics. In short, form and content influence one another, each can be expressed in the other, but they do not take the shape of each other.

Now there is a specific relation between content and form which can be disrupted under socially abnormal conditions. Works of art, and this includes "the novel," have validity in the social context in which they are found since their form and content are themselves social products in the sense that they reflect the reality of the society in question. The change of reality necessarily means change of "art," because the traditional values of the old society fall out of favour of the reality just taking place. Under certain conditions, the content of art and literature may change without a corresponding change of form. This happens when, for example, owing to the commercialization of "art" and "literature," a rift occurs between the commercial content and the traditional social formulations which have been in existence as art forms. When this happens, there can be no question of "continual transformation of content into form and form into content." The old social formulations are simply drowned by the new individualized art "content" and lose meaning. This leads to formlessness of art and literature which in Europe led to Dadaism and Surrealism and the Existentialism of Jean-

Paul Sartre, that philosopher of isolated bourgeois individualism. For as Christopher Caudwell puts it, "only those things are recognized as art forms which have a conscious social function."¹

Now what is "the novel?" Ah, "the novel." *novella, novelle, novellino, novellus, novus*. Take your choice. It's an Italian word after all. It existed in Italy in the Thirteenth century as the "novella" where a collection of tales called *Il Novellino* was composed. Francesco da Barberino (1264-1348) connected with these tales was the first recognized "novelist" in the West, followed by Giovanni Boccaccio whose *Filicopo* appeared in 1339, and *Decameron* in 1348. In Japan, 1004 A.D. we hear of *Genji Monogatari* originated by a woman by the name Murasaki no Shikibu. In China, during the Northern Sung Dynasty (960-1127 A.D.), *Water Margin*.² So that was "the novel" at the various "moments of its origination." But according to the "Theoretical and Historical Forms," "the novel" existed as the Greek epic and later as the Roman epic. Now the Greek epic was a result of collective chanting at the rise of Greek military dynasties. And this chanting was derivative of the mimetic rite of the earlier tribes which preceded the military aristocracy. As epic, whether in Greece or in Rome, the subject matter (content) and the manner of executing that content (form) had nothing to do with "the novel" as we came to know it. The Greek chanting was performed to celebrate victory in war,³ and as such, could not handle the social aspects connected with "the novel" that at any rate didn't exist in Greece or Rome in their respective epic periods. To assert, therefore, that "the novel as a literary form (what else could it be?)...developed from the Greek epic" is as false as saying that the tractor developed from the hoe, or that the motor vehicle grew from the horse. For the tractor neither existed as a hoe nor the motor vehicle as a horse. Rather, with the development of agriculture on one hand, and of industry on the other, the hoe and the horse were rendered ineffective and as archaic and obsolete as "origination." Their replacement by the tractor and motor vehicle was an historical necessity. So also was that of the epic by "the novel" when the social structure - necessarily economic and political - changed, so that the means for its reflection, which had up to a point adequately played a correspondingly suitable role, became antiquated.

The literature which best expressed the reality of feudalism was poetry. The aggressive and the defensive form of military power which best reflected the social structure of the late middle ages in Europe was chivalry. And when the advent of the city dwellers brought with it new military techniques best suited to their particular way of life, chivalry lost ground. It became an anachronism because its idealism and irrationality, in other words, its ideological outlook failed to recognize the new reality.⁴ The most effective military

tactics for the third world countries in the present world of imperialism is the guerrilla warfare. The same is true "IN and OF the novel." It was an historical phenomenon best suited for the expression of consciousness of the emerging forms of social organizations at "the moments of its origination."

So, what is "the novel?"....."the novel is the unity of LITERARY FORM and HISTORY."

Ach so! Whose voice is that?

Georg Lukács.....? Honore de Balzac.....? Jean Jacques Rousseau?

Here!

In Eighteenth century Europe "the novel" arrived in France in the emperor's clothes. It had achieved a great deal of success and modification in the countries it had invaded so far. In Spain, it engaged the Spanish literary matador, Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, from whom it received an honorary degree of literary excellence. Having himself experienced bitter poverty and even spent five unforgettable years in prison in the hands of Algerian pirates, Cervantes came to the conclusion that the age of chivalry was at an end. The only reality for him was that of the dream world, because the actual world was full of demons. There was, in the mind of Cervantes, an irreconcilable enmity between the ideal and the real. He found himself caught in the nether world of this contradiction. And so, by the use of "the novel" (for example in *Don Quixote*) he made an attempt to solve the problem for himself and the society he lived in, and failed. Thereafter "the novel" went to England where, in the first half of the Eighteenth century, a merchant had gone bankrupt. The year was 1719 when, having transformed himself from an unsuccessful businessman to a political careerist, Daniel Defoe published his *Robinson Crusoe* to speak for and defend the interests of his middle-class. Seven years later, a clergyman wrote a satire of "universal" immorality. In *Gullivers Travels*, Jonathan Swift blamed the defective political economic and social institutions on the imperfection of "man's nature." From here, too, "the novel" advanced forward and approached France, which it surrounded and immediately conquered. During the second half of the century, Francois Marie Voltaire became possessed of "the novel" and cried "wolf" to feudalism, for example in *Candide*.

"The novel" had performed all these social functions for the men who drove the European economic cart. But it failed to offer them a solution to their social problems arising from the economic structure. And so the century was about to retire from its active historical career with less than honourable discharge when Rousseau entered the scene and saved it from total disgrace. He took one long glance at the reality of his world and though

that he had discovered the ailment. The trouble with the "world," he said, was lack of self-observation, self-reflection. The "present world" had been deprived of its natural essence, and only if "man" returned to himself, was it possible to solve man's social problems. So he gave the order: "Back to Nature." Everybody heard that. Balzac heard it, Goethe heard it and so did Dostoevsky and Tolstoy later on. And Lukács? He heard it too, but this time from Balzac.

Honoré de Balzac?
Here!

Eighteenth century Europe saw "the novel" grow from youth to early stages of maturity. It was during this time that the antagonism between the individual and his society became more than ever a "problematic" because the economic structure of the main European countries had struck a "problematicalness." And when "the novel," as a mirror of this social conflict, reflected the reality of the day, it was concluded that it was "PROBLEMATICAL *without having a problematic.*" The criterion for "the novel" was now based on how much of this "problematicalness" it contained. In the early nineteenth century "the novel" dug its roots deep in the fertile ground of European social tumult. Balzac made the most of it. He realised that the old order had ceased to be, and a new one was taking its place. He looked on the individual as having meaning only in his capacity as a social agent, that is, as a minion of a conflict between group interests. The social worth of an individual was, therefore, determined by the society in which he lived. The society, having created everything and everybody, was itself then reflected in the minds of men. This is the core of Balzac's works. Nevertheless, he regarded the society of which he was a member, as a nightmare, and capitalism as a social disease, but a disease that could be pathologically analysed and medically cured. That was the message of his *comédie humaine*. The real social problem, as he saw it, was the cancerous cut-throat scramble for profits and power. As a solution he prescribed the liquidation of the old hierarchy, e.g., the monarchy, the church and the family. In the place of these old-fashioned structures, he proposed individualism, free competition and unrestrained personal ambition (which explains the special high value he has earned himself on the American campuses). He saw no other way out of the social anarchy of the time other than educating the aristocracy in the art of rationality and *realism*. By this, he meant grasping the social essence and representing it, through art and literature, as it actually was.

But Balzac was a confused man. On one hand, he willed the destruction of the aristocracy; on the other, he regretted the fall of feudalism. In one regard, he admonished the bourgeoisie; in the other, he apologized for it. From one standpoint, he "hated" capitalism; from the other, he defended it.

He was, in the literary field, what John Maynard Keynes later became, for the same class, in the economic sphere. But what can be said objectively of Balzac is this: He became aware of the fact that ideology was an expression of the material interests of the social group in power. In political terms, his "realism" was far much ahead of time. His sympathies were all with the disadvantaged. Nevertheless, his deepest emotional hypersensitivity was with the nobility. For him, struggle was struggle *per se* against privileges and prerogatives, not historically justified struggle, not the struggle of the rightful heirs of human history; the wrongly dispossessed. All this notwithstanding, the fact that he was forced to admit the necessity for the fall of his beloved nobility, and was convinced that the future belonged to the oppressed, this fact was what Engels described as the "greatest triumph of realism," which not of Balzac's making, but of objective historical condition

This point needs to be emphasized because later Lukács misunderstood it and made it the basis for his *Theory of Reflection*, from which grew a motley of "theories" such as "Historical forms in and of the novel." Based mainly on Balzac's works, theory grew that an artist could lend his artistic sympathies to a just cause while at the same time, not only remaining all from any struggle designed to realize that cause, but actually participating in activities inimical to it. This line of thing is everywhere evident in the academic product of bourgeois "Marxists" who have formed themselves into a convoy of intellectual pauperism. They are even trying to internationalize the disgrace in "journals" like the *New Left Review*. No wonder we read from "'Theoretical and Historical Forms': The monological structure of the homophonic (?) novel is static and does not facilitate an authentic interaction between itself, history and ideology. It is dominated by the author's ideological vision which does not make possible the linkage with the processes of history." Indeed! We shall return to this "problematic" soon. Before then, let's follow "the novel" a little further in its last leg of its tedious journey as a "unity of LITERARY FORM and HISTORY."

A fusion of Balzac's "realism" and Rousseau's "natural found expression in the German *Sturm und Drang*⁵, the so-called "Geniezeit." Goethe, who was in one way or other connected with this philosophy of "living with and according to the law of society" taught that the criterion for the cultural achievement of an individual artist should be based on his integration into that society. (Like the illusory idea of "world government of Solzhenitsyn, Goethe flirted with that of "world literature." The demand that one should integrate oneself with the society necessarily meant, for Goethe, cooperation with it. It never occurred to him that peaceful solutions to problems existing between the oppressor and the oppressed cannot be achieved un

the terms of the former. But it must be said in favor of Goethe that he was advanced in his thinking in that he pin-pointed the fruitless attempts of the romantic world to try to find solutions to social problems by means of intellectual self-exile from the society where the problems existed. In *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers*⁶, nevertheless, he ends up making the existing political and economic structure of his society an omnipotent and infallible power with which one had to cooperate or lose validity. (Later we shall see how an African writer, who may or may not have read Goethe, struck a similar note.)

Between 1830 and 1850, "the novel" acquired an unprecedented importance. And for a good reason. It was the time of revolutions in Europe. "The novel" ceased to be "the novel" as such. It became "the social novel." In England, for example, where economic development was most advanced, "the social novel" became a means of explaining the social "problematic." For a while, at least in England, the "problematic" was not regarded as "the novel's" property. There was some notion in men's minds, though still a misty one, that the culprit lay elsewhere. It is during this time that we meet people like Disraeli and Dickens who never wrote anything which did not concern itself with a current social question mark. "The social novel" became an instrument for ridicule, censure, condemnation, contempt and protest. The "naturalism" and "realism" of mainland Europe were not quite in keeping with the reality of the England of 1830-50. Here there was need for a real solution to problems of the suffering of the apprentice, of the handworker and of the petty merchant. And when Charles Dickens appeared on the scene and expressed these feelings, tears were shed and chests beaten. From a pulpit of moral indignation, he preached to the congregation down below against the sins of cruelty, of heartlessness, of the evil rich, of the legal injustice to the poor and of lack of consideration by the institutions. And all responsible for these anti-social practices, he sent to hell by the stroke of his quill. In this sense, he can be regarded as a spokesman for the oppressed, a man of the people, in a way, and a radical. But like his predecessors and contemporaries, he never understood the cause of the evil he was so much up and against, much less define the course of the cause to which he had lent his creative power. For him, it was struggle against evil over destiny.

After 1851, England entered the sphere of the "workshop of the world." The workers' conditions improved a little, and all the fever of the 30's and the 40's responded favourably to a dose of capitalist quinine. A sense of slumber, indifference and passivity hovered over all like a truly British ghost, and "the social novel" transformed itself back to "the novel." George Eliot came in, Thackeray came in, Trollope came in, and none of them wrote a single "social novel" in the real sense of the word.

They turned to moral problems of single individuals and earned themselves a name in the world of "intellectual passion."

But what England lost Russia gained. It was here in the land of the czars that "the novel" began to acquire a specific meaning and even took a positive step towards losing its quotation commas.

The Russian novel started off as "the novel." It had inherited much of Rousseau's naturalism, and occasionally it would peep into the romanticism of the far past. But basically the Russian novel was a "social novel." It blended Balzac's realism with the concrete characteristics of the czarish Russia to form a foam of political and social questions. As Hauser observes: "The connection between the political and the social question of the day is here, from the outset, closer than the contemporary French and English writers."⁷ Both Fyodor Dostoevsky and Leo Tolstoy spoke the language of politics. Ironically, it was the Russian novel which, though arriving late on the scene, achieved what the Western novel had started but failed to accomplish.

In *Anna Karenina* and *Brothers Karamazov* "naturalism" is portrayed at its most magnificent glory, in a manner that Europe had never known hitherto. The political content is woven around a maze of morality and mysticism. Dostoevsky, like Goethe before him, advocated the line of thinking, that the worth of an individual was to be found within the boundaries of "society." For that reason, he condemned the emancipation of the individual from "society" but remained unsure whether "freedom", which he did not define clearly, was good or bad. Hence, his religious and mystical beliefs to which he took refuge in times of *Sturm und Drang* of his personal life.

Tolstoy towed more or less the same line. The problem of the oppression of the peasants by the czars and the solution to it were his special concern. This solution he found in the renunciation of politics altogether. The emancipation of the individual was not a solution but a problem, because it smacked of anarchy. The real freedom lay in an orderly socially sanctioned structure. "The emancipation of woman," he wrote in *Kreutzer Sonata*, lies not in colleges and not in parliaments, but in the bedroom."⁸ Like Dostoevsky, Tolstoy's world was a religious one which he tried to drag everybody else. But he had the right attitude towards the peasant question, up to a point. As said of him, "he associates himself with a popular name in order to increase his political capital."⁹ And it cannot be denied that he had, and still has, a universal significance as an artist. This is the key point in understanding the character of the Russian novel as personified in Tolstoy. In expressing the plight of the peasants, their hopelessness in the face of brutal exploitation, somewhere along the way, he stumbled upon a heap of f

inconsistencies which, in turn, sought to make themselves heard through him willynilly. And so, once again, even in Russia, even a great artist, a monumental figure in the world of literature had failed in the end to analyse the social content of his own works. He, therefore, failed to see any practical solutions to the peasant question. This ability to see through a fog of social chaos was left to one Russian writer.

In his novel *Mother*, published in 1906, Maxim Gorki describes the life of a working mother, Pelageja Nilovna, who joins a group of workers and revolutionary intellectuals for the purpose of struggling to overthrow czarism. In the course of the novel, all the factors associated with revolutions are portrayed without a single trace of romanticism. Every success brings along with it the seeds of its own possible reversal; every failure, elements of its own imminent opposite; every step forward, a frustrating opposing force; etc. The analysis of the worker's movements, the suffering, the resignation, the slow development of the process of learning, all this testifies to the complete awareness on Gorki's part, that the Russian novel had a clearly defined progressive function to perform. He shows, for example, how slow a process class-consciousness is among the factory workers, how difficult the political agitation among the peasants and how distrustful of one another the city-workers are. With Gorki "the novel" became, in a social function under concrete socially defined conditions, not an amorphous "novel" that either keeps on "becoming" nobody knows what, or even an all-embracing "social novel" that is and is not what it wants and does not want to be, which is nothing; but in this case, the Russian novel without question marks. We shall see soon how another non-academic writer rescued "the novel." But before we leave the European scene, lastly, we come back to Georg Lukács, alas!

In his *Widerspiegelungs theorie* (Theory of Reflection), Lukács makes good use of Balzac's "realism." He takes as his point of departure what he calls the category of "Besonderheit" (particularity, peculiarity or even "specivity") as denoting the right kind of reflection. Another coefficient of this reflection is what he terms "the type" (Typuse), which he defines as "the central category and the criterion of realistic concept of literature: the type in relation to character and situation....a peculiar synthesis which organically embraces the general and the individual."10 Hear the similarity? The voice? "The problematic?" Well all he means to say is that, in literature, an artist's artistic content can reflect a reality which is in a way independent of the artist's particularity (Besonderheit) of his life. In other words, the artist's convictions, which are revealed and reflected in his works, do not necessarily demand of him to live up to them. What is reflected in the artistic expressions of the artist and what actually goes on in his specific way of life, need not have a common denominator. One is only aesthetic, the other actual.

Remember Balzac? When in 1888, in a letter to a Miss Harkness, Engels said, "the realism which I am talking about, can even take place in spite of the views of the author"¹¹ referring to Balzac, he meant that, in spite of Balzac's passionate sympathy for the nobility, he knew that their future was at an end, and told them so. Engels says that Balzac was forced to go against his own class sympathies by painting a gloomy but realistic political picture for the members of that class. For Lukács, therefore, this means that the historical trend that forces you to give a realistic portrayal of the events emanating from it, does not at the same time force you to choose and live up to a political line whose goal is the realization of that trend. In other words, either you are like a tree whose branches can bend in the direction of the wind while the trunk remains firmly fixed on the ground; or like the head of a hen which stays put no matter which way the main body may move. This line of thinking is quite in keeping with the needs of the modern bourgeois "Marxists," those who laud wide and far the power of "the novel." No wonder then, having scratched all over in search of a way out of this academic quagmire, they have no alternative but to announce "To a Marxist then, the *problematicness* of the novel is the product of the simultaneous complex nexus of contradictory relations between it and history (there you are, "the novel" and "history" are independent of one another; hence, the contradiction between them), ideology and history of forms." Which simply means: ideology and "history of forms," e.g., the frame-work on which "the novel" is based, are constant, given once for all; and with the varying nature of ideology, you can expect an insurmountable 'problematicness' IN and OF the novel." What these "Marxists" fail to understand is that the ideological content of any work of art worth the name, and the form in which it is expressed are intertwined values. If one changes without the other, the thing disintegrates into "the monological structure of the homophonic," and "the dialogical structure of the polyphonic novel," in which case you might as well abolish "the novel," like the wise American who has proposed to abolish the winter to avoid another energy "problematic."

Now, one more shot at Lukács before we leave him wallowing in his discredited *Theory of Reflection*. It is obvious that those who base their "theories" of literature on this theory, are unaware that Lukács has long had his loose intellectual feathers plucked by a fellow country man, József Révai, who in the *Lukács Discussion of 1949*, reduced him to his diminutive size:

The possibility of Balzacish discrepancy resulted from the fact that one could criticize capitalism from a romantic reactionary political stand-point precisely because it was, in a contradictory manner, advanced compared to feudalism. Genuinely progressive

world outlook can never be a drag of a full all-around representation of reality. Only the bourgeois-liberal world outlook can stand in the way of the representation of reality, on account of its apologetic character which disguises or palliates the contradictions of capitalism.¹²

And with that we come to the end of this unproductive, tiring journey of "the novel." After centuries of faithful service in Europe during which "the novel" moved from one country to another administering doses of social therapeutics, all it received from its clients as a reward for its pains was an academic "problematic." So where does it go from here? The personal tragedy of Nixon had its prelude in the life of "the novel" long before Watergate. And the words of a dying king are not prerogative of a fallen president alone, but also that of the fallen "novel." So now both can say, each in his own determined manner, "I don't know what the future brings, but whatever it brings, I'll still be in there fighting."¹³ For "the novel" that future came soon, and indeed it was there fighting.

For a clear understanding of the role of "the novel," if any, on the African continent, it is our misfortune to have to return momentarily to that unholy alliance between "form," "content" and "transformation." We have seen that transformation describes a state of being, that is to say, a condition resulting from a change of a given set of values. If the values being changed are simply expressed in terms of the new values, then we refer to this type of transformation as linear. It is now time to introduce a new element to this concept, which is indispensable to a proper analysis of African art and literature in general and to "the novel" in Africa in particular.

Non-linear transformation of form and content occurs when the *basis* of operation (one may even speak of a base in military terms), that is, in the case of "the novel" when the principle behind which change has to take place itself changes. This basis involves the political and economic background, constituting the social structure whose reality it is the business of "the novel" to reflect. Just as in mathematics, *basic transformation* takes place when *linearly independent* elements (actually this is the precise language mathematicians use) undergo change in such a way that, instead of expressing the new and old values in terms of one another as in the case of linear transformation, a set of totally new values composed of totally new elements emerges, so does genuine transformation in social life take place only when the political and economic background itself changes. (This is nothing new to "Marxists") If now we apply this concept on "the novel" in the African context, the analogy is complete.

If "the novel" is a social product, albeit a mental one and the reality of this society is reproduced in a fictional form in "the novel" then "the novel" in Africa has had its share of "problematicness." The social background, and, therefore, the basis from which "the novel" in Africa has taken off has been almost totally European. Take, for example, the so-called "On Market" which has been hailed as "the literature for the masses in Nigeria. The influence of British literature is manifested in such titles as *Alice in the Romance of Love* (by Thomas Iguh patterned after Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* and *Tribulus and Foida* (Uzoh), taking after *Troilus and Cressida* also by Shakespeare.¹⁴ Here British art form and content which are out and British social products, and not even of a modern Britain at large are directly imposed on a totally different set of social values. The result is not a tragedy, but a farce. Given the reality of colonialism, this can be sympathetically regarded as inevitable. The complications which "the novel" endured and barely survive at its "moments of origination" in Europe were reproduced in Africa in a quadratic form. Senghor, who wrote mainly poetry, came down in 1947 with a mental case of ancestor worship, which he baptized "négritude," whose theme was basically going back to the natural state of being African, just like Rousseau's "naturalism" and the German "storm and stress." Négritude achieved its climax in 1961 with *L'Aventure Ambiguë* by Cheikh Amidou Kane, which tells of a young man who is finally destroyed by the force of the all-powerful and infallible "négritude" when he fails to become the chief of his people. Remember Goethe in *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers*? The similarity of the message and even of the titles of these two works (*L'Aventure Ambiguë* - *The Ambiguous Adventure*; *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers*-*The Passionate Sufferings of the Young Werther*)? Werther goes beyond traditional German values of Christianity and is destroyed in the process; Samba Dialo, the protagonist in *L'Aventure Ambiguë* does the same in relation to "négritude" and meets with the same fate. Another "French African" writer, Kamara Laye, whose concern and inclinations had little or nothing to do with "négritude," gives us *L'enfant noir*, which is basically about his childhood in Guine before he was uprooted from this background by forces of "modernity"; and again *The Radiance of the King*, about a European man who takes what may be described as an ego trip to Africa in search of himself. "Psychological," "symbolic," "visionary," have been some of the terms used in favour of Kamara Laye. Dostoevsky and others wrote "psychological" novels too.

"British Africa" which came a little later in the literary field produced *Jagua Nana* (1961) by Cyprian Ekwensi and *Blade Among the Boys* (1962) by Onuora Nzekwu as some of the best examples of what came to be known as the "search for the African personality." Eyewitnesses report that no such thing has been found in the African literary jungle; and you can be assured, that none will be as long as the searchers continue to use borrowed weapons and

technique. The much lauded Chinua Achebe is no exception to this rule. In his novel *No Longer at Ease* for example, he pays tribute to Graham Greene and Evelyn Waugh by inserting an open discussion of *The Heart of the Matter* (Greene) and *A Handful of Dust* (Waugh).

So clearly "the novel" lives in Africa and suffers from similar indignities as those it had contacted in Europe. Whatever else is not visible in "the novel" in Africa, one thing is on display: Just as the specifically French language of Rousseau's "naturalism" and Balzac's brand of "realism" translated into the German *Sturm und Drang* and later into their Russian varieties, so also has the general political and economic life of Europe with its corresponding cultural means, manner and substance, found expression in the African tongue. But there is this difference: The French social reality differed from that of contemporary Germany only in degree. In Africa, at least the Africa of the 1960's - not that it has changed since then - the economic structure was a mere reflection of that of the West. It was an economic tail of Europe; hence, any cultural expression based on this relation was bound to be confused, unconvincing and illusory. The contradictory character of "the novel" in Africa then and now is essentially the definition of that relation. Europe underwent its cultural phases in parallel to its economic development. Africa became the ghosthouse of the dead culture of Europe, and the black mouth-pieces for it, mere spirits. The fact that other African artifacts, such as pottery, sculpture and other forms of woodwork, do not suffer from this general malady is a punitive proof of this.

The difference between "the novel" in Africa and African artifacts as far as their artistic value goes, lies in the fact that the artifacts did not need any outside element for their existence. They were expressions of the reality of African societies at various phases of development from which they drew their flesh and blood. The tools necessary for their creation were already in existence and adequate for the purpose of creating them. "The novel," on the other hand, came from without already equipped with its indispensable tools, such as writing, reading*, printing and their accessories, all of which were as yet not African in origin and development. And then the ideological content and the artistic form. The "problematic" of "the novel" in Africa has its parallel case in the "problematic" of the African artifacts in the Western context. The commercial-

*Sure enough, Africa had long learned how to read and write before colonialism, e.g., the University of Sankore in Timbuktu at the end of the Fifteenth century. But the development of African writing and reading was later destroyed by outside forces which then introduced their kind of learning process, which Africa had to adopt.

ization of the Kamba wood-carving, for example, has met with a corresponding degradation of the artistic essence of that artifact. With a changed purpose, the justification for its existence as an expression of the Kamba people's meaning of life at one point of their history, ceases to be, and with it the artifact itself as work of art. It can only continue to live as a reprobate, a derelict and an outcast.

The same is true of "the novel" in Africa. The attempt to install African traditional material into "the novel" has done nothing to redeem "the novel" from its eventual doom. Am Tutuola's use of traditional African mythologies has met with ironic approval from the West because it reminds the Western audience of their own sense of artistic "superiority." So Tutuola finds himself set side by side with Dante and Bunyan because of the similarity of the art between the *Palm Wine Drunkard*, on the one hand, and the *Pilgrim's Progress* and *Divine Comedy* on the other. What Tutuola has done is to take the art form and content of the old past, which expressed the social essence of the people from whom they originated, and with the use of the tools of "the novel," recorded them as if they are an aspect of current life. There lies the "problematic." Bunyan and Dante recorded aspects of the then current or previous life. The similarity of the art form in these three works finds explanation in the fact that the social structures of the societies from which they arose had an historically determined base that was similar in all three cases. But it does not mean that mythologies shouldn't be recorded in Africa. On the contrary, they are useful in studying the history of the African people; but then they should be defined as such from the outset, not as "novels."

A slightly different tone of "the novel" has been provided by the South African writers. We have on file such writers as Ezekiel Mphahlele, Alex la Guma, Peter Abrahams and others, all of whom have in different ways written about Apartheid and similar oppressive political machinery of the South African Bantu Political conditions being different there, in their historical character, from those obtaining in the rest of Africa, the South African writers haven't had the luxury to write "psychological" novels. Alex la Guma, for example, has addressed himself directly to the economic and social oppression of the African people by white supremacy. This is evident in his *A Walk in the Night* (1962) in which he portrays the actual life lived by the African people in a slum of an African "district" in Cape-town. Even an autobiographical work like Mphahlele's *Down Second Avenue* and a "biographical" achievement like Abraham's *Mine Boy* are all about an unknown but very well known concrete African. But even here, "the novel" has reared its ugly head. And where there hasn't been enough evidence of it, critics have woken up from their day-light slumber, drawn out their critica

swords and charged with ungodly fury in defence of His Majesty "the novel." Thus, Lewis Nkosi attacks his fellow South African writers for failing to learn from "the masters." In his own words:

*If black South African writers have read modern works of literature (necessarily European), they seem to be totally unaware of their most compelling innovations; they blithely go on 'telling stories' or crudely attempting to solve problems to which European practitioners, from Dostoevsky to Burroughs have responded with greater subtlety, technical originality and sustained vigour; and black South Africans write, of course, as though Dostoevsky, Kafka or Joyce had never lived.*¹⁵

In other words, the social background from which Dostoevsky, Burroughs, Kafka and Joyce derived their inspiration, is here regarded as the training camp for South African writers if they are to achieve "subtlety, technical originality and sustained vigour." These ingredients are necessary, for sure, but they have meaning only if they are organic determinants of the set of values from which the art work grows; which is how "the novel" in Africa can finally lose its European (Western) embroidery and dress itself up in African rugs. That is the reality of Africa today. And in this direction one African writer has taken giant steps.

In *Les bouts de bois de Dieu*, Sembene Ousmane tells of the workers' strikes in 1947 which brought to a standstill the Dakar-Niger railway. Bakayoko is a trade unionist leader (who by the way has an ideological outlook identical in every way to that of Sembene himself). During the strikes his unromantic approach to the struggle makes it possible for him to offer a realistic leadership. He also knows that a leader or leadership is, at certain stages of a people's movement, as necessary as the capacity and willingness of the leader to learn from the members of the movement. He does not regard any success of the strikes as an end in itself, or any failure the end of the struggle. He sees both these possibilities as a union of positive steps; and one should not rest at the one or resign oneself to the powers that be, at the other. What comes out at the end is the realization by the workers that they have a potential power which, if developed and used consciously and properly, that is depending on the nature of the struggle, can change their life for the better. Maxim Gorki, as we have seen, made a similar use of the Russian novel in 1906. And as with him, so also with Sembene, the nameless "novel" is transformed basically from its abstract cocoon into a specific, in this case, African novel, with a specific socially defined role to play within a conscious political context. Sembene is better known as an

African film-maker, and as in his novels, he has turned the abstract film to a concrete one. The future of the African novel and that of the African film, lies on this road. But as long as the African writer has to operate from a foreign political base, and, therefore, on a cultural basis derived from that base it is not possible to make a clear break and set off on an independent course that will have any significant effect on the African people. And the alternative to Western values can not be found in the bowels of African ancestry, not in the traditional romantic values of the African past which have no social import for the oppressed African of the unromantic present. The only possible way towards an African novel is to be found, not on the aesthetic, but on the political and economic, failing that, military battleground. Only, thus, can an African social base be created for a concretely African cultural basis.

Now in the categories of "Theoretical and Historical Foundations and of the Novel" Sembene would clearly belong to the "monological structure of the homophonic novel." Remember? This is the category which "is dominated by the author's ideological vision which does not make possible the linkage with the processes of history." And the writer will tell you in the same breath in no less a flowery dressy language, that Sembene is the greatest African film-maker. Heh! It is as if, as a film-maker, Sembene becomes capable of the "dialogical structure of the polyphonic (film?)" and loses the "problematicness" of the novel." Whereas, as a novelist, he falls right back into the "monological structure of the homophonic novel!" And all this from a "Marxist?"

Footnotes

1. Caudwell, Christopher. *The Concept of Freedom*, p. 11.
2. *Peking Review*. No. 9, 1976.
3. Thomson, George. *Aeschylus and Athens*, p. 60.
4. Hauser, Arnold. *Sozialgeschichte der Kunst und Literatur*. Verlag C.H. Beck München, p. 269.
5. *Storm and Stress*. The participants were known as "Stürmer und Dränger," "men of strain and stress," a title of a play by F.M. Klinger, one of the founders of the "S.S."
6. The word *das Leiden*, pl. *die Leiden*, which means "suffering" can also mean "passion" in the biblical sense; hence, the difficulty in rendering Goethe's work into English. The closest translation would be something like "the passionate sufferings of young Werther."

7. *Ibid.*, p. 901.
8. Quoted from V.I. Lenin. *On Literature and Art*. Progress Publishers, p. 60.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 29.
10. Lukacs, Georg, *Schriften zur Literatursoziologie*, herausgegeben von P.Ludz. 1963. p. 244.
11. Marx, Karl-Engels, Friedrich. *Über Kunst und Literatur*, 1937. p. 53-54.
12. Révai, József. *George Lukács und der Revisionismus*, p. 14.
13. Nixon, R. in "Frost-Nixon" television interview, May, 1977.
14. Obiechina, Emmanuel. *Literature for the Masses: An Analytical Study of Popular Pamphleteering in Nigeria*. p. 47.
15. Nkosi, Lewis. *Fiction by Black South Africans in Introduction to African Literature*. Ed. Ulli Beier, p. 211.

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Kyalo Matiro is a former member of the editorial board of UFAHAMU in its infancy, who defected from it nevertheless and 'escaped' from UCLA altogether. He now works at a gasoline filling station among other things.