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Art and Ideology in the African Novel: A Study of the Influence of Marxism on African Writing by Emmanuel Ngara

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AFRICA & THE WEST INDIES

Emmanuel Ngara. *Art and Ideology in the African Novel: A Study of the Influence of Marxism on African Writing*. London. Heinemann. 1985. viii + 126 pages. \$12.50.

At a time when African writers and critics are deliberately engaged in a search for a matrix within which African literary esthetics may be defined and formulated, Emmanuel Ngara's singular study of the influence of Marxism on African writing is a welcome contribution to the critical canons of the modern African novel. Undoubtedly, this search for a matrix calls for a constant definition of the role not only of art but also of the artist in society. On a continent still struggling to liberate itself from the impact of imperialism and Eurocentrism, it is small wonder that socialism and Marxism have affected the political, economic, and cultural life of a significant number of independent African countries. Witness the Marxist/socialist-influenced writings of such African authors as Ousmane, Ngugi, and La Guma

and such statesmen as Nkrumah, Nyerere, Kenyatta, and Mboya, which Ngara's two-part study brings to mind.

The first part of the study articulates the historical context of Marxist principles and the relationship between art and ideology. The second applies Marxist esthetics to the analysis of novels by La Guma, Gordimer, Achebe, Armah, Ngugi, and Ousmane and their articulation of socialist ideology. Ngara delineates two points crucial to the criticism of African literature: first, that to advance a theory of literary development which does not take into account the impact of the introduction of capitalism in Africa, with its attendant technological transformation of the continent, would be erroneous; and second, that since modern African literature, particularly the novel, poetry, and the drama, is the result of sociopolitical conditions created by technological, ideological, and economic developments, inevitably African literature must be studied "in its historical and intellectual context." On the basis of this claim, Ngara practices his own preaching by the theoretical-literary application structure of his singular book.

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