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## TRACING THE WESTERN NOVEL'S ORIGINS AND THE RISE OF THE AFRICAN NOVEL: CONVERGENCES AND DIVERGENCES

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**Abstract:** This paper focuses on the historical trajectory of the genre of novel from its inception in Britain to its subsequent emergence in Africa, elucidating both the distinctions and parallels between African and Western literary traditions. The problem is that people generally tend to believe that the genre of the novel is the pure invention of the Western world forgetting that Africa has always had its own form of the novel genre. The objective of the study is to retrace and explain the historical, cultural, and socio-political contexts that shaped the development of the British novel and the African novel. To achieve this foregoing objective, the study adopts a socio-historical approach and postcolonial theory to analyze the collected data. Since the primary data collection's instruments are all written documents, the qualitative methodology is used to ensure the collection of qualitative data. The results of the investigation reveal that the British novel, which developed in the 18<sup>th</sup>-century Enlightenment era, focuses on reflecting individualism, social happenings, and the complexities of personal identity within a rapidly changing British society. Conversely, the African novel, which gained prominence in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, portrayed cultural hybridity, national identity, indigenous values, local stories, resistance against oppressive systems and many other salient issues. While the British novel often privileges the introspective exploration of the self, the African novel frequently interrogates collective experiences and communal struggles. Nevertheless, both traditions share common features such as the portrayal of human experiences, societal evolution, and the quest for belonging. Yet, it may thus be concluded that diverse interconnected narratives have shaped the global landscape of the novel in Europe and Africa underscoring its enduring significance as a medium for cultural expression and socio-political discourse.

**Key words:** African novel, British novel, colonialism, cultural exchange, and oral storytelling.



**Résumé:** Cet article se concentre sur la trajectoire historique du genre romanesque depuis son apparition en Grande-Bretagne jusqu'à son émergence ultérieure en Afrique, en éclairant à la fois les différences et les parallèles entre les traditions littéraires africaines et occidentales. Le problème est que l'on a généralement tendance à croire que le roman est une pure invention du monde occidental, oubliant que l'Afrique a toujours possédé sa propre forme du genre romanesque. L'objectif de l'étude est de retracer et d'expliquer les contextes historiques, culturels et sociopolitiques qui ont façonné le développement du roman britannique et du roman africain. Pour atteindre cet objectif, l'étude adopte une approche socio-historique et la théorie postcoloniale pour analyser les données recueillies. Étant donné que les instruments de collecte des données primaires sont tous des documents écrits, une méthodologie qualitative est utilisée afin d'assurer la collecte de données qualitatives. Les résultats de l'enquête révèlent que le roman britannique, qui s'est développé à l'époque des Lumières au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle, met l'accent sur la réflexion de l'individualisme, les événements sociaux et les complexités de l'identité personnelle au sein d'une société britannique en rapide mutation. À l'inverse, le roman

africain, qui a pris de l'ampleur au XX<sup>e</sup> siècle, a dépeint l'hybridité culturelle, l'identité nationale, les valeurs indigènes, les récits locaux, la résistance aux systèmes oppressifs et bien d'autres enjeux majeurs. Alors que le roman britannique privilégie souvent l'exploration introspective du moi, le roman africain interroge fréquemment les expériences collectives et les luttes communautaires. Néanmoins, les deux traditions partagent des traits communs tels que la représentation des expériences humaines, l'évolution sociale et la quête d'appartenance. On peut donc conclure que des récits divers et interconnectés ont façonné le paysage mondial du roman en Europe et en Afrique, soulignant son importance durable comme moyen d'expression culturelle et de discours sociopolitique.

**Mots clés : roman africain; roman britannique; colonialisme; échanges culturels; tradition orale.**

## INTRODUCTION

The current study focuses on accounting for the historical and socio-cultural factors that have contributed to the development of the genre of the novel in Europe and Africa. The study is conducted by comparing and contrasting both forms of the novelistic genre with reference to particular works. Although very few studies have been carried out on these two forms of the novel, a rich and diversified literature exists on the origins of the British novel. For instance, scholars commonly locate the origins of the British novel in the long eighteenth century, arguing that the novelistic form emerged from a convergence of social, economic, and literary changes rather than from a single author or period. Salient accounts emphasize how expanding print culture, rising literacy, and commercial publishing created a new reading public that demanded extended prose narratives. Ian Watt's influential study (1957) traces the novel's rise to realism and the novelistic emphasis on individual experience, with Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding often treated as formative figures who experimented with narrative voice, moral psychology, and plot structures that became novel conventions. Other historians of the period, notably Michael McKeon (2002), place the novel in a broader cultural transformation toward modernity, showing how genres, legal and philosophical changes, and debates about fact and fiction shaped emerging narrative forms and the novel's claims to veracity.

Revisionist works complicate the unitary origin stories by highlighting diverse antecedents and competing practices: aesthetic and generic heterogeneity in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries such as courtly romance, pamphlets, travel writing, bildungsroman precursors, the role of periodical culture and serial publication, and the political economy of authorship and reading communities (Davis 1983; Watt 1957). Critics such as Lennard J. Davis and others interrogate the category "novel" itself, showing that what later critics canonized as the "novel" was the outcome of debates about factuality, genre boundaries, and literary authority. Recent scholarship also stresses marginalized voices and alternative narrative traditions that complicate the Anglocentric canon and invite a more plural history of novelistic emergence (Davis 1983; McKeon 2002).

However, the journey from the origins of the British novel to the emergence of the African novel is a captivating exploration of the evolution of literary expression across diverse cultural landscapes. Each epoch represents a distinct chapter in the narrative of human storytelling, shaped by unique historical circumstances, socio-cultural influences, and artistic visions. The

origins of the British novel and the emergence of the African novel represent two distinct yet interconnected threads in the rich tapestry of literary history. Both forms reflect unique socio-cultural contexts, literary traditions, and thematic concerns, while also sharing certain similarities and mutual influences.

The British novel finds its genesis in the fertile intellectual soil of 18<sup>th</sup>-century Europe, amidst the transformative currents of the Enlightenment and the rise of the middle class. With seminal works such as Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* and Samuel Richardson's *Pamela*, the British novel emerged as a medium for exploring the complexities of individual experience, morality, and society. Rooted in realism and psychological depth, these early forms of the British novel laid the groundwork for the modern novel form, characterized by its nuanced portrayal of human characters and social dynamics.

In contrast, the African novel emerged against colonialism, imperialism, and the struggle for independence in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. African writers, grappling with the legacies of colonization and the complexities of cultural identity, began to wield the novel as a tool for reclaiming agency, articulating indigenous perspectives, and confronting the realities of post-colonial nationhood. Influential works such as Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Petals of Blood* epitomize this literary trend, blending indigenous oral traditions with modernist narrative techniques to address themes of colonial oppression, cultural clash, and societal transformation.

In light of the above, the overall objective of the study is to retrace and explain the historical, cultural, and socio-political contexts that shaped the development of the British novel and the African novel. In so doing, the study also accounts for some similarities and differences between African and British novels focusing on history, culture, themes, narrative techniques, and literary conventions. In line with the general objective of the study; the following research question is formulated to guide the study and ensure its proper implementation: How did historical, cultural, and socio-political contexts shape the development of the British novel and the African novel?

We have applied the qualitative method to this study because we opted for a pure content analysis design. This research method is relevant to this study because it also does not deal with numerical statistics and huge numbers of the population. For example, investigating the socio-political, economic, and cultural contexts surrounding the production and reception of novels in Britain and Africa during their respective periods, this includes studying colonial histories, post-colonial realities, cultural exchanges, and literary movements from written documents. Besides, the lives, backgrounds, and literary influences of key selected authors from both traditions are consulted to ensure the understanding of their personal experiences and perspectives prevailing their writings. This involves biographical research, analysis of authorial interviews, and examination of correspondence and other archival materials.

Theoretically, we use the post-colonial theory and socio-historical approach to analyze and explain how colonial legacies continue to influence the literary landscapes of both worlds. This involves exploring themes of imperialism, cultural hybridity, resistance, and decolonization in British and African novels. The technique of close reading is also deployed to identify themes, narrative structures, character development, and stylistic elements from British and African literatures. By so doing, the focus is laid on examining how language use, symbolism, imagery, and literary techniques are employed by African and British novelists.

## 1. Retracing the Origins of the British Novel and its defining key elements

As already underlined in the introduction, the origin of the British novel is a fascinating subject that intertwines with the broader development of literature and society. Scholars have debated various factors contributing to its emergence, including social, cultural, and economic shifts. One significant aspect often discussed is the rise of the middle class and the increasing literacy rates in Britain during the 18<sup>th</sup> century. As more people gained access to education and reading materials, there was a growing demand for literature that catered to diverse tastes and interests. This created a fertile ground for the novel to flourish, as it offered a form of entertainment and reflection on the complexities of human experience. This means that the Western genre of the novel dates back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century in Britain.

Additionally, the British novel's development was influenced by earlier literary forms such as romance, satire, and allegory. Writers drew inspiration from these traditions while experimenting with new narrative techniques and themes. For example, Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) is often cited as one of the earliest British novels, blending adventure, realism, and moral reflection. Another important factor in the evolution of the British novel was the rise of the printing press and the expansion of the publishing industry. Advances in printing technology made books more affordable and accessible to a wider audience, enabling authors to reach readers beyond elite groups.

Furthermore, the changing social and political landscape of Britain played a crucial role in shaping the themes and concerns of the novel. Works such as Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* (1740) and Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones* (1749) reflected the moral and social anxieties of their time, addressing issues of class, gender, and identity.

In sum, various arguments are employed to explain the British novel's origins and development as explicated above. Some scholars focus on formal aspects such as narrative structure, character development, and style while others explore its relationship with historical context, ideology, and cultural discourse as key defining features.

## 2. The Emergence of the African Novel and its Traditions

This part retraces the history of the African novel and its literary tradition. Up until the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the majority of African literature was oral. Proverbs, myths, and poetry passed down orally have endured and have subsequently influenced modern writing. African literature employs a broad range of dramatic, lyrical, and narrative forms. One of the most prevalent genres in prose narrative is the folktale, which frequently features an animal hero; tales of cunning heroes are especially well-liked. Numerous religious tales and myths have been preserved in historical legends and the worldviews of specific communities. Since the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, writers from West Africa have utilized newspapers as a platform to share their opinions.

To begin with, there are far too many facets and complexities to the history of the African novel. There were native African written languages before the European incursion, despite the common belief that the growth of written literature in Africa was a direct result of European colonization. Africa was introduced to the colonists' writing style. Furthermore, written Arabic has had a major influence on certain regions of Africa. According to George Joseph's works (1997–2023), the earliest African literature appeared between 2300 and 1100 B.C., when the Egyptians started using burial texts to accompany their deceased. In addition, the Egyptians invented papyrus, which gave rise to the word "paper," and writing flourished. On the other hand, the oral culture of Sub-Saharan Africa is rich and diverse. Oral arts in Africa are "arts for life's sake," as opposed to "arts for art's sake," as they are in Europe. Therefore, readers in

Europe may find African art strange and foreign. On the other hand, they directly offer practical information, historical context, moral insight, and creative inspiration. Proverbs, riddles, epic tales, speeches and firsthand accounts, songs and poems of praise, rituals and chants, folktales, stories, and legends are just a few examples of the various forms that African oral narrative.

The African storytelling tradition is carried by the African oral tradition. It is a manifestation of African values and outlooks on life. If we want to determine how African literature evolved after writing became widely used through colonial education, we can also look at other oral traditions like folktales and proverbs. It is possible to argue that the African novel has its roots firmly established in the historical resistance to slavery, colonialism, and neo-colonialism. To affirm their humanity and assert their new identity in the culture of slavery, they resorted to writing. The process of colonization laid the groundwork for modern literature. It is true that literature in ancient African languages, such as Arabic, developed independently from colonialism. Thanks to hieroglyphs, or pictorial representations of words, African literature can be traced back thousands of years to Ancient Egypt. The use of hieroglyphs expanded and advanced throughout Egypt over time. African and Arabic cultures persisted in blending with Greco-Roman and other European cultures, giving rise to a distinctive literary form known as the novel today.

However, it is highly significant to emphasize that, although the genre of the African novel could be traced back to Ancient Egypt with written and oral narratives, people do not always have the same idea concerning the historical beginning of the African novel. For instance, some scholars think that Amos Tutuola was the first African novelist. They consider his novel *The Palm Wine Drinkard* (1952) as the first African-written novel:

However, there are more and more rising voices, in Africa today as well as in the West, which recognize and acknowledge Amos Tutuola as one of the early important pioneers of the genre of the African novel. African oral narratives and the more conventional literary Africa. In this sense, it may be uttered that Amos Tutuola is a traditional or pre-modern African writer and the beginning point of written modern African novel. (1952, p.11)

We can see here that Tutuola is among the pioneers of African literature, especially the genre of the novel. He is also identified by some scholars as a bridge between traditional African oral narratives and the more conventional literary African novels that started to be published soon after his first novel appeared.

Other scholars also think that René Maran was the first African novelist. This shows us that scholars have different points of view about the historical beginning of African novels. Yet, we cannot talk about the genre of the African novel without talking about Olaudah Equiano, because he plays a paramount role in the creation of the African novel with his written slave narrative. He was among the first Africans who wrote a narrative work. Besides, not only was he born, and grew up in Africa, but he also had strong knowledge of Africa and African cultures. Olaudah Equiano had cultural consciousness. He played a very important role in the promotion of African culture. He wrote about his own African culture and slavery in Africa. All of these facts have contributed to rate him among the earliest novelists to promote African culture and history. In fact, the earliest African writers to use Western languages in the 18<sup>th</sup> century were either slaves or former slaves and Olaudah Equiano is a very good illustration. He, thus, evoked in their narratives that Africans had culture and civilization and African people are not savages as they think. That is why he can be regarded as one of the first novelists to promote Africa and its cultures thus making him one of the founding fathers of the genre of the African novel.

Who are the other founding fathers of the African novel? We can answer this question by

saying that Amos Tutuola, Réné Maran, Camara Laye, Olaudah Equiano, and Chinua Achebe are the most significant novelists who played a salient role in the making up of the African novel. This entails that they are the pioneers of the African novel as a genre. Besides, it is axiomatic to pinpoint that among all the pioneering figures of the African novel, Chinua Achebe remains that the founding father of contemporary African literature and modern African novel. He is the one who was quite aware of his role and responsibility as an African writer to help his society and people regain confidence and dignity after years of marginalization, denigration and domination. In his writing and novels, he shows African novelists that they have to be proud of being African. They have to learn about Africa and their past. They have to promote their African identity and avoid blind imitation of western literary traditions. They should take into account the African norms of writing and styles.

Moreover, he was able to devise the African genre of the novel to deconstruct the bad images associated to Africa by providing a counter discourse. For Achebe, an African novelist must be considered as a guardian. He must protect Africa and defend its interests. For him, the novel or literature should allow Africans to see the problems at stake in their society and show them the means to solve them. Thus, the African novelist has a mission to promote African civilization, culture, history, and values through writing. This self-consciousness of Chinua Achebe is highlighted as follows :

Achebe was possibly the first African writer to be self-conscious about his role as an African writer, to confront the linguistic and historical problems of African writing in a colonial situation, and to situate writing within a large body of regional and global knowledge about Africa. (Booker, 1998, p. 32).

From the above , it becomes clearer that the history of the emergence of the African novel has been explored by scholars from various perspectives, offering insights into its evolution, themes, and contributions to global literature.

### **3. Colonialism and Imperialism Influences on the trajectories of African and British Novels**

Colonialism and imperialism have profoundly shaped the trajectories of both African and British novels, influencing themes, narratives, and the very purposes of literature in these contexts. Here is a detailed examination of their influences. During the height of the British Empire, many British novels painted distant lands as exotic backdrops for adventure. Writers such as Rudyard Kipling's *Kim* and Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* set their narratives in colonial territories and often centered on the experiences of European characters abroad. Some works reinforced the idea of a "civilizing mission," presenting colonial rule as a constructive force; Kipling's *The Jungle Book*, for example, frames British figures as agents of order and progress. At the same time, a number of British authors interrogated imperialism. E.M. Forster's *A Passage to India* exposes cultural misunderstandings and racial tensions, challenging the moral justification for Britain's presence in India. Encounters with the colonized frequently catalyzed deep personal change in characters. In *Heart of Darkness*, Marlow's voyage into the Congo becomes an intense psychological journey that probes human darkness. Contact with colonized cultures also altered British prose: the incorporation of local dialects, indigenous customs, and vernacular expressions enriched narrative voice and stylistic texture.

With regard to the African novel, writers have recurrently foregrounded resistance to colonial domination and the concomitant quest for cultural and personal identity. Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* stands as a paradigmatic critique of colonial intervention and its destructive consequences for Igbo social structures and cultural practices. In the post-independence period, African literature shifted toward an interrogation of the ambiguities of decolonization,

addressing themes such as political corruption, neocolonial influence, and the search for authentic national and personal identities. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Petals of Blood* exemplifies this orientation by indicting the failure to realize the emancipatory promises of independence. Debates over linguistic choice have been central to African literary discourse: Achebe's use of English sought to engage an international readership, whereas Ngũgĩ advocated for the recuperation of indigenous tongues as a form of cultural decolonization, as evidenced by *Devil on the Cross*, originally composed in Gikuyu. Finally, both British and African novelistic traditions bear the imprint of colonial and postcolonial cross-cultural exchange. This hybridity is manifest in contemporary writing by authors such as Zadie Smith and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, who examine migration, identity formation, and the complexities of cultural intersectionality.

Colonialism and imperialism have exerted a lasting influence on both African and British novelistic traditions, informing their thematic preoccupations, narrative strategies, and cultural outlooks. British literature frequently engaged with the ethical ambiguities and the exoticizing impulses of empire, whereas African writing has been central to expressing resistance, reconstructing identities, and interrogating postcolonial conditions. The sustained interchange between these bodies of literature continues to deepen and diversify the global literary landscape.

#### 4. Similarities between the Two Genres

Despite their divergent historical and cultural backgrounds, African and British novels exhibit significant affinities in thematic focus, narrative techniques, and cultural reflection. To begin, both traditions frequently engage with questions of identity. British texts such as Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* probes the intricacies of personal identity within social constraints, while African works like Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* examines the negotiation of individual and communal identity in the face of colonial disruption. Moreover, novels from both worlds operate as instruments of social and political critique. Charles Dickens's novels, including *Oliver Twist* and *Hard Times*, expose the injustices of industrial Britain; likewise, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Petals of Blood* interrogates postcolonial corruption and the failure to fulfill the promises of independence.

Secondly, both African and British novels have adopted realist modes to render quotidian life and social structures with verisimilitude. George Eliot's *Middlemarch* exemplifies British realist practice, while Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* employs a comparable realist register to depict the lived realities and constraints experienced by Nigerian women. Symbolism and allegory also recur across both traditions. In British letters, George Orwell's *Animal Farm* mobilizes allegory to expose and critique political systems; correspondingly, Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* integrates magical realism and allegorical motifs to comment on Nigeria's sociopolitical conditions. Furthermore, novels from each tradition function as mirrors of social transformation and cultural transition. Victorian narratives such as Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* registers the upheavals of industrialization and shifting moral codes; similarly, postcolonial African work like Wole Soyinka's *The Interpreters* probes the complexities and contradictions of societies in the aftermath of colonial rule.

Thirdly, a sustained intertextual conversation exists between the two traditions, with African and other postcolonial writers frequently reworking and critiquing canonical British texts. Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*, for example, reconceptualizes Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* from a Caribbean perspective, offering a postcolonial revision and critique of the metropolitan narrative.

Finally, the similarities between African and British novels highlight a shared engagement with universal human concerns and a mutual influence that transcends cultural and historical boundaries. Both literary traditions utilize narrative techniques that deepen the reader's understanding of complex social realities, while also reflecting their unique cultural contexts and histories. The interplay between these two literary worlds continues to enrich the global literary landscape, fostering a deeper appreciation of diverse human experiences.

## 5. Differences between African and British Novels

Despite shared affinities, African and British novels diverge markedly because of their distinct historical, cultural, and social contexts; these divergences appear in thematic emphases, narrative techniques, linguistic practices, and vantage points. First, British novels, frequently narrated from the perspective of imperial actors, tend to reflect the ambivalences of empire, the exoticizing impulse, and the rhetoric of exploration. Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, for example, frames Africa through a European gaze. By contrast, many African novels centre the experiences of the colonized, foregrounding the consequences of colonial intrusion, cultural dislocation, and anti-colonial struggle; Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* embodies the Igbo community's encounter with British rule. Second, while postcolonial issues are not always central in the British novel, contemporary British writing increasingly addresses multiculturalism and migration, as in Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*. In African literature, postcolonial concerns remain primary, encompassing neocolonial dependency, corruption, and the challenges of nation-building. For instance, Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* offers a trenchant critique of post-independence Ghanaian society.

Thirdly, British novels are typically written in standard British English, with attention to formal literary language and structure whereas African novels generally incorporate indigenous languages, pidgin, and local dialects, reflecting the linguistic diversity of the continent. This can be seen in Achebe's use of Igbo proverbs and idioms in *Things Fall Apart*. Moreover, British novel often centers on the experiences and perspectives of British characters, reflecting European cultural and social issues. For instance, E.M. Forster's *A Room with a View* focuses on British expatriates and their cultural encounters. However, African novels primarily present the viewpoints of African characters, emphasizing African experiences and perspectives. Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* focuses on Nigerian women's experiences and societal roles. In other words, the British novel tends to explore themes of modernity within a European context, examining industrialization, urbanization, and changing social norms, whereas; the African novel engages deeply with the tension between tradition and modernity, often within the framework of colonial history and post-colonial challenges. Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* evokes the conflict between traditional Yoruba culture and British colonial rule.

To sum up, the differences between African and British novels underscore the varied historical, cultural, and social contexts from which they emerge. While British novels often focus on individualism, class, and social change within a European framework, African novels are deeply intertwined with the themes of colonialism, cultural identity, and the struggle for self-determination. These distinctions highlight the rich diversity in global literature, offering readers a broad spectrum of human experiences and perspectives.

## Conclusion

The development of British and African novels reveals a complex interplay of differences and similarities shaped by their distinct historical, cultural, and social contexts. Understanding these nuances enhances readers' appreciation of global literature and its diverse expressions.

Both British and African novels evolved as responses to their respective historical and cultural environments. Early British novels, such as Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* and Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* emerged in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, reflecting the rise of individualism and the middle class in Britain. Similarly, the modern African novel emerged in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, influenced by the struggle for independence and the desire to reclaim cultural identity, as seen in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*.

Both traditions use the novel as a platform for social and political critique. British novels have historically critiqued social norms, class structures, and industrialization, as seen in the works of Charles Dickens and George Eliot. African novels accordingly address colonialism, post-colonialism, and socio-political issues, exemplified by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's works.

The origins of the British novel are deeply rooted in the socio-economic changes of 18<sup>th</sup> century Europe, reflecting the Enlightenment, industrialization, and the rise of the middle class. The African novel, however, is intertwined with the colonial and post-colonial history of the continent, focusing on the impact of European colonization and the subsequent struggle for independence and cultural revival.

British novels are primarily written in standard British English, reflecting the linguistic norms of their society. African novels very often blend indigenous languages, pidgin, and local flavors with English or French, reflecting the linguistic diversity of the continent and the legacy of colonial languages. This is evident in Achebe's use of Igbo proverbs in *Things Fall Apart* and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's decision to write in Gikuyu.

British novels frequently engage with themes of individualism, social mobility, and class dynamics, examining personal and societal concerns within relatively established social frameworks. By contrast, African novels predominantly address questions of cultural identity, the legacy of colonialism, and the socio-political conditions of postcolonial life, attending to the wider consequences of historical disruption and cultural conflict.

In sum, tracing the development from the origins of the British novel to the rise of the African novel reveals both points of convergence and divergence between these literary traditions. Each tradition functions as a mirror of its society, offering critical perspectives on the human condition, social organization, and cultural identity. The British novel contributed foundational forms and conventions to the modern novel, while African fiction has broadened the literary field through distinct perspectives and narrative practices. Together, they furnish a more complex and nuanced appreciation of global literature.

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