History and memory as revolutionary tools: An analysis of the significance of Ndabaningi Sithole’s historical novel Umvukela wamaNdebele (The Ndebele Revolution)

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Abstract

“The colonised man who writes for his people ought to use the past with the intention of opening the future, as an invitation to action and a basis for hope.(Fanon 1969: 187)”

This paper analyses Ndabaningi Sithole’s historical novel Umvukela WamaNdebele (1956) as a tool for revolution. It argues that although the novel was written under repressive colonial conditions, the author uses the history of the Ndebele in a militant and radical manner to come up with rebellious literature meant to raise the consciousness of the oppressed Africans in the then Rhodesia, to fight against the oppressors. The novel, although written in the 1950s, transcends historical epochs as it interrogates the present post Zimbabwean independence situation, especially the betrayal of the aspirations of the masses by the present leadership and thus gives a direction for the future. History can be a tool for empowerment and liberation. The way a historical artist retrieves and articulates the history of his/her people influences how those people negotiate their present and shape their future.

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The historical novel is a literary genre that links strong dramatic plot lines and credible human psychology, within a setting characterized by specific historical details. The founder of this genre, which had a great impact on Romantic Europe, was Sir Walter Scott (1771–1832), whose novels, starting with Waverley (1814), created a passion for the historical novel among readers and writers that remains strong up to this day. Scott's main achievement was to get people to realize that history was not just a list of political and religious events, but the product of human decisions. He introduced a new concept of history, based on the lives of the ordinary people, rather than on those of kings and noblemen. Many early historical novels played an important role in the rise of European popular interest in the history of the Middle Ages. Victor Hugo's The Hunchback of Notre Dame often receives credit for fueling the movement to preserve the Gothic architecture of France, leading to the establishment of the Monuments historiques, the French governmental authority for historic preservation. In some works, the accuracy of the historical elements has been questioned, as in Alexandre Dumas' Queen Margot Postmodern History and memory as revolutionary tools: An analysis of the significance of Ndabaningi Sithole's historical novel Umvukela wamaNdebele (The Ndebele Revolution). Croatian Chemistry in the 20th Century. From the Establishment of the Republic of Croatia on June 25th, 1991 to the End of the Century. History of Historical Archaeology. Sawmilling in Croatia Part 1 – Historical Review of Croatian Sawmilling. Historical sources classification at history lessons: methodologists' view. The history of historical earthquake research in Germany. In the article we attempt to detect the return of the grand narrative, both in the case of criticism, when it addresses the trauma suffered by others, and in the moral discourse within the novels.