

M. Carme Junyent

The volatilization of literature

Humankind is immersed in an unprecedented process of linguistic homogenization: according to predictions, if things do not change, in the 22nd century only 10% of the present linguistic heritage will be left. We are not certain of how this will affect life on our planet, but the destruction of resources, the loss of knowledge which has been accumulated for centuries, the different ways of seeing the world and, in short, all that languages are and represent, will probably have disastrous consequences for all.

All the consequences it has entailed so far must be considered: marginalization, uprooting, poverty, violence and a very long etcetera, which can be summed up in all the possible forms of suffering. There is an aspect, however, that, as it precedes the process and is intimately linked to it, at least allows us to understand what is at stake in this story. I am referring to literary creation.

Needless to say language is the raw material of literature, but creation cannot be separated from cultural tradition, and from the literary tradition and the referential world which nourishes the author. In addition, the recipient of this creation, the relationship authors establish with their readers and the message they transmit can also be added. Although the act of writing is individual, this does not imply it is dissociated from a context, and contexts have a history. The individuality of the act of writing allows the choice of language, and history is full of authors who have chosen a language which is not their own or who have written in two languages. Conrad, Nabokov, Beckett, Ionesco or Celan are some of the names always mentioned whenever a change of language has to be justified. However, does anybody consider Conrad a representative of Polish literature or *Lolita* a work of Russian literature? It would be odd to do so, as the choice of language also implies the choice of a referential world in which to insert oneself and, especially, of a recipient.

As the mercantilization of literature has turned the recipients into consumers, the creation has also adapted itself to the consumers taste, and market laws have required the product to be addressed to the maximum number of potential readers; so authors choose majority languages to obtain readers. The choice clearly implies the renunciation of history or, at least, the insertion in an alien history, a history which has created its own stereotypes of the other and which will not allow them to be changed. This, therefore, transforms the writer into a reproducer of stereotypes and a transmitter of official history, dissociated from the context which, in theory, nourishes him, who creates and recreates a product for consumption. Literature, however, has volatilized.

THE “CHOICE” OF LANGUAGE

For isn't it odd that the only language I have in which to speak of this crime is the language of the criminal who committed the crime? And what can that really mean? The language of the criminal can explain and express the deed only from the criminal's point of view.

JAMAICA KINCAID, *A small place* (1988)

In the history of the processes of linguistic substitution of a large percentage of the languages which have disappeared during the 20th century, a common element can be found which initiates the process: the adoption of the dominant language by a cultured elite. This fact, which could be nothing more than a “social indicator”, usually has immediate implications which often explain the subsequent developments: language becomes an instrument of power which allows the people holding it to control those who do not. This is naturally a good ploy to achieve dissemination, and this explains, for example, the rejection of the use of subordinate languages by the speakers themselves. This rejection can be restricted to certain realms, education for example, or even reach the most intimate realms of communication, but whatever scope it has, we will always find the feeling that the subordinate language reduces or hampers the possibilities of social mobility. The fact that the possibility of thriving by means of the subordinate language is not even considered is quite incomprehensible unless we take into account that the dissemination of the dominant language goes hand in hand with an ideology which is, in the end, the most destructive factor for linguistic diversity.

The colonial enterprise, as any form of imperialism, is characterised by an absolute disdain towards people, their cultures and their languages and, when faced with self-destruction, it is easier to change a language than to change skin colour, for example. However, giving up one's own language is a painful enough process for a very powerful ideological apparatus not to be needed, and this apparatus is provided by disdain, humiliation, punishment and marginalization; if this is not enough, genocide, deportation, the kidnapping of children and other similar practices can always be resorted to, therefore leaving the victims defenceless and with no possibility of choice. Nevertheless, the process of persuasion is more “civilized”, making believe that the language that has been transmitted is useless. This method is more civilized and more effective, because in the end, what is left is mental colonization, as destructive as colonization itself and much longer lasting. It is actually so civilized and efficient that

it even manages to make its victims believe that they have chosen the new language freely, and, in consequence, any attempt at recovering linguistic heritage is branded as imperialistic and antidemocratic.

When dealing with literature, the social fracture implied by dominant language versus subordinated language is reproduced in the authors who “choose” and those who probably do not even think about choosing, that is, those who write in the dominant language, and those who write in the language they have been allotted. The former are in theory addressing the world, the latter are simply creating; the former set themselves up as representatives of their people, the latter write for them; the former are recognized, the latter are hidden by the former. Worst of all is the fact that the former are those who, with products manufactured for the market, have impeded the flotation of literary creation. This result is clearly linked to language.

If there is a representative figure of what mental colonization can imply for a writer, it is the Senegalese Leopold Sédar Senghor, the instigator of what was supposed to be a back-to-roots movement, the *négritude*, and the author of some of the most servile texts towards the language of the master which can be found: “Why do we write in French? Because we are cultural hybrids, because although we feel in black, we express ourselves in French, because French is a language with a universal vocation, so that our language also addresses French people from France and other men, because French is a language of kindness and honesty. [...] I know its resources for having tasted it, chewed it, taught it and it is the language of gods. So listen to Corneille, La Fontaine, Rimbaud, Péguy and Claudel. Listen to the great Hugo. French, great organs that are suitable for every tone, every effect, the gentlest and most dazzling sweetness of tempest. It is, alternatively and at the same time, flute, oboe, trumpet, tam-tam and even cannon”¹.

Senghor’s poetry is so alien to Africa that he can hardly be considered an African poet. A similar fate seems to have befallen the work of another member of the *négritude*, the Martinican writer Aimé Césaire, of whom his fellow countryman Patrick Chamoiseau makes the following assessment: “And, for example, the relationship Césaire has with the French language, his adherence to this language, comes from this dynamics; a dynamics and a relationship with the language which is almost a relationship of idolatry. And the problem with Antillean writers is that, when they wrote in French, they became French. They were so concerned with universality, so concerned with obliterating any trace of Creole, of presence in the country and in the place where they found themselves —a mean little country of black people— so greatly concerned with universality that they used a language in which they disappeared completely”².

The *négritude* inspired a similar movement, called *Vamos descobrir Angola*, led by Agostinho Neto, Portuguese being its vehicular language. Neto, as president of his country —and in a similar way to Senghor— did very little for the revitalization of African languages, in spite of his well-intentioned discourses about returning to roots. Writers such as Wole Soyinka, who wrote in English, or Tchicaya U’Tamsi, who wrote in French

■ ¹ L. S. SENGHOR, *Poèmes*, Paris: Seuil, 1973, p. 25.

² P. CHAMOISEAU, “Un rapport problématique”, in L. GAUVING (ed.), *L’écrivain francophone à la croisée des langues. Entretien*, Paris: Karthala, 1997, p. 37.

were in opposition to the *négritude*, in spite of the fact that their linguistic behaviour was identical to that of those they condemn. The processes that led the country to independence initiated a debate about the language of literature, in which Wole Soyinka showed special virulence: “There is an inherent element of irrationality, the unwillingness to accept the socio-political reality of which those affected form part, an attempt to leave them out of the national structures —out of the judicial and legislative structure, traffic signs and shops, all of which use this language— an attempt to make them operate outside history, outside the reality of their country”³.

Tchicaya U’Tamsi discharges an enraged argument which writers who have “chosen” the dominant language have used in all its possible variants: “So you want to know if it bothers me to write in French? Or why in French and not in Congolese? Well, I ask myself and my reply is: It certainly does bother me, but what can I do? What do we do with an impairment which is consequence of an accident? We drag it along until our death hoping it is not the genesis of an atavism for those who follow on”⁴.

We will speak about this “atavism” further on. Let us, however, first go back to Soyinka’s argument about “the country’s reality”, because when this reality has been faced with honesty, the answer has been very different.

Ngugi wa Thiong’o is probably the author who is best known for having abandoned the dominant language in favour of his own language, in this case Kikuiu. The return to roots is actually caused by a clash with the “reality” of his country: wanting to write a play for a theatre group in his village, he realises that he cannot do it in a language,

“This choice [of an alien language] also implies the choice of a kind of reader, and this is where the alienation of the work with respect to its context condemns it to volatilization”

English, which they do not know; this prompts a reflection which makes him abandon English as a language for creation and to write subsequent works in Kikuyu. The case of Ngugi also illustrates quite a revealing fact: although his works in English are a fierce criticism of colonization, of neocolonization, of

the corruption in his country, Ngugi had never had any problems with censorship; it is evident that they were not too concerned about a work that, in any case, could not reach the great majority of Kenyans as they did not understand the language in which it was written. On the other hand, a play in Kikuyu results in his imprisonment and later his exile. Ngugi’s experience is similar to that of Ismaïla Traoré. This Malian author also reaches the conclusion that “literature in national languages can be a weapon to participate in the awakening of consciences”⁵ and, as a result of the premiere of one of his plays (where the author was not mentioned), the director of l’École Normale Supérieure where it was staged was sanctioned and removed from his post. The person who was at the time in charge of the Organization of Malian Students was arrested and tortured, but he assumed all responsibilities and refused to name the author. The reflection that made Ngugi and Traoré write in their own languages is shared by other authors such as

Sembène Ousmane, from Senegal, who, having written many plays in French, started directing cinema in Wolof and publishing a magazine in this language; or Gassou Diawara, who wrote his first works in French but who in the end reached the conclusion that “we have written in the great languages of Western communication; for the moment we are strangers in our own home, because our people do not identify themselves with us”⁶. As André Salifou says: “I have absolutely nothing against ‘francophony’ not even against ‘Frenchness’, but no one is fooled: when they say that a country like Niger, for example, is francophone, everybody knows it is a way of saying what the country is not. The Nigerians who are capable of reading a book —or even the merest texts— written in French [...] are no more than a handful of privileged people”⁷.

Taking into account the percentages of population who know the dominant language in many parts of the world, it is obvious that the unwillingness to accept the reality described by Soyinka is mostly typical of those who “chose” an alien language. The question is that, inevitably, this choice also implies the choice of a kind of reader, and this is where the alienation of the work with respect to its context condemns it to volatilization.

THE CHOICE OF READER

In Africa, Paris is still the privileged place of recognition. It is in Paris where African books are published and sold.

HAMIDOU DIA

When the question of the language of literature is raised, one of the arguments most often put forward by writers who have chosen to write in the dominant language is that of the potential public. But although this comes down to the possible number of readers, this choice implies a specific kind of public. What public is in the mind of a writer who says things like this: “Even when kidnapping is advised by the girl’s parents or they mutually agree on the matter, in no case has this not been considered an infringement of our ancestors’ good principles”⁸.

Or like this: “Her deepening despair found expression in the names she gave her children. One of them was a pathetic cry, Onwumbiko, ‘Death I implore you’. But death took no notice. Onwumbiko died in his fifteenth month. The next child was a girl, Ozoemena, ‘May it not happen again’. She died in her eleventh month, and two others after her. Ekwefi then became defiant and called her next child Onwuma, ‘Death may please himself’. And he did”⁹.

What makes novels become anthropology textbooks in which even the translation of proper names becomes a part of the novel? Evidently, the author is thinking of a reader

■ ³ W. SOYINKA, “Ethics, Ideology and the Critic”, in K. HOLST PETERSEN (ed.), *Criticism and Ideology*, Uppsala: Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 1988, p. 37.

⁴ TCHICAYA U’ TAMSİ, “Le socialisme c’est la révolution à parfaire”, in M. ROMBAUT, *Nouvelle poésie négro-africaine*, Paris: Saint-Germain-des Prés, 1976, p. 141.

⁵ A-B. ISCHINGER, *Kulturidentität und Frankographie*. Afrikanistische Monographien 5, Universität zu Köln, 1995, p. 88.

⁶ Id., p. 92

⁷ A. SALIFOU, *Tamimoune*, Paris: Présence Africaine, 1973, p. 7.

⁸ X. UANHENGA, *Maka na sanzala*, Lisboa: Eds. 70, 1979, p. 87.

⁹ CH. ACHEBE, *Things Fall Apart*, New York: Fawcett Crest, 1959.

Dibuix negre III (Black Drawing III), Antoni Tàpies (2005)
paint and pencil on paper 23,8 x 16,5 cm



Tàpies

who ignores the context of his work and, therefore, needs to be put in the picture. For some, as for the Congolese writer Sony Labou Tansi, for example, this seems to be the main objective, given that, as François Lumwamu says: “The identity of the Sonyan man coincides with the promotion of ethnical culture. In this sense, at several levels, Sony’s novels are marked by this ideal of defence and illustration of Kongo culture. The many *excursus* in these texts do not seem to have any reason other than offering, through fiction, an insight into this culture, whether it is dealing with the structuring of space in well identified clans or with time”¹⁰.

But the choice of reader does not only imply the anthropologization of literature but it all too often implies the creation of characters, worlds and situations which fit the stereotype the chosen reader has of the other. This corresponds clearly with what Edward Said calls “Orientalism”, a discourse, according to the author himself: “by which European culture was able to manage —and even produce— the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period”¹¹.

And as he says in a later article: “Orientalism is a style of thought based on an ontological and epistemological distinction between ‘Orient’ and (almost always) ‘Occident’. Thus, a great number of writers, among which there are poets, novelists, philosophers, political theorists, economists and imperial administrators, have accepted the basic distinction between East and West as a starting point for the creation of theories, epic, novels, social descriptions and political explanations about Orient, its people, customs, ‘mind’, fate, etc.”¹².

Although orientalism develops in the 19th century, the model of relationship established by it expands and ramifies during the 20th century as a pattern of relationships between Occident and the rest of the world, and it is the one adopted by authors who, with the choice of language, choose also the reader. The difference resides in the fact that in the former case the stereotype is created by Occident, and in the latter case, when the writers who have chosen the dominant language are the ones who come into play, they are actually adding fuel to these stereotypes and in doing so, in spite of their self-appointed role of intermediaries —or interpreters, as they are known— become screens which stand in the way of true knowledge of the other. Naturally, Western publishing industry has also played its part, as in the case of Heinemann and its African Writers Series: “A cursory history of the Series suggests that Heinemann, for all its well-intentioned activities, may have contributed to the continuing exoticization of Africa it has promoted by way of its talented literary protégés and has been subjected to a self-empowering, implicitly neocolonialist ‘anthropological gaze’”¹³.

By simply looking through the catalogue of this collection, it is noticeable that, as far as language is concerned, the majority of the titles are originally written in English, and regarding the translations, they can be found translated from French, Portuguese and Arabic, while very few works are originally written in African languages. It is therefore obvious that the market lays down its own conditions and that the “interpreters” do nothing to change them. On the whole, this leads to an isolation and an alienation

■ ¹⁰ A-P. BOKIBA, *Écriture et identité dans la littérature africaine*, Paris: L’Harmattan, 1998, p. 129.

¹¹ E. SAID, *Orientalism*, New York: Vintage, 1978, p. 31.

¹² E. SAID, “From Orientalism”, in P. MONGIA, (ed.),

Contemporary Postcolonial Theory. A Reader, Arnold: p. 21.

¹³ G. HUGGAN, *The Post-Colonial Exotic. Marketing the Margins*, London & New York: Routledge, 2001, p. 50.

which critics have not refrained from denouncing. Anthony Appiah, for example, defines “postcoloniality” as “the condition of what could be called, without the merest generosity, *comprador intelligentsia*: a relatively small group of writers and thinkers in the Western style and formed the Western way, who are intermediaries in the trade of cultural products from the capitalist world to the periphery”¹⁴. Or Grahan Huggan: Indo-Anglian writing is the product of a roving band of privileged diasporics; that it has become the happy hunting ground of a fairly small group of clubbable cosmopolitans, who are producing a self-consciously globalized literature “written by elites, and defined and canonized by elites”¹⁵.

The elite is, therefore, the one who establishes the characteristics that the product must have, the one who acts as a censor or promoter of ideological, aesthetic, thematic trends etc. Huggan remembers, for example, the first meeting of Commonwealth

“The elite is the one who establishes the characteristics that the product must have, the one who acts as a censor or promoter of ideological, aesthetic, thematic trends etc.”

writers in Leeds, where they required the writer to be an “internationalist”, who must be comprehensible to readers in Heckmondville or Helmsby, and asks himself “how the writer in London or New York would react to the demand that s/he must also be comprehensible to readers in Murrurundi or Kumasi”¹⁶.

The choice of reader, apart from alienation, also has other effects that have contributed to the volatilization of literature. A significant one is the isolating of the recipients, both the “chosen ones” and those that have been “left out”.

As the majority of writers who have “chosen” the language come from the university world, it could at least be expected that their “natural” public would also be found at university. The metropolis have already made an effort to organize their territory, in case an Eliot were mistaken for a Zulfikar Ghose, or a Proust for an Oulougem; there is, therefore, English literature and Commonwealth literature, or French literature and Francophone literature, or Portuguese literature and Overseas literature, or Spanish literature and South American literature. Therefore universities act accordingly: the programmes in which both are represented are very rare. If we look at it from another perspective, that is, from overseas, or from the colonies, or from the provinces, or from the Orient, the pattern is reproduced. It is sufficient to analyse the recommended reading in African literature courses to realize that those canonized by Heinemann are always on the list and that they are rarely renewed; in India, Narayan or Desai are ever-present, while younger writers have very few possibilities. Of course this is a usual source of complaint amongst marginalized writers, but if they were asked about their referents, would they not say they were Pound, Faulkner, Flaubert, Hugo and, in short, all those considered universal classics? So what can they say in their favour, if they themselves have shown what the path to success was? What need is there to read intermediaries if we can access the sources directly? And when we look at the metropolis, the reply is not too different. The writer Zulfikar Ghose

—Pakistani, though born in Bombay— tormented by his own identity, complains: “As you yourselves know better than I do, some of the best new writing in English has come from the Commonwealth. Much of it goes unread in America and Britain. And much of European and South American literature goes unread too”¹⁷.

But beyond the public that is chosen, there is a despised public, the one they claim to represent and the one that nurtures them, and the one upon which one day responsibilities could be claimed, since as Pius Ngandu Nkashama says: “The debate [about language] is exclusively oriented towards the ‘foreign school’, ignoring the majority of unschooled children, or those who have left school after primary or secondary education. How can you think of building the ‘future of the continent’ based only on the ten per cent of the whole country’s population who are high school graduates or the half per cent who are university students? The loss of school children should make the ‘creators of great linguistic theories’ reflect and take into consideration the problem of African languages, mainly taking into account the millions of youngsters who have not been formed at school or received any technical formation from technical schools, semi-illiterate, but who also have their place in society. It must be considered that they are the group from which the ‘death squads’ are regularly recruited, cynically used by the ‘combatants’ who appear in the countryside and in the hinterland: in Liberia or Uganda, in Chad or Sudan, in the former Belgian Congo or in Angola; everywhere where senseless and fratricide fighting keeps destroying contemporary societies”¹⁸.

This despised public can also appear in the works themselves. The Indonesian writer Pramoedya Ananta Toer, author of a quartet whose protagonist is the prototype of intellectual who opposes colonization although he is not in touch with his own culture, lets this public speak through the character’s mother: “And you, what do you care about the Dutch? You are still not an authentic Javanese. You do not pay enough attention to your Javanese ancestors. People say that you have become a learned man but, where are the poems that I can read at night, when you are not by my side?”

“I cannot write in Javanese, mother”.

“See? If you were a proper Javanese you would be able to write in Javanese. You write in Dutch, Gus, because you do not want to feel Javanese any more. You write for the Dutch”¹⁹.

This contempt can result in the author’s alienation from his place of reference, but what is worse is that it deprives the immediate public of the referents they could provide, as Rigoberta Menchú says: “The Ladine ethnic group is often foreign in its own country. The same happens with the majority of the scholars. They have not felt confident with their volcanoes, their rivers; they have not felt confident with their villages, with this beautiful cultural continent, with the valuable things there are here. They have always looked for a source of reference outside. Many of them have moved to find inspiration. On many

■ ¹⁴ K. A. APPIAH, “Is the Post- in Postmodernism the Post- in Postcolonial?”, in P. MONGIA, (ed.), *Contemporary Postcolonial Theory. A Reader*, Arnold: 1996, p. 62.

¹⁵ G. HUGGAN, *The Post-Colonial Exotic...*, p. 79.

¹⁶ Id., p. 233.

¹⁷ F. JUSSAWALLA, R. W. DASENBROCK, (eds.) *Interviews*

with Writers of the Post-Colonial World, University Press of Mississippi, 1992, p. 188.

¹⁸ P. NGANDU NKASHAMA, *Littératures et écritures en langues africaines*, Paris: L’Harmattan, 1992, p. 112-113.

¹⁹ P. ANATA TOER, *Tierra Humana*, Tafalla: Ed. Txalaparta, 1995, (or. 1975), p.331.

occasions they were with one foot in America and another in Paris. This has also affected and has caused a delay in the cultural development of our people”²⁰.

The fact is that sometimes it seems these authors need a static referent as a source of inspiration and that the interaction of the referent with their work could leave them without a setting or without actors, as this could distance them from the stereotype they need to reproduce. This way, the author becomes the spectator of a world that he has abandoned. He will regret illiteracy, but will not ask himself if he has contributed to its eradication, and will complain about the lack cultural development, but will not have to justify his performance. It is then when dissociation from context will be complete.

DISSOCIATION FROM CONTEXT

... So all our best work... appears first to an audience which either regards us like some glass-enclosed specimen... or like some exotic weed to be sampled and made a conversation piece... or else we become some international organization's pet.

ATUKWEI OKAI

Choosing a language may entail choosing the reader, but when the language is alien then nearly all the ingredients are present for the creation of a volatile product. As was mentioned at the beginning, literature is a creation associated with a tradition and with a referential realm and it cannot be conceived without taking the reader into account either. The choosing of an alien language causes dissociation between the referential realm and the reader, and so the text becomes a marginal product, for some because it does not belong to their cultural environment and for the others because it is, simply, incomprehensible. It is questionable whether this type of literature could create a new tradition, but a glance at the development of 20th century literature does not exactly show this tendency.

As has already been mentioned, Tchicaya U'Tamsi expressed his wish that the “impairment” of writing in a foreign language did not create an atavism for those who followed on. It cannot be said, for the moment, that his wish has been fulfilled, but quite the opposite. Alain Ricard's synthesis of the generational sequence in Nigerian poetry —generally applicable to other literatures and other genres— clearly shows that the choice of language made by the first generation, Tchicaya U'Tamasi included, led the next generation into a cul-de-sac: “These poets are scholars and university people. They no longer apologise for writing in the language they teach. They are the third generation of Nigerian poets writing in English: the first generation adopted Victorian rhetoric; poetry was a discourse aimed to manifest clearly the mastery of English by scholars, politicians, journalists and educated Africans; the second generation is a brilliant university group who have tried to equal Eliot and Pound, with the risk of sounding pedantic and ostentatious, but proving they took poetry seriously. For the Latinist Okigobo, poetry is a separate language, destined for the *happy few*: in this same sense the problem of poetic consciousness is only a mastering of the particular codes of this language. For Wole Soyinka, poetry is also a separate language: poetry is not the place to show the Yoruba

inspiration present in his drama works. The poetic text is closed within itself and does not converse with the mother language. The third generation of poets has appropriated English, but has not been able to spare the reflection on the relation between poetical consciousness and linguistic consciousness. These writers must have no complexes: English is the language of the Nigerian elite and they adopt Wole Soyinka's pragmatic approach regarding linguistic practice. But, on the other hand, they do not wish their poetry to be classified as an intellectual exercise, and wish to abandon its university image; they cannot continue avoiding the reflection on the peoples' languages and the relation of their poetry with popular culture"²¹.

The truth is that, no matter how necessary that reflection is, the third generation continues to be as detached from its context as the first. It is surprising to verify that forty years of independence has done very little to decolonize the mind of the elite and the arguments they use to justify their choice are more typical of colonial civil servants than of previous generations of authors. In fact if the first generation were able to use Caliban type arguments (you had to appropriate the oppressor's language in order to fight against him), the younger generation argue that their language "is not written", or is not taught at school, or that it has not enough words, or that "what matters is what you write, not which language it is written in". The author who now jumps on the bandwagon of exoticism as a representative of his people is more a subject of the market than an intermediary, and, does probably not even consider the language an issue, since, as Boehmer states, the post colonial writer of the 90s is: "possibly more a cultural traveller, or an 'extra-territorial', than a national. Ex-colonial by birth, 'Third World' in cultural interest, cosmopolitan in almost every other way, he or she works within the precincts of the Western metropolis while at the same time retaining thematic and/or political connections with a national background"²².

The Pakistani authoress writes about the effects of this: "Those who are writing from outside their countries do tend to be more critical. It almost appears sometimes that they are pandering to the Western world, reinforcing the stereotype the Western world would like to see reinforced and perhaps feel they can't do it themselves and would prefer somebody else to do it for them.[...] Then, of course, there's this whole new body of writers who live in England, let's say, or perhaps in France, who write about their countries, be it Africa, be it Subcontinent, and their way of presenting things, their whole slant on the world and their part of the world, because they are living in a foreign country and they've adopted another country, does change. There's less compassion. There's less realism, and they start seeing their own backgrounds the way the West has been seeing them"²³.

What the market will rarely receive is the perception of the matter held by "the others", those who, having cultivated a work linked to their context, integrated in a tradition and not having "chosen" any language, remain concealed from those self-appointed representatives of their people.

■ ¹⁹ R. MENCHÚ, *Rigoberta: La nieta de los mayas*, Madrid: El País-Aguilar, 1998, p. 160.

²¹ A. RICARD, *Littératures d'Afrique noire. Des langues aux livres*, Paris: CNRS & Karthala, 1995, p. 187-188.

²² E. BOEHMER, *Colonial and Post-Colonial Literature*, Oxford University Press, 1995, p. 78.

²³ E. JUSSAWALLA, R. W. DASENBROCK (eds.), *Interviews with Writers of the Post-Colonial World*, P. 212.

In the year 1997, Salman Rushdie co-published an anthology of Indian literature, *The Vintage Book of Indian Writing 1947-1997*, for which he only chose English-writing authors. He could have added the prefix *Anglo* to the title, as, according to Rushdie, English is one of the languages in India, but in fact he wanted an anthology which represented the whole country. The author justifies his choice and the arguments could not be more cynical, because, if, some 400 languages are spoken in India, many of them

“A language is not only an instrument of communication. Hidden in that language is the knowledge accumulated by the speakers for centuries”

with a long tradition of written literature, who can have sufficient knowledge to choose? As he says, the texts included are the most important works produced in the 15 official languages of India, and they represent the most valuable contribution made by India to the book

world. It is not difficult to imagine the reaction of the excluded ones. Shyamala Narayan, who wrote a review of the anthology, accuses him of being excluded from the debate on the languages in India and of wanting to represent the speakers without knowing the languages. U.R. Ananthamurthy, a writer in Kannada, quite rightly states that “No Indian writer in any of the languages can presume to know what is happening in the other Indian languages. Rushdie does not even live in India. How can he make such an enormous assumption?”²⁴ Nabaneeta Deb Sen compares him to Macaulay, a colonial British civil servant, the author of a project for the teaching of the local languages which included the creation of a class of “interpreters”, who would be intermediaries between the colonizers and colonized, who, naturally would have to speak English. It is clear that Rushdie is considered an interpreter by the West, but he is not the most suitable for the job.

Macaulay’s project was an utter failure, especially in the creation of this class of interpreters, who finally became acultured individuals and once in the metropolis, look at their place of origin with borrowed eyes. If the way of looking is changed, it is easier to despise, as Buchi Emecheta does: “In Nigeria, as people do not leave the country, they think that real English is the English spoken by the colonizers twenty years ago. That is how you will find English spoken by people who have not left Nigeria. But English is a language that grows, like any other language. The African writer who stays in Nigeria and writes in English is left to one side. This writer uses old-fashioned English to write. He thinks that people still speak that way. So that when he comes to the West people laugh at him without him realizing”²⁵.

The most regrettable of all is that, once dissociated from the context and not being able to integrate in any tradition, the fight for a place in the market intensifies, and within this fight behaviours can range from Emecheta’s disrespect to the subtlety of oblivion. Alain Ricard remarks that: “Nadine Gordimer does not spare praise in an essay on black African literature: for her, Senghor would be the greatest poet, Soyinka the best playwright and Achebe the only novelist of ‘international class’. Her opinions, still seem appropriate, twenty years later. She had only omitted South Africans among the African writers”²⁶.

THE VOLATILIZATION OF LITERATURE

The students sang without pausing in a language which was neither French nor their own language. It was a strange mixture which the village people took for French and the French for the indigenous language. They all applauded. FERDINAND OYONO, *Une vie de boy*

The adoption of an alien language as a creative instrument, as long as it is an individual phenomenon, is only as important as the individual's skill to use it. This is obviously not what is being questioned. Neither is the question the choice of the language of the environment regardless of whether it is the mother tongue. What is being questioned is the borrowing of an alien instrument to re-create one's own world. The reasoning being that this choice may be innocent, but never innocuous. This choice entails an ideological component justifying the subordination of some languages to others, of some cultures to others and of some people to others. This choice implies the incorporation of the others' point of view of one's own reality. That is where creation becomes deception.

A language is not only an instrument of communication. Hidden in that language is the knowledge accumulated by the speakers for centuries. It is a unique way of explaining the world, and an instrument of adaptation to the environment. When a writer chooses an alien language, he also chooses a vision of the world, and this vision may be incomprehensible for someone not familiar with the referential world of the language. "Visite", one of Senghor's poems, begins like this:

*Je songe dans la pénombre étroite d'un après-midi
Me visitent les fatigues de la journée
Les défunts de l'année, les souvenirs de la décade*

In other poems by the same author it is possible to find images like these:

*Et voilà qu'au Coeur de l'Été et de Midi, je te découvre.
Bleue par les prés frais de Septembre.
Quel mois ? Quelle année ?
Que viendra la moisson après l'hivernage pénible
Est-ce le Printemps – partir!
Cette vacance de trois mois comme ce sombre couloir de trois semestres captifs*

The list is endless and there is no need to continue, but the conclusion is immediate: Senghor, the poet of *négritude*, the one who claims to vindicate his cultural legacy, follows a European measuring of time. What can "au Coeur de l'Été" mean to an African? And "l'hivernage pénible" mean to someone from Senegal? Such cases as Senghor's can be found everywhere. Emmanuel Dongala, in an allegedly magical realism novel entitled *Le feu des origines*, tells how Makunku discovers the annual cycles—the Georgian Calendar, to be exact—which as the languages show, have no connection with the measuring of time in the cultures of that zone. Donato Ndongo, in *Los poderes de la Tempestad*, paints

■ S. NARAYAN, review of S. RUSHDIE & E. WEST (eds.), *The Vintage Book of Indian Writing 1947-1997*, 1997, in *Ariel*, 29, 1, 1998, p. 264.

²⁵ F. JUSSAWALLA, R. W. DASENBROCK (eds.), *Interviews with Writers of the Post-Colonial World*, p. 88.

²⁶ A. RICARD, *Littératures d'Afrique noire...*, p. 238.

a picture of Macías's Guinea where the good characters use a Christian rhetoric and the villains use a Marxist-Leninist one, where the description of the native culture seems taken from a colonial civil servant's diary. Tutuola was acclaimed by Western critics and public for his *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* because he allegedly dared to challenge English syntax, in a story reproducing supposedly African narrative. We could continue to give examples of the farce the "chosen" language literature has become.

Tutuola's case is paradigmatic, and above all, a premonition of what is now called postcolonial, or emerging, or ethnic, or new literature, which is only a product for consumption by the West. Tutuola first appeared with a disconcerting book and, rather than admitting that the king was naked, everyone applauded. He tried the same move again but without success, his later works went practically unnoticed. This confusion appears both in publishing policies (even in the aforementioned *African Writers Series*, there are texts which can be directly included in this group) and among the critics who have acclaimed texts which hardly merited the category of melodramas, like Cyprian Ekwensi's, to mention just another historical writer. Due to the lack of criteria, they resort to trends to solve the question: nobody remembers the Haitian authors who enjoyed the public favour of the French in the 50s; the West Indian writers who also had their golden age in the 60s (v. s. Naipaul, Sam Selvon, George Lamming, Wilson Harris) are now complaining about lack of continuity; in the 80s it was the Indian authors turn... But all considered, what has it to do with literature?

The fact that these authors themselves miss continuity in creative work is already a sign that, despite having chosen a dominant language, they do not consider themselves a part of the literary tradition in these languages; and even though they appeal to Joyce or Kafka to justify their option, it is obvious that they are different cases. The difference lies in the self-imposed role of intermediary. This role alone places them in no man's land even if they explain it as a will of universalism, but their main deception is rethinking a world that lives in a different language. A world that neither understands them nor is interested in them, and a world, presumably, they do not understand and that only interests them as a stage. They have played the exotic card to present themselves but have entered through the wrong door. If the elements they use are a borrowed language, an alien tradition, a referential world from which they have dissociated themselves and a recipient who has fed on stereotypes, what kind of message are they trying to convey?

Globalization has only emphasised the contradictions of those who turn their backs on their natural public to address the market. Dazzled by the West, they cannot conceive success without the Empire's recognition. The Empire, in turn, is pleased when tame subjects return the values they had been transmitted even when they are covered in a coat of rebelliousness to enhance those democratic values it boasts. As Charles de Gaulle put it: "France has done a lot for Guinea. There is clear evidence of this in the fact that the previous speaker (Sekou Turé) spoke very good French..."

Literature can be many things, but without honesty, without authenticity, there is no literature. If false raw material is used in the first place, the result cannot be expected to be authentic. Therefore, those who have thwarted the access to other literatures, have also given us, in exchange, a consumer product. Literature has volatilized ||