

A. Oladipo Agboluaje

A. Oladipo Agboluaje about himself:

I am a playwright and tutor of playwriting and post-colonial performance. I am based in the UK but I love writing plays set in Nigeria that are written for a Nigerian audience. That means the language, content and conventions are devised primarily for an audience that possesses what drama scholar Susan Bennett terms a 'horizon of expectations', where the audience members possess contextual knowledge of a performance and its aesthetics. In this case, the horizon of expectations is different from the normative, white, middle class, theatre-going, UK audience. I choose to write with a Nigerian audience in mind because I believe that universality comes from being specific. An audience member might not be conversant with the peculiarities of a setting's political and cultural landscape but through dramatic action, character motivation and story arc, they can follow a character through a story to understand and identify with their actions. What this does is refuse

to adapt the script to the perspective (and preconceived notions) of a predominantly white audience. It rejects the imposition of their conventional thinking on the text. The performance of the text, combined with the response of black audience members, allows for a different form of engagement, it dispossesses the dominant audience of a knowledge described by Chinua Achebe as 'I know My Africa'. It puts the power of interpretation in the hands of the marginalized audience.

■
■

OU

B.

I T S T

B. What does 'tradition' in literature mean to me?

Tradition in literature means engaging imaginatively and critically with the selective work of the past, bearing in mind that the imaginative and critical faculties can work together, sometimes in synchronicity and at other times diametrically opposed to one another. Looking back, I think of my relationship to tradition in terms of growing up watching black and white American and British films, listening to the music of my parents and reading the books in their library. I wanted to write like the authors of those books I admired, especially when the idea of a canon filtered through to me through my parents, through my education and through the affirmation of the literary establishment. Growing older, when I had greater autonomy to choose my own reading material, along with the affirmation of my peers came the division into tribes of those of us who preferred one genre over another genre and one author over another author. This is my way of saying that tradition for me is a paradoxical struggle

between idiosyncratic choices made both consciously and unconsciously within a Gramscian hegemony. But there was also an understanding of a tradition that helped me socialize into Nigerian society, having moved there from London with my parents at the age of nine. The weekly Yoruba popular theatre shows and soap operas and comedies on TV eased me socially, culturally and psychically into Nigerian culture. Kola Onadipe's *Koku Baboni* and the novels of Cyprian Ekwensi – *The Drummer Boy*, and *The Passport of Mallam Ili* – created a landscape of imagination where black characters were the heroes I never saw in the black and white films I was enthralled with as a child (I probably took their being black AND white too literally). The mythical tales of Yoruba deities and the fantastic works of D.O. Fagunwa and Amos Tutuola drew me into an imaginative landscape that I had hitherto thought belonged only to the Scandinavians and the Greeks. Thanks to these works, Sango replaced Thor, Olokun (both male and



female embodiments) replaced Poseidon and Ogun replaced Aries. Further on, I was to engage with an African canon, of the works of Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Ama Ata Aidoo, Efua Sutherland, Femi Osofisan, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o. In Achebe's words I was listening to history and literature being written by the lion. My musical hero Fela Kuti was an iconoclast who blended several musical traditions to form his own unique style, Afrobeat, or as he preferred to call it, African classical music, because all things lead back to Africa. And so tradition means the archive of culture and mores that literature picks and chooses from, is inspired by, appropriates, rails against, assimilates. To borrow from Fredric Jameson, tradition is the already written text that is constantly being revised. In the final analysis, for now, tradition is the social text from which literature negotiates with the community on behalf of the individual.



NEVER

C.



C. What is my favourite (literary) quotation regarding Africa?

In truth, I don't have a favourite anything; a novel, play, or movie. So this question is hard for me. I used to be one of those youngsters who wrote down their favourite quotes in an exercise book. Fortunately, the habit never left me. Since plays occupy most of my reading time I've picked this quote from Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman*:

'PRAISE-SINGER: Our world was never wrenched from its true course.'



D.

D. Why is this quotation important to me?

Death and the King's Horseman is set in the Oyo Kingdom, the seat of the old Yoruba Empire. It is now under the control of the British Empire. The story revolves around the King's Horseman, Elesin Oba, who is preparing to commit ritual suicide to follow the late King, the Alaafin, to join his ancestors. But Elesin Oba procrastinates. The British district officer stops the ritual suicide from going ahead and detains Elesin Oba in a cell. Elesin Oba's son Olunde returns from London expecting to bury his father. When he sees Elesin Oba alive, Olunde commits suicide in his place. On seeing his son's body, Elesin Oba commits suicide.

Soyinka deals with several themes in the play, but the quote resonates with me because it points to the resilience of the Yoruba race, and by extension of Africans and Africans in Diaspora. Praise-Singer's lines preceding the quote give the line context:

'the white slavers came and went, they took away the heart of our race, they bore away the mind and muscle of our race. The city fell and was rebuilt; the city fell and our people trudged through mountain and forest to find a new home'.

Here Soyinka refers not only to European colonization but also to the Fulani Uthman Dan Fodio whose Jihad in northern Nigeria put pressure on the Oyo Kingdom, forcing its people to flee its original capital to its present location. The quotation recalls in me my return to Nigeria from London, that even though I'd never previously set foot in Nigeria, there was something at my core that was Yoruba, and that despite my having considered myself to be British for the first nine years of my life, being Yoruba, being Nigerian, being African was always a part of me.



E.

E. In my opinion, what function(s) does literature have?

Literature is any work of fiction that uplifts my spirit and intellect. It is any work that is at once familiar and unique. In other instances it is a travelogue that transports me to unfamiliar territories and still connects with me on a human level, although I wonder if it has to be said that a work of art connects people on a human level – even bad writing finds an audience. Since I work in theatre, I consider play texts as literary. The way I judge play texts in the performance of reading rather than in their staging is if I begin to embody the characters, if I begin to think like them as they pursue their goals and understand why they have opted to act in a certain manner. These texts may be post-dramatic, absurdist or realist in nature, but they must say something to me that makes me want to say something back, to dialogue with them. I am not afraid of using the term sentimental to describe the way a work has an effect on me. The majority of people respond to mawkishness,

hence the number of pop songs that inhabit the charts. I would love to believe that literature can change the world for the better. I have to believe it. But I think that people generally read fiction for pleasure (and this is no bad thing) rather than for elucidation. As I write, I note how I used literature and fiction interchangeably and wonder if the question alludes to Literature or literature. In any case, as I stated in question B, literature for me is a negotiator between the individual and the community. Whatever the case, it will always find its way back to the community, for it is in the public sphere that it receives its affirmation. An author may feel their work is literary and therefore for a select few, but such an author does so in the acknowledgement that there is a wider community and that their work can only be placed within the context of there being communities. The function of literature is to initiate dialogue between readers and audience members, to



provide, even if only briefly a moment of connection. Literature pleads its case long after the last page has been turned, living in the memory of the reader who then infects others with their love of a text and asks them to be part of their group. Its function is to remind people of their humanity.



F.



F. Which hopes or expectations do I have in regard to this festival and the concomitant discussions?

I hope to meet with practitioners, scholars and lovers of literature and performance from around the world, to deliberate with them on a range of topics in a sharing environment. I hope to be illuminated and inspired by the different discussions within the formal conference and during our downtime. To say I am looking forward to the festival is an understatement.



A. Penda Diouf



A.

Penda Diouf about herself:

I am a woman, a playwright, and an Afro-descendant. I live in France. Questions linked to the colonial, to domination relations, and to eco-feminism interest me. But most of all I like to tell stories.



A

PE

B.

PLUS

UI

I

LE

C



B.

What does 'Africa' mean to me?

Africa is such a vast and diverse continent that it is difficult to give an overview of all that it represents to me. I can however say that it is the land of my ancestors and that I need to return regularly to Senegal or Ivory Coast to recharge my batteries. And the few geographical areas I know in Africa have nothing to do with the image given by the media of the continent.



APER.

C.

SEN -

RCHER

SERA



C. What is my favourite (literary) quotation regarding Africa?

I really like this quotation of Felwine Sarr in *Afrotopia*, when he writes:

«L’Afrique n’a personne à rattraper. Elle ne doit plus courir sur les sentiers qu’on lui indique, mais marcher prestement sur le chemin qu’elle se sera choisi.’ In English: ‘Africa has no one to catch up with. She must no longer run on the paths that she is told, but walk quickly on the path she has chosen.»



D.



D.

Why is this quotation important to me?

For me, it is a question of reaffirming the autonomy of the African continent and its potential, off the beaten track.



E.



E. In my opinion, what function(s) does literature have?

Literature makes it possible to develop a new imaginary, allowing us to engage by proxy in new ways of living and to experience or inhabit other lives. Literature also makes it possible for us to develop forms of empathy and hospitality, as well as new reception methods. It is the most economical and least polluting form of travel. Literature is a waking dream for me.



F.



F.

How has the pandemic affected me and the way that we interact with society and the world around us?

First, I am very happy that the African continent has been spared the catastrophe scenarios linked to the pandemic elsewhere. It shows how conditioned we are to think of Africa as a place where nothing will ever go well. Maybe it affected me in my relationship to politics and to my own body, which was deprived for a time of what it used to do. It also affected me with regard to the precarious economic conditions, as well as my relationship to loneliness and my desire for others.



A. Nuruddin Farah



A.

Nuruddin Farah about himself:

I was born in Baidoa, Somalia, and did much of my schooling in Ethiopia and then Somalia, attended universities in India and in England. I am the author of several plays and novels, reside in Cape Town and teach at Bard College in upstate New York in the fall semester.



ALL O

B.

HE FA



B.

What does 'Africa' mean to me?

In all my life, I have lived in Africa, because the sounds, the smells, the people, everything about Africa gives me comfort and I feel inspired and write a lot better when I am on the continent. As the ancient Roman proverb has it, 'Out of Africa there is something new and marvellous.' I want to be at home, in Africa, when the 'new thing' is revealed, so I can catch it.



AMING

C.

;

■



C. What is my favourite (literary) quotation regarding Africa?

**‘There’s man all over for you,
blaming on his boots,
the faults of his feet.’**

Samuel Beckett: Waiting for Godot (1953)



D.



D.

Why is this quotation important to me?

It is my favourite quotation, because one can apply it to many situations, especially political situations, on most occasions.



E.



E. In my opinion, what function(s) does literature have?

Literature awakens one's senses and keeps them alert, reminding the reader of the past and preparing him or her for the future, because literature 'occurs' in the present.



F.



F. How has the pandemic affected me and the way that we interact with society and the world around us?

To date, the pandemic has not affected me personally. After all, when I am busy writing, I self-isolate. But I have lost a very, very dear friend to Covid-19 and this saddens me a great deal.



A. Ildevert Méda



A.

Ildevert Méda about himself:

I am an artist, playwright, stage director, and actor. I am director of a theatre company called théatr'Evasion created in 1996. Nowadays, I spend most of my time giving workshops on playwriting, acting, and staging pieces. I am often asked by the government of Burkina Faso to contribute to projects that involve teaching arts and culture in schools.



PEUVE

B.

EUR

VANTA

ETITE



B.

What does 'Africa' mean to me?

To me, Africa means the future of humanity. That is why I decided to set up here in Africa and develop all my work. When I watch out to see how the world goes, I notice that most of the human values are being lost and forgotten because of a sort of permanent search for material accumulation and self-power. Unfortunately I see that Africa itself does not seem to be aware of its own qualities, Africa itself seems to be running after the other continents' position without considering the price for it: the loss of its humanity. That is why I feel myself and other artists to be useful in getting Africa to become conscious of some of its values throughout our artistic work.



PETI -

C.

NE

GRAN -



C. What is my favourite (literary) quotation regarding Africa?

My favourite literary quotation is from Yoshi Oïda, an actor working with Peter Brook. He wrote in his book *L'acteur flottant*

«ceux qui ne peuvent pas voir la petitesse dans leur propre grandeur ne sauront pas davantage percevoir la grandeur dans la petitesse d'autrui».

This quotation has a deep link with many old African values taught to the youth during initiations.



DANS

D.



D.

Why is this quotation important to me?

This quotation is important to me because it reminds me that great human values meet somewhere, no matter where you live and where you come from. It is also important to me because it guides my link to my fellow human beings and my fellow collaborators, it helps me learn a lot from others.



’ AUTR

E.



E. In my opinion, what function(s) does literature have?

In my opinion, literature has the function of developing imagination. It is a kind of living blood that connects us to life.



F.



F. How has the pandemic affected me and the way that we interact with society and the world around us?

The corona-virus pandemic reminds me how precious life and community are. It taught me to have more consideration for all those living around me no matter where they stand, who they are, and what they have.



A. Rémy Ngamije



A.

Rémy Ngamije about himself:

I am a Rwandan-born Namibian writer and photographer. My debut novel *The Eternal Audience Of One* is forthcoming from Scout Press (S&S). I write for brainwavez.org, a writing collective based in South Africa. I am the editor-in-chief of *Doek!*, Namibia's first literary magazine. My short stories have appeared in *Litro Magazine*, *AFREADA*, *The Johannesburg Review of Books*, *The Amistad*, *The Kalahari Review*, *American Chordata*, *Doek!*, *Azure*, *Sultan's Seal*, *Columbia Journal*, and *New Contrast*. I have been longlisted for the 2020 Afritondo Short Story Prize and shortlisted for Best Original Fiction by Stack Magazines in 2019. More of my writing can be read on my website: remythequill.com



EANS

B.

OF TH

NENT.

D SMA



B.

What does 'Africa' mean to me?

There is no single answer to this question because the meaning changes day by day, and sometimes, from hour to hour. Personally, the simplest iteration of Africa is this: home. But even that is a contentious label. However, it is that to me: home – a place of shelter and security, a place of origin, a place to be from, a place to return to.

It can be seen that all of these are nebulous and shifting concepts, but if they defy rigid explanation and categorisation, it is only because they are like the very concept they are trying to explain – Africa is more than the landmass, more than its people. It is a thing in constant motion and progress. This is what home means to me, and this is what Africa means to me.



BUT

C.

TRIES

THING

TIME?



C. What is my favourite (literary) quotation regarding Africa and why is it important to me?

I do not have a single favourite quotation about the continent because I think all of them would fall short in some way. But I do have a favourite name from the continent, and in some way it explains some of what I feel or think about the continent: Rwanda. It means wide, or big. But Rwanda is one of the smallest countries on the continent. How can something be both big and small at the same time? The irony in the name, to me, sums up the rest of the continent – it is many things while at the same time being none of them, it is both rich and poor, both hot and cold, both old and young, it is past, present, and future. These wonderful contradictions can be found co-existing and conflicting with each other – I think there is a strange beauty in that.



Rwanda



T THE

E.

SUMS

NY T



THEM

Rémy Ngamiye

E. In my opinion, what function(s) does literature have?

Within the African context, I think literature's role is to bring the past into the present (by telling and retelling the continent's histories and traditions); to archive the present as honestly as possible (with an unflinching and courageous gaze), dream differently, to speak bravely, to represent with generosity and humanity, and to include rather than exclude; it is also to inspire and motivate for different futures (wherever and whenever they can be found). So it is many warring concepts – but that is what literature is there for: to fight the impossible fights, the tangible and intangible ones, to reclaim the lost territories of the minds and the unmapped regions of the heart.

In order to do this, I think literature on the continent must be accessible to everyone. If anyone is left behind, then literature will have failed.

Each one, read one; each one, teach one.

AT TH

F.

IS B

COLD ,

PRESE



F.

How has the pandemic affected me and the way that we interact with society and the world around us?

I spend most of my day in relative isolation, writing or reading. I do most of my correspondence digitally. I still do that. What the pandemic has robbed me of, though, is my non-writing life, the rich, connected life I have with my family, my friends, and my freedoms (both grand and small). It is this other life which informs my writing, and its limitation has made me acutely aware of my privilege, my excesses, the fleeting nature of time, and the dangers of unfulfilled ambitions. The pandemic has added a sense of urgency to my writing and brought an increased dose of sincerity to my interactions and communications with the world around me.



A. Sylvia Schlettwein



A.

Sylvia Schlettwein about herself:

I was born on 16 November 1975 in Omaruru in Namibia. I grew up in Namibia and studied German and French Literature and Language in Cape Town, Stuttgart, and Lyon. I write in English, German, and Afrikaans. I am known for my Namibian take on the short story and speculative fiction and reflections on multilingual writing. I live, love, work, and write in Windhoek, where I teach and am involved in various literary projects.



E ON

B.

DVANT

UST Y

S. IF



B.

What does 'Africa' mean to me?

Africa is my home, my castle, my roots, my wings, my wounds, my healing, my blood, sweat, and tears, my quicksand and rock, my cradle and bed, my silence and voice, my happy place and the eye of my storm, ... the list goes on.



CAN

C.

F YOU

WARM

OMAN ,



C. What is my favourite (literary) quotation regarding Africa?

‘Africa is the only continent you can love – take advantage of this. If you are a man, thrust yourself into her warm virgin forests. If you are a woman, treat Africa as a man who wears a bush jacket and disappears off into the sunset. Africa is to be pitied, worshipped or dominated. Whichever angle you take, be sure to leave the strong impression that without your intervention and your important book, Africa is doomed.’

Binyavanga Wainaina: How to Write About Africa (2005)



IN F

D.

CA AS

PEARS

ED, W



D. Why is this quotation important to me?

If I could, I would have quoted the whole essay. To me it remains the most brilliant piece on why it sometimes frankly sucks to write about Africa, but why we should laugh and pursue: When we write about/from our African 'normal', we are criticized for being inaccessible because the poor reader who does not know Africa will be lost, but when we write about 'normal' (aka universal) issues, our writing is not 'African' enough. We need to get over these stereotyped expectations and turn them around and write how and what we like. We do not need to save Africa. We need to write about it and tell its stories – individually and authentically.



ARE

E.

RS A

UNSET

MINAT



E. In my opinion, what function(s) does literature have?

Literature (like any artistic expression) does not exist by virtue of functions, it is what it is, an integral part of human expression and the sharing thereof. Of course it shows, reflects, delights, disgusts, scares, elevates, unsettles, educates, grounds, puts into perspective, imagines, dreams, ridicules, mocks, inspires, shatters, constructs, enchants, disillusion, and whatever else happens when we tell, read, or hear a good story, but it is under no obligation to be directed towards a purpose or a goal.



TO BE

F.

WHICH

TO L

WITHO



F. How has the pandemic affected me and the way that we interact with society and the world around us?

In my country, where many have lost their livelihood due to lockdown and travel restrictions, life currently literally seems like a masquerade – without the fun factor. Personally, the pandemic has had its main impact on me on a mental and creative level: the conspiracy theories make my head explode and right now I cannot imagine a story weirder than the one we are living.



A. Sami Tchak

ins Deutsche übersetzt von
Annette Bühler-Dietrich

A.

Sami Tchak about himself:

Mon nom est Sami Tchak, pseudonyme de Sadamba TCHA-KOURA, je suis né au Togo en 1960. Après une licence de philosophie dans mon pays et une thèse de sociologie soutenue en 1993 à La Sorbonne-Paris V, je me consacre depuis quelques années à l'écriture. Parmi mes publications, citons *Place des Fêtes* (Gallimard, 2001), *Hermina* (Gallimard, 2003), *La fête des masques* (Gallimard, 2004), *Le paradis des chiots* (Mercure de France, 2006), *Filles de Mexico* (Mercure de France, 2008). *Al Capone le Malien* (Mercure de France, 2011), *La couleur de l'écrivain* (La Cheminante, 2014), *Ainsi parlait mon père* (JC Lattès, 2018), *Les fables du moineau* (Gallimard, 2020).

Je vis en France depuis 1986.

(DE) Mein Name ist Sami Tchak (Pseudonym für Sadamba Tcha-Koura) und ich wurde 1960 in Togo geboren. Ich erwarb in Togo meine Licence in Philosophie und verteidigte 1993

meine Dissertation in Soziologie an der Universität Sorbonne-Paris V. Seit einigen Jahren widme ich mich dem Schreiben. Zu meinen Veröffentlichungen gehören *Place des Fêtes* (Gallimard, 2001; dt. *Scheiß Leben*, Zebu, 2004), *Hermina* (Gallimard, 2003), *La fête des masques* (Gallimard, 2004), *Le paradis des chiots* (Mercure de France, 2008), *Filles de Mexico* (Mercure de France, 2008). *Al Capone le Malien* (Mercure de France, 2011), *La couleur de l'écrivain* (La Cheminante, 2014), *Ainsi parlait mon père* (JC Lattès, 2018), *Les fables du moineau* (Gallimard, 2020).

Seit 1986 lebe ich in Frankreich.

Mongo Beti: Main basse sur le Cameroun.
Autopsie d'une décolonisation (1972)



N

CO

B.

L

VA

E

DE

E

VAI

B. What does 'Africa' mean to me?

L'Afrique, ce continent où se trouve mon pays, le Togo, est pour moi une évidence mais aussi le lieu de mes multiples ignorances. Évidence, parce que je suis un Africain, je suis issu de ce continent. Lieu de mes multiples ignorances parce qu'il s'agit d'un vaste continent avec 56 États et des centaines de peuples qui ont des cultures ne se ressemblant pas sur tous les points. L'Afrique, c'est mon continent, mais c'est dans des livres, dont beaucoup écrits par des Occidentaux, que j'ai appris à la connaître un tout petit peu. Mes nombreux voyages dans au moins 20 pays africains m'ont aussi apporté un supplément d'impressions. L'Afrique, c'est le continent d'où je viens, mais jusqu'à la fin de ma vie, elle sera pour moi une réalité que je connaîtrai seulement par fragments. Ainsi, je ne dirai pas «Chez nous en Afrique.» Même mon petit village est d'une grande complexité qu'il me faudrait toute une vie pour tenter de comprendre.

(DE) Afrika, dieser Kontinent, auf dem sich mein Land, Togo, befindet, ist für mich eine Selbstverständlichkeit, aber auch der Ort meiner vielfachen Unkenntnis. Eine Selbstverständlichkeit, weil ich Afrikaner bin, weil ich von diesem Kontinent herkomme. Ort meiner vielfachen Unkenntnis, weil es ein riesiger Kontinent mit 56 Staaten und Hunderten von Völkern ist, deren Kulturen sich nicht in allen Punkten ähneln. Afrika ist mein Kontinent, aber erst in den Büchern, viele davon von Europäern verfasst, habe ich gelernt, es ein bisschen kennenzulernen. Meine zahlreichen Reisen in mindestens 20 afrikanische Länder haben mich mit zusätzlichen Eindrücken versehen. Afrika ist der Kontinent, von dem ich komme, aber bis zum Ende meines Lebens wird es für mich eine Realität sein, die ich nur in Bruchstücken kennen werde. Folglich werde ich nicht sagen „bei uns in Afrika“. Selbst mein kleines Dorf ist von einer großen Komplexität und ich bräuchte ein ganzes Leben, um zu versuchen, sie zu verstehen.

Mongo Beti: Main basse sur le Cameroun.
Autopsie d'une décolonisation (1972)



S LE
C.

LANCE

RIMÉS

EMPS ,



C. What is my favourite (literary) quotation regarding Africa?

«Il faut bien convenir que, dans le monde comme il va, toute la vaillance révolutionnaire des peuples opprimés sera peut-être vaine si, en même temps, ne s'établit pas solidement en Occident un minimum de vraie démocratie et s'il ne s'y développe une véritable information.»

Mongo Beti: Main basse sur le Cameroun.
Autopsie d'une décolonisation (1972)

(DE)

„Man muss also zugeben, dass beim Lauf der Dinge in der Welt alle revolutionäre Tapferkeit der unterdrückten Völker womöglich vergeblich sein wird, wenn sich nicht gleichzeitig im Norden ein Minimum an wahrer Demokratie fest etabliert und wenn sich dort nicht eine wirkliche Informationskultur entwickelt.“

Mongo Beti: Main basse sur le Cameroun.
Autopsie d'une décolonisation (1972)



PEU

D.

LIT

E VR

UNE V



D.

Why is this quotation important to me?

Mongo Beti a été un des rares écrivains africains dont toute la vie aura consisté en une lutte d'abord intellectuelle, par ses romans et ses essais, durant plusieurs décennies au cours desquelles il n'avait pas pu remettre les pieds dans son pays, le Cameroun, puis, de façon active, quand, après la retraite, il est enfin rentré chez lui. Il s'était engagé sur le terrain, en créant, avec son épouse Odile Tobner, «La librairie des peuples noirs» à Yaoundé, faisant de la politique, en mettant en place dans son village une structure agricole pour produire des vivres et élever des animaux avec l'idée que les villageois de chez lui devaient avoir une autosuffisance alimentaire. Jusqu'à sa mort, il aura été un intellectuel en colère contre l'impérialisme français et contre le système politique corrompu de son pays. En novembre 2013, quand j'étais allé dans son village pour voir sa tombe, j'étais ému de me retrouver là, là où repose cet homme, cet homme qui soutenait et répétait que les

destins des peuples, ceux des pays ex-colonisateurs et ceux des pays ex-colonisés, étaient liés, que les luttes des uns n'aboutiraient pas à des victoires significatives sans l'émancipation des autres. C'est justement ce que dit la phrase que je tire de son célèbre pamphlet *Main basse sur le Cameroun*, publié en 1972 et pour lequel il avait été victime d'une grande censure en France où il avait fait ses études et toute sa carrière d'enseignant. Mongo Beti demeure pour moi le modèle de l'écrivain de gauche, engagé jusqu'au risque de sa vie.

(DE) Mongo Beti war einer der seltenen afrikanischen Schriftsteller, dessen Leben gänzlich aus Kampf bestanden hat, zunächst intellektuell, durch seine Romane und Essays, während mehrerer Jahrzehnte, in denen er sein Land, Kamerun, nicht mehr betreten konnte, dann aktiv, als er im Ruhestand schließlich nach Hause zurückgekehrt ist. Er hatte sich vor Ort engagiert, indem er mit seiner

Gattin Odile Tobner in Yaoundé „La librairie des peuples noirs“ [Die Buchhandlung schwarzer Völker] gegründet hatte, politisch aktiv, indem er in seinem Dorf eine landwirtschaftliche Einrichtung aufgebaut hatte, die Lebensmittel produzierte und Vieh züchtete, mit dem Gedanken, dass die Bewohner seines Dorfes die Möglichkeit zur Selbstversorgung haben sollten. Bis zu seinem Tod wird er ein Intellektueller im Zorn gegen den französischen Imperialismus und das korrupte politische System seines Landes gewesen sein. Im November 2013, als ich in sein Dorf gegangen war, um sein Grab zu sehen, war ich bewegt, mich dort wiederzufinden, dort, wo dieser Mann ruht, dieser Mann, der wiederholt behauptete, dass das Schicksal der Völker, das der Ex-Kolonisatoren und das der Ex-Kolonisierten, verbunden sei, dass die Kämpfe der einen nicht zu bedeutenden Siegen gelangen würden ohne die Emanzipation der anderen. Genau das sagt der Satz, den ich aus der berühmten Streitschrift *Main*



Mongo Beti: Main basse sur le Cameroun.
Autopsie d'une décolonisation (1972)

bas *sur le Cameroun* (1972) entnommen
habe und für die er Opfer einer großangelegten
Zensurkampagne in Frankreich wurde, wo er
studiert und dann sein ganzes Leben gelehrt
hatte. Mongo Beti bleibt für mich das Vor-
bild eines linken Intellektuellen, engagiert
unter Einsatz seines Lebens.

Sami Tchak

J
E.
EN EN O
ET
ATION

E. In my opinion, what function(s) does literature have?

Souvent, dans des débats, on demande aux écrivains de définir la fonction de la littérature, leur fonction. À quoi sert la littérature? Quels rôles doivent ou peuvent jouer les écrivains? Il est toujours difficile de répondre à cette question, il m'est, à moi, difficile de répondre à cette question. Quelles fonctions pourrait jouer la littérature? Déjà, il faudrait qu'elle soit une chose qui imprègne la société, ce qui n'est possible que par la lecture. Ce que les livres contiennent comme imaginaires, comme idées, comme visions du monde ne se transmet que par leur lecture par un certain nombre de personnes. C'est quand leurs contenus deviennent un objet de débat..., qu'ils circulent à travers l'enseignement..., qu'ils imprègnent des esprits, individuellement, collectivement... Il serait illusoire de définir des fonctions précises à la littérature, mais elle est le lieu de bien des

possibilités. Ce qu'elle peut avoir comme fonction, cela dépend des autres, à partir des politiques de l'État ou grâce aux démarches personnelles des lecteurs.

(DE) Häufig bittet man Schriftsteller in Diskussionen, die Funktion der Literatur zu definieren, ihre Funktion für sie. Wozu dient die Literatur? Welche Rolle sollen oder können die Schriftsteller spielen? Es ist immer schwierig, auf diese Frage zu antworten, auch mir fällt es schwer, auf diese Frage zu antworten. Welche Funktionen könnte die Literatur einnehmen? Zunächst sollte sie etwas sein, das die Gesellschaft prägt, was nur durch die Lektüre möglich ist. Was die Bücher als Vorstellungen, als Ideen, als Visionen der Welt enthalten, vermittelt sich nur durch ihre Lektüre durch eine bestimmte Anzahl von Leuten. Dann, wenn ihre Inhalte



zum Diskussionsobjekt werden..., wenn sie durch den Unterricht zirkulieren..., prägen sie den Geist, individuell, kollektiv... Es wäre illusorisch, präzise Funktionen für die Literatur zu definieren, aber sie ist der Ort vieler Möglichkeiten. Was sie als Funktion haben kann, hängt von den anderen ab, beginnend mit der Politik des Staates oder dank der persönlichen Zugänge der Leser.



DEVEL

F.

F. How has the pandemic affected me and the way that we interact with society and the world around us?

J'ai 60 ans cette année. La pandémie du Covid-19 se produit l'année où j'ai 60 ans, donc à un moment où je suis déjà entré dans un âge où, sans faire partie des très vieux, je ne suis plus jeune. En suivant les informations, en lisant des textes, en ayant de plus en plus une idée du profil des personnes susceptibles de faire des formes graves du Covid et d'en mourir, je n'ai fait que me rappeler à la vérité que je n'avais jamais oubliée: c'est parce que je vis que je mourrai. C'est banal, c'est une évidence assez banale, mais, on a tendance à oublier que la mort n'a de sens que parce qu'on vit. C'est le sujet de mon dernier livre, *Les fables du moineau*, sorti en janvier 2020 aux éditions Gallimard, où, en partant de la chaîne alimentaire, je mets en lien de petites histoires pour montrer la beauté du lien intime entre la vie et la mort, la nécessité, pour la vie, qu'il y ait la mort, pour la

mort qu'il y ait la vie. Une idée simple: beaucoup de créatures vivantes sont obligées de tuer d'autres créatures pour vivre, et elles sont aussi tuées par d'autres créatures. Le virus s'intègre dans cette sorte de chaîne. En partant de cette idée, et même si je dois prendre des précautions pour minimiser les risques de rencontrer le virus, donc pour me protéger et protéger aussi ma famille, je reste sur l'idée que la vie doit être le premier impératif, et elle nous conduira forcément à la mort. Pour le reste, au niveau plus élargi de la société, du monde, je suis incapable de dire grand-chose. Je préfère laisser ces réflexions-là à des spécialistes sérieux. Moi, je me contenterais de dire ce que je pense: cette pandémie ne rendra l'humanité ni pire ni meilleure, le monde ne changera pas en meilleur ni en pire. Ce n'est qu'un spectacle temporaire. Demain, nous l'aurons oublié.

(DE) Dieses Jahr bin ich 60. Die Pandemie Covid-19 ereignet sich in dem Jahr, in dem ich 60 bin, also zu einem Zeitpunkt, wo ich bereits einem Alter angehöre, in dem ich, ohne zu den ganz Alten zu gehören, nicht mehr jung bin. Indem ich den Nachrichten folge, Texte lese, immer mehr eine Idee vom Profil der Personen habe, die anfällig dafür sind, schwere Formen von Covid-19 zu entwickeln und daran zu sterben, habe ich mich darin nur an die Wahrheit erinnert, die ich niemals vergessen hatte: Gerade weil ich lebe, werde ich sterben. Das ist banal, das ist eine recht banale Selbstverständlichkeit, aber man neigt dazu zu vergessen, dass der Tod nur einen Sinn hat, weil man lebt. Das ist das Thema meines jüngsten Buches, *Les fables du moineau* [*Die Fabeln des Spatzes*], erschienen im Januar 2020 bei Gallimard. Ausgehend von der Nahrungskette, verbinde ich darin

kleine Geschichten, um die Schönheit des intimen Bezugs von Leben und Tod zu zeigen, die Notwendigkeit für das Leben, dass es den Tod gebe, für den Tod, dass es das Leben gebe. Ein einfacher Gedanke: Viele lebende Geschöpfe müssen andere Geschöpfe töten um zu leben und sie werden selbst auch von anderen Geschöpfen getötet. Der Virus fügt sich in diese Art von Kette ein. Mit diesem Gedanken, und selbst wenn ich Vorsichtsmaßnahmen ergreifen soll um die Risiken, mir den Virus einzufangen, zu minimieren, also um mich und auch meine Familie zu schützen, bleibe ich dabei, dass das Leben der erste Imperativ sein muss, und es wird uns zwangsläufig zum Tod führen. Für alles Übrige, auf der weiteren Ebene der Gesellschaft, der Welt, kann ich nicht viel sagen. Diese Reflexionen überlasse ich lieber den wirklichen Fachleuten. Ich würde einfach nur sagen, was ich denke: Diese Pandemie wird die Menschheit nicht besser oder schlechter machen,

die Welt wird sich nicht zum Besseren oder Schlechteren verändern. Es ist lediglich ein vorübergehendes Schauspiel. Morgen werden wir es vergessen haben.