

Africa in literature and arts

Idealised, criticised, deeply fantasized, the African continent has triggered throughout the ages various commentaries and criticisms by Europeans. This imaginary link established between Africa and the North, as early as the Antiquity has constructed *a colonial library* (Mudimbe) with well-known or less well-known works. The latter have surely created a blurred or even a false perception of Africa and Africans. According to Aimé Césaire, humanity was reduced then to a monologue. But *when it went out of the long night* (Frantz Fanon), a dialogue started along with reactions from the part of the colonized. Indeed, Africans started to express themselves, revealing who they were through various artistic expressions. Writers, painters, filmmakers offered the keys in order to discover their world - a world which they kept interpreting with passion. It is through their art that one entered into a constantly changing world, which carried on creating and recreating itself.

All these artistic works express the lives of men and women engaged with the world and with their existence, through orality and the written word, through cinema and painting: a subject, a world, a language, all arts are expressed through this triptych. Traumatized by the slave trade and by colonisation, bruised by so much suffering and atrocities, the history of Africa is perceived as a conquest. Its literature deals with these events, with the failures as well as victories. Its literature tells the story of lyrical subjects engaged with their History. All languages translate their imaginary. It is true that language has been for a long time an issue for many critics. Which language for which audience or readers? Cinema and paintings solved that dilemma. As time went by, what was once a real problem is not one anymore. Kateb Yacine's motto, saying that language was '*a war loot*' matched the practice of integrating all languages, first imposed and then won over and transformed, while continuing to tell stories in native languages. Kourouma succeeded a revolution of his own in francophone literatures, as he liberated a language of expression, as did Amos Tutuola, Ngugi Wa Thiong' O and Chinua Achebe in English. So, as languages were won back, the negated History was won back too. The African subject stood up by himself, becoming a heritage (Mbembe), transformed by his powerful desire to be alive. While the representations of Africa, as described from elsewhere from ancient times to today, from the 'good savage' to the 'cannibal', Africans were describing themselves in fact through their traditions, their hopes in order to

reject such an invented Africa (Mudimbe), built on stereotypes such as Friday who meant more to those who have invented him, than to himself. Today, most African writers are liberated from the myth of the negritude, delving rather into their genuine culture. They do not “play the African” anymore, they do not want to be exotic to be published and please a European readership but rather they write on and depict difficult post-colonial realities. The African continent known for its massacres, genocides, coups, exactions, is tackled and its history is now told as it is. The postcolonial realities appear through literature, cinema, and painting as well as through other artistic forms. The new Africa, ‘globe Africa’ (Mbembe) is a universe in progress, building up its future and constructing a world free from colonisation, prejudices, and stereotypes, which consequences can be so negative.

In his foreword of *L’Afrique qui vient* (Paris, Hoëbeke, 2013), Michel Le Bris, Alain Mabanckou draw an outline of tomorrow’s Africa, which contradicts the conventional discourse. This continent, which is most of the time depicted through genocides, conflicts, diseases, and corruption happens to be in fact a place of talents and promises. Novelists, poets, painters, filmmakers make their voices heard in Africa and in the world at large. “The Africa of catastrophes” surprises many, thanks to its extraordinary capacity to reinvent itself, to make itself heard, to show that it does exist. It is all these voices which we would like to hear during the conference: the voices which come from far away places and tell about Africa, imprisoned within imaginary representations, fantasies, blurred perceptions, but which can be liberated through dreams and hope which show the way towards the future.

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