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**MAPPING TRANSFERENCE: PROBLEMS OF AFRICAN LITERATURE AND
TRANSLATION FROM FRENCH INTO ENGLISH**

by

Moses Nunyi Nintai
(Lic. ès Lettres, MA)

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Supervised by Professor Susan Bassnett

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To my late father
Who passed away
While I was away.

ABSTRACT

Although a number of African literary works have been translated from French into English since the middle of this century, research and debate on their translation has remained scanty, fragmentary, and scattered in diverse learned journals and other short publications. This thesis seeks to broaden the scope of research by mapping out aspects of transference in translation in terms of analysis and transfer strategies that have been, or could be, used. A selection of major translated works have been compared with their originals, to give textual examples indicative of transfer strategies.

Current issues in African literature as well as typical features of the literature in French and English have been explored in order to examine differences between them and English and French literatures. The implications of these differences (at the levels of content, cultural setting, peculiar use of English and French, and the target audience) for translation are considered, and a brief historical survey of the translation of African literature provides insights into how translators have approached, and continue to approach, literary texts as well as cope with their target readership. Furthermore, dominant trends in literary translation studies (mainly in the West) are explored to determine if, and in what ways, they relate to translation studies in Africa.

The analysis of transfer strategies focuses on the distinctive features of francophone African literary texts, drawing on relevant Western literary translation theories and models, on African literary theory and criticism, as well as on other disciplines likely contribute to an informed understanding of the texts. Finally, a case study applies the analysis to a text which is translated, and transfer strategies discussed.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

SL Source Language

TL Target Language

ST Source Text

TT Target Text

INTRODUCTION

0.1 Present situation of African literature

The twentieth century has witnessed the rapid development of African literature and its exposure to the rest of the world. The bulk of this literature remains oral in many parts of the continent. Oral literature is expressed in indigenous African languages and is based on the culture and traditions of specific tribal or ethnic groups. Today, oral traditional literature is generally regarded by many African writers and critics as the authentic literature of Africa¹; it is handed down from generation to generation by word of mouth, especially in the villages. Furthermore, it comprises, in particular, traditional songs, poetry, proverbs, riddles, folktales, legends, epics, etc.

Despite this predominantly oral nature of the literature, it is worth noting, however, that written literature was already being produced in Africa before the introduction of the Roman script by the white man in the nineteenth century; for example, Ethiopia possessed written literature in its own languages, while the Arabic script was used in Swahili, Hausa, Fulani, Wolof, and other literatures.² Moreover, certain tribes and ethnic groups developed

¹ This view is evident in certain attempts to define African literature that will be presented and analyzed later in this thesis.

² Gérard, Albert, *Contexts of African Literature* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1990), pp. 47-48. Ge'ez was the literary language of Ethiopia before the 19th century; it was used for religious writing (poetry and hagiography) and chronicles about the rulers.

their own scripts which were used mainly for correspondence and creative writing; these include the Bamoun, Vai, Fulfulde, and Hausa scripts. Albert Gérard describes the current state of creative writing in African languages as follows:

By the 1980s, creative writing had reached print in some fifty African languages. Several of these new-fangled literatures were already securely established: in Nigeria, Yoruba writers have been increasingly active since the middle of the nineteenth century and most Hausa authors have now turned to the Roman script. Roman script and Western genres have also been adopted by Swahili writers in Tanzania, and Zimbabwe has produced a sizable amount of creative writing in Shona and Ndebele.³

Performances of oral literary genres are very much alive in many parts of Africa nowadays, especially as the vast majority of the population cannot read and write. For instance, in Somalia a genre of oral poetry, *heello*, is often recited with musical accompaniment over the radio and in the theatres.⁴ Moreover, modern creative writing both in indigenous and European languages still draws heavily on the traditional oral lore; novels and short stories may use tales, proverbs and aphorisms, while poetic and dramatic forms incorporate songs and dances. Again, efforts are constantly being made in several African countries to promote the use of indigenous languages in written literature. In Benin,

³ *Contexts of African Literature*, p. 20.

⁴ Chris Wanjala, a Kenyan writer, has also stressed that oral literature is not dying in East Africa: "Among the Swahili there are, for instance, poetry competitions known as *ngonjera*. You get about six traditional artists who come on the stage and compete at the level of words and by the end of the competition you have one or two experts remaining. The judge is the audience. This is a long-established tradition that is being exploited by some writers in Tanzania. It has made poetry very popular." In *African Voices. Interviews with Thirteen African Writers*, interviewed by Raoul Granqvist and John Stotbury (Sydney, Mundelstrup and Coventry: Dangaroo Press, 1989), pp. 83-4.

for example, some school textbooks contain oral tales in Fon and other national languages while in Senegal the television and other media contribute to the dissemination of literature in local languages such as Wolof, Tukolor, Peul, Malinke, etc.⁵ Literature in the rather few written African languages enjoys only a limited readership mainly because it is expressed in languages restricted to specific localities or regions, which in certain cases are quite small, not to mention the fact that the literacy rate for indigenous languages is extremely low.

In addition to creative writing in indigenous languages, African literature also comprises works in Arabic.⁶ Writing in Arabic is considered the oldest written tradition in Africa, and it has been greatly influenced by Islam, especially in classic texts. Today, Arabic is used particularly in the Maghreb countries of North Africa (Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Morocco, etc.) Furthermore, some languages in East Africa (e.g. Swahili, Somali, etc.) and West Africa (e.g. Hausa) have adopted the Arabic script in their written form. Contemporary literature in Arabic is often referred to as "Afro-Arab" literature and writers are progressively breaking away from traditional Arabic literature in both form and content. For example, Swahili

⁵ Leonard Klein, ed., *African Literatures in the 20th Century: A Guide* (New York: Unger, 1986), pp. 22 & 146.

⁶ This brief introductory survey considers all types of languages used for creative writing in Africa, even though the usual tendency among African writers and critics is to exclude Arabic literary works by Africans from African literature: "It should be noted here that Arabic, though possibly the most widely employed non-indigenous language in Africa, is usually excluded from our use of the term [African literature]." Abiola Irele, "The African Imagination", *Research in African Literatures*, 21.1 (1990), 49-67 (p. 51).

literature in Tanzania and some writers in Egypt have produced works in Arabic that deal with current issues in society.

Pidgin English (used mainly in Cameroon, Nigeria, Gambia, and Ghana) and Krio (used in Sierra Leone) are also sometimes used by writers. While some literary works in English are interspersed with Pidgin English (e.g. *Many Thing You No Understand*, 1970, by Adaora Lily Ulasi) or Krio (e.g. *Na Mami Bohn Am*, 1968, by Juliana Rowe), the two languages are often used mainly for dialogue between uneducated characters; sometimes, the same character alternates between Pidgin English and standard English in different situations. For example, in Wole Soyinka's *The Trials of Brother Jero*, Chume speaks in Pidgin English in his role as office messenger and in standard English when he uses his mother tongue which is translated into English.⁷ Although Pidgin English or Krio is used as *lingua franca* in the regions concerned, and for literary creation by other writers such as Amos Tutuola (*The Palm-wine Drinkard and His Dead Palm-wine Tapster in the Dead's Town*, 1952) and Chinua Achebe (*A Man of the People*), Rand Bishop notes that:

there has not been any systematic tendency to use Pidgin English in African literature. Tutuola and other authors have used it mainly for its comic effect.⁸

⁷. As Chantal Zabus has rightly pointed out, where Pidgin English is used, many contemporary African novelists retain "only superficial features of Pidgin" and employ "a larger percentage of English words." *The African Palimpsest: Indigenization of Language in the West African Novel* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1991), p. 52. Moreover, Pidgin English is often mixed with words and expressions from African languages; in *The Road* (1973), Wole Soyinka makes some of his characters speak Pidgin English mixed with their mother tongue, Yoruba.

⁸ *African Literature, African Critics* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1988), p. 40.

In the case of francophone writers, some of them use "français petit nègre"⁹ mainly in the dialogue of uneducated characters or persons who have received very little education in French. They are also made to speak incorrect French in order to portray their social position. Writers like Ferdinand Oyono and Mongo Beti are cases in point. However, these languages are not as extensively used in literature as the languages of the former colonial masters.

A noteworthy number of African writers outside the Arabic-speaking areas today use European languages such as English, French, Portuguese and Spanish. While this choice stems primarily from the colonial past of the continent, some of the authors also count on the international status of the languages to reach a wider audience and larger market. Moreover, right from the colonial days to the present, several years after the vast majority of African countries gained independence, many Africans continue to receive education in European languages and even feel more at ease communicating and writing in these languages than in their own mother tongues. The preference for European languages has also been prompted, to a large extent, by the fact that most indigenous African languages do not yet have a writing system. What is more, the multiplicity of African languages and the limitation of most of them to small ethnic groups make European languages an appropriate choice for writers who wish to

⁹ Although some linguists and researchers have rejected this term because of what they consider its colonial overtones and have suggested "pitineg" (Chantal Zabus, p. 47), I have used it here as a purely descriptive term. I also believe that "pitineg" is not different from "petit nègre" since the former seems to be just a shortened form of the latter and thus could still carry colonial and derogatory overtones.

communicate beyond their tribal or ethnic groups and countries to other African countries and the outside world. That is why Chinua Achebe asserts:

There are scores of languages I would want to learn if it were possible. Where am I to find the time to learn the half-a-dozen or so Nigerian languages each of which can sustain a literature?¹⁰

Many African authors have therefore found it practical and convenient to use European languages in their attempt to portray African society and cultural values.

As regards the publication of works of African literature, most of them are today published in France, Britain, and the United States of America by publishing houses such as *Présence Africaine*, Heinemann Educational Books,¹¹ Three Continents Press, Macmillan, and others. On the other hand, there are only a few small publishing houses in Africa (*Les Nouvelles Editions Africaines*, Editions CLE, Fourth Dimension, Ethiopie, East African Publishing House, etc.) engaged in the publication of African literary works; in addition, these houses face a lot of problems including low levels of literacy among the population, the low purchasing power of African readers, the scarcity of bookstores which are in most cases concentrated in towns and urban centres, and so on. Consequently, only a few copies of any given work are produced by the publishers whereas their counterparts in Europe and America can afford to put far more copies on their larger

¹⁰ "English and the African Writer", *Transition*, 18 (1965), 27-30 (p. 28).

¹¹ Heinemann also has regional offices in Africa; these offices are located at Ibadan (Nigeria) for West Africa, Nairobi (Kenya) for East Africa, and Gaborone (Botswana) for Central and Southern Africa.

markets. For example, while Les Nouvelles Editions Africaines could produce only about 3,000 copies of Mariama Bâ's *Une si longue lettre* (1976), it was estimated that Heinemann Educational Books printed approximately 20,000 copies of its translation *So Long a Letter* (1981).¹²

Furthermore, appropriate departments have been set up in universities in Europe and the United States for research in and the study of African literature as a discipline in its own right. Some African scholars such as V.Y. Mudimbe, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Abiola Irele, etc. are engaged in the teaching of African literature in American universities. In Africa, on the other hand, Ambroise Kom paints the situation in francophone universities as follows:

En Afrique même, les universités qui sont organisées d'après le modèle du maître d'hier n'ont pas encore tout à fait intégré des enseignements sur la culture nationale/continentale... On veille scrupuleusement à ce que la part réservée aux littératures nationales ou africaines ne dépasse pas le seuil tolérable pour ceux qui seront chargés de juger des équivalences.¹³

In anglophone countries and universities the attitude towards African literature is generally different:

In the last decade or so, Ministries of Education and Culture have changed their school syllabuses to include not only African writers such as Achebe, Soyinka, Ngugi and others, but also a serious study of orature. National collections of folktales, songs, proverbs and riddles have appeared and are still appearing, finding their way onto school syllabuses. The Department of Literature in the African university

¹² Mentioned in Christopher Miller, *Theories of Africans: Francophone Literature and Anthropology in Africa* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990), p. 287.

¹³ "Littérature francophone d'Afrique, parent pauvre des départements d'études françaises: récit d'une expérience", *Peuples noirs, peuples africains*, 11.59-62 (Sept. 1987- April 1988), 165-69 (pp. 166 & 168).

has also changed drastically. To take one example, African epic, such as *Shaka*, *The Mwindo Epic*, *Sundiata*, *The Epic of Liyongo* and others are being studied either in their own right as part of African culture or on a comparative basis with Homer's and some European epics relevant to the African experience.¹⁴

Some departments of African literature publish journals (for example, *Okike* in the University of Calabar) and some professors and lecturers have become prominent critics of African literature (for example, Wole Soyinka, Sunday Anozie, etc.)

African literary theory today focuses on a number of key issues and debates. African literature still has to be adequately defined and situated; recent critical studies have tended to perceive African writing

as a subset of 'post-colonial literatures', also called 'the new literatures in English', which are still wavering between 'a sense of place' and placelessness.¹⁵

There are diverse opinions as to the audience that should be targeted by African writers. In addition, the role of the African writer in society as well as the writer's commitment to either society or to his or her craft remain ambiguous and controversial, while critics and writers constantly argue over which language(s) should be used in works of African literature.

¹⁴ Jack Mapanje (Malawi) in *African Voices*, p. 37.

¹⁵ Chantal Zabus, "Criticism of African Literatures in English: Towards a Horizon of Expectation", *Revue de Littérature Comparée*, 3 (1993), 129-147 (p. 139). Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin have suggested that any literature whose culture has been affected by the imperial process from colonization to the present day be considered as a post-colonial literature; thus literatures of African countries, Australia, Bangladesh, Canada, Caribbean countries, India, Malaysia, Malta, New Zealand, Pakistan, Singapore, South Pacific Island countries and Sri Lanka would be treated as post-colonial literatures. *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (London and New York: Routledge, 1989), p. 2.

Again, there is disagreement as to whether African works should be judged according to Western literary canons or whether African literary criticism should have its own criteria.¹⁶ While the definition of an African aesthetic in literary criticism keeps writers and critics divided, the controversy over whether or not only Africans can give a "true" evaluation of African literary works seems to rage on without any consensus. These issues and others are often debated in conferences, journals and academic circles.

All in all, criticism of African literature was marked in the 1960s by a comparative approach and panafricanism, in the early 1970s by the national approach and ethnicity, in the late 1970s by emphasis on genre study and sociology of literature, in

¹⁶ The current debate over the adequacy of Western literary theory to African literary criticism is aptly summarized by Henry Louis Gates: "... how are we to read black texts? Can the methods of explication developed in Western criticism be 'translated' into the black idiom? How 'text-specific' is literary theory, and how 'universal' are rhetorical strategies? ... Do we have to 'invent' validly 'black' critical theory and methodologies?" ["Criticism in the jungle" in *Black Literature and Literary Theory*, ed. by Henry Louis Gates (New York: Methuen, 1984), p. 3.] Different opinions have emerged as regards the proper evaluation of African literature. Writers and critics like Wole Soyinka, Makouta M'Boukou, Chinua Achebe, Dan Izevbaye and Abiola Irele, to name but a few, insist that African literature should be evaluated within its own historical, cultural, and aesthetic framework; that is why Abiola Irele has pointed out: "Literature takes place within a cultural setting, and no meaningful criticism is possible without the existence of a community of values shared by the writer and the critic, which the latter can, in turn, make meaningful to the writer's larger audience." "The Criticism of Modern African Literature", in *Perspectives on African Literature*, ed. by Christopher Heywood (London: Heinemann, 1975), pp. 9-24 (p. 12). Others such as Eldred Jones, Lekan Oyegoke, and Solomon Isayere have argued in favour of a structuralist and post-structuralist approach to African literature. Again, others like Chidi Amuta adopt a Marxist critical approach that underscores the political dimensions of literature. *The Theory of African Literature* (London: Zed Books Ltd, 1989).

the early 1980s by emphasis on orality and politics, in the late 1980s by emphasis on language and decolonization as well as by the conflict between Afrocentrism and Eurocentrism, and in the early 1990s by emphasis on theory and postcoloniality.¹⁷ These debates, it must be conceded, help to foster the development of African literature as they provide useful insights and enhance an informed interpretation and understanding of literary texts. It is such insights that would also be useful to translators as they seek to contribute to the dissemination of African literature within Africa and to other parts of the world.

0.2 Statement of the research problem

In an attempt to reach a wider and international audience, most African writers today use European languages and endeavour to have their works translated into other languages, especially those that enjoy large readership. Through translation, writers can become known outside their own countries and the language barriers between Africans can be overcome. In this way, the works of francophone authors, for example, can be made available in English translations to anglophone readers in Africa and abroad. Moreover, it should be noted that some translations of African

¹⁷ See Chantal Zabus, "Criticism of African Literatures in English: Towards a Horizon of Expectation" for more detailed discussion of the evolution of the criticism of African literature. Although she focuses on the literature in English, a similar trend could be traced in the criticism of francophone African literature; moreover, many English-speaking critics have carried out studies on francophone literary works. These include Christopher Miller, *Theories of Africans: Francophone Literature and Anthropology in Africa* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1991) and Jonathan Ngate, *Francophone African Fiction: Reading a Literary Tradition* (Trenton, N.J.: Africa World Press, 1988).

works are already being regarded and studied as literary works in the target language, and have therefore formed an integral part of African literature; for instance, the English translations of some francophone works published by Heinemann Educational Books in the African Writers Series are treated as part of African literature in English and some of them are used as set books in schools and universities in Nigeria and Cameroon.¹⁸

Despite the writers' desire and the overall benefits of translation, however, not many African works have so far been rendered from one language into another, especially from indigenous to European languages and even between European languages themselves. The dearth of literary translation in Africa has already been underscored by Ade Ojo:

But as at present, not enough has been done to reveal the rich vitality of African literature, through translation. For example, texts written in Spanish and Portuguese have not been very much affected by translation into English and French; so too have very few texts written in English and French managed to cross over to the other two linguistic communities, through translation. Moreover, too little has been done from European languages into indigenous languages. Publishing houses, professionally trained translators, competent bilingual scholars and national or continental associations of translators must take up the challenge very seriously.¹⁹

It is also worth noting that most of the translators have failed

¹⁸ Timothy Asobele Jide, "Literary translation in Africa: the Nigerian experience", *Babel*, 35.2 (1989), 65-86 (p. 67). Translations studied as set books in colleges and used for research in universities include *The African Child* (Camara Laye), *God's Bits of Wood* (Sembène Ousmane), *Mission to Kala* (Mongo Beti), *Houseboy* (Ferdinand Oyono), *The Ambiguous Adventure* (Cheik Hamidou Kane), etc.

¹⁹ "The Role of the Translator of African Written Literature in Inter-cultural Consciousness and Relationships", *Meta*, 31.3 (1986), 291-99 (p. 299).

to comment on the translation process and methods used in solving translation problems, especially problems of cultural context and how to cope with the different horizons of expectations between African and non-African readers. Even where some researchers have expressed their views on the translation of African literature, such views are usually rather sketchy and lack a coherent theoretical framework that would foster debate and research in the field.

0.3 Aims of the thesis

The primary goal of this thesis is to attempt to map out what happens in the translation of African literature, mainly in terms of a range of strategies and choices that have been, or can be, made by translators of African literature from French into English. These strategies will be considered from a coherent overall perspective based on the various stages of the translation process: ST analysis and interpretation as well as transfer. In addition, my analysis will be presented against the background of issues in contemporary African literature and focus on features considered as typical of African literature in French and English.

Although I must admit that I would have preferred to centre my discussions on the literature written in my own mother tongue (Babungu), this is not possible as there is practically no written literature in the language.²⁰ References will therefore

²⁰. Recent work on the Babungu language in the North-West Province of Cameroon has been carried out by researchers of the "Summer Institute of Linguistics" (SIL) in their attempt to translate the Bible into the language using the Roman alphabet. Some basic grammar books and reading manuals have been produced

be made only to African literature in English and French, the languages with which I am sufficiently familiar on account of my education and the official bilingual (English and French) policy of my country, Cameroon. My knowledge of the other European languages used in African literature is rather poor and would, in any case, be grossly inadequate for analyzing and interpreting literary texts.

Furthermore, since translation, as opposed to interpretation, deals with written texts, emphasis will be laid on written texts which incorporate some oral literary genres. This is because orature forms a very important part of African literature and many writers often draw on this vast reserve of African traditions and folklore.

0.4 Methodology and organization of the thesis

In my attempt to present a coherent perspective of the various strategies and choices in the translation of African literature from French into English, my approach will be essentially descriptive and analytic, comparing English translations and their French originals and using examples from texts that are indicative of the underlying translation strategies. The analysis will also draw on debates and issues in African literary theory and criticism, relevant Western literary translation theories, studies on the translation of African literature, and so on in the attempt to suggest possible explanations for transfer strategies.

and the villagers are currently being taught how to read and write their language.

Chapter 1 examines and discusses some of the major issues and debate in African literature which might assist the translator in his or her attempt at an informed analysis and interpretation of African literary texts; these issues include a definition of African literature, its major features, and its audience. Some of the principal implications of these issues for translation are also considered.

In Chapter 2, a historical overview of the translation of African literature with particular emphasis on translations from French into English explores some of the ways in which translators have approached their source texts (ST) and the expectations of their target audience. Furthermore, certain studies of the translation of African literature are reviewed in order to assess their contribution to debate on literary translation in Africa.

Given the scanty and fragmentary nature of current studies on the translation of African literature dispersed in learned journals and publications, Chapter 3 looks at a range of Western literary translation theories with a view to exploring if and how these theories might contribute to broadening the perspective of literary translation studies in Africa.

Chapter 4 attempts to present a coherent overall picture of strategies and choices in the analysis, interpretation and translation of African literature from French into English. The proposed outline pattern, based mainly on existing translations, lays special emphasis on the distinctive features of African literary texts and expatiates on certain aspects that seem to have been inadequately addressed by Western literary translation

theories, drawing on models developed by some Western theorists, African literary theory and criticism, and other disciplines that could help the translator in the analysis and interpretation of African literary texts.

In Chapter 5, the various aspects of the transference mapping are illustrated in a case study in which a hitherto untranslated francophone African literary text is rendered into English and light shed on some of the significant translation strategies and decisions adopted. Moreover, comments are made within the context of stages in the translation process.

The thesis finally discusses the significance of the study or its contribution to knowledge. In the light of the results of the analysis, suggestions will be made as to further research that could use such information for the development of theories and models in the effort to foster translation studies in Africa.

CHAPTER 1

AFRICAN LITERATURE: ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS FOR TRANSLATION

As noted in the introduction, African literary theory today deals with a variety of issues. An examination of these issues will indicate how debate and research might contribute towards an informed analysis and interpretation of African literary works, particularly for translation purposes. This chapter will therefore attempt to explore and discuss some of the issues, as well as consider their implications for translation. The issues include the definition of African literature, its major distinctive features, and its audience.

1.1 Definition of African literature

One of the basic problems of African literature nowadays is its definition. To a large extent, attempts at definition have so far been limited only to the literature written in European languages, a situation which tends to reflect the controversy that usually surrounds the importance of language in literature. As concerns African literature written in indigenous languages and oral literature, on the other hand, there is widespread convergence of views as to their forming part of African literature. Nevertheless, given that African writers started using European languages only quite recently (after the Second World War), it is also generally agreed that a working definition which outlines the constitutive elements and scope of the young

literature would facilitate and enhance research and debate.

1.1.1 Early definitions

In her discussion of the various attempts to define African literature, Sandra Barkan points out that:

It was the African writers of French expression who first gave voice to their conceptions of African literature, integrating these conceptions into the philosophy of Négritude. Their definition of African literature was derived less from textual realities than felt political and social needs.¹

These writers, for example Alioune Diop, Léopold Sédar Senghor, etc., insisted that African literature should be defined only in terms of the black race and that the African writer should possess "that feeling of being black". Consequently, they excluded North African and white South African writers from their definition, emphasizing that these writers were of a different culture. This view was also shared by the Portuguese-speaking writers who regarded blackness as a fundamental semantic component of the term "African".

As for the English-speaking writers and critics, they proposed various definitions of African literature, dwelling often on aspects other than race. In fact, one of the first anglophone writers to suggest a definition was Cyprian Ekwensi who, as early as 1956, wrote:

To my mind African writing is that piece of self - expression in which the psychology behind African thought is manifest; in which the philosophy and the pattern of culture from which it springs can be

¹ "Emerging definitions of African literature", in *Literature Studies: The Present State: L'état présent*, ed. by Stephen Arnold (Washington D.C.: Three Continents Press, 1985), pp. 26-44 (p. 31).

discerned.²

He later explained what he meant by the term "psychology" as follows:

I use the term psychology very broadly to embrace reactions to situations and to the social order, religious beliefs, interpretations of moral codes, inter-relationships within the family. These factors inter-acting create the African character which gives its stamp to African writing. The subject matter is incidental.³

Other writers and critics like Bernard Fonlon, Christopher Okigbo, Ezekiel Mphahlele, Donatus Nwoga, etc. made further attempts at definition, trying to highlight aspects or features that could contribute towards distinguishing African literature, especially in European languages, from the literatures of the colonial powers.

1.1.2 Criteria for definition

Despite various discussions among African writers and critics for the past four decades in conferences, workshops, research projects, journals, books, and academic circles, opinions on what constitutes African literature have usually been divided and an appropriate definition of the literature remains as elusive as ever. The diverse views seem to stem primarily from the complex political and social realities of the continent, the different trends in the criticism of African literature, the various implications of the word "African", and so on. Be that as it may, efforts to define African literature have constantly

² "The Dilemma of the African Writer", *West African Review*, 27 (1956), 701-704, 708 (p. 703).

³ Cyprian Ekwensi, "Problems of Nigerian Writers", *Nigeria Magazine*, 78 (1963), 217-219 (p. 218).

been made in terms of criteria such as the geographical area or setting of the work, the race and nationality of the author, the language used, the subject matter or content of the work, the implied audience of the work, etc.

1.1.2.1 Geographical area or setting of the work

As regards the geographical area, many writers and critics feel that the setting of any African literary work should be Africa or one of the countries or regions within the continent. For example, T.R.M. Creighton's definition of African literature which was eventually adopted by the "African Literature and University Curriculum" conference held at Fourah Bay College, Freetown, in 1963 underscored the importance of the African setting:

any work in which an African setting is authentically handled, or to which experiences which originate in Africa are integral.⁴

Such emphasis on the African setting, however, raises questions as to whether a non African whose work is set in Africa can be considered an African writer and whether an African who adopts a foreign setting, say Paris, for his or her work ceases to be an African writer. That is why certain writers and critics such as Cyprian Ekwensi have objected to this restriction:

I do not agree with the stress which has been laid on experiences confined to the African continent, especially in these modern times when the most travelled man in the world is the educated African.⁵

⁴ "An Attempt to Define African Literature", in *African Literature and the Universities*, ed. by Gerald Moore (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1965), pp. 84-88 (p. 84).

⁵ "African Literature", *Nigeria Magazine*, 88 (1964), 294-299 (p. 294).

In any case, it is worth bearing in mind that many other literatures in the world also take geographical considerations into account; for example, although French, German, and Italian literatures are basically literatures in those languages and suggest specific cultural identities, the appellations also carry geographical implications.⁶ Similarly, despite the fact that the term "African" is first and foremost a geographical notion, it also has historical, ethnic, sociological, and cultural implications.

1.1.2.2 The race of the writer

Unlike the francophone writers and critics who in the beginning insisted that African literature concerns only the black race in Africa (hence their philosophy of Negritude⁷), many of their anglophone counterparts felt that race

⁶ Distinctions are sometimes made between appellations such as "French literature" or "English literature" (literature by native speakers of French or English) and "African literature in French" or "Indian literature in English" (literature by authors who use French or English, but are not native speakers). Such a distinction is evident in the title of William Walsh's book *Indian Literature in English* (Harlow: Longman, 1990); "English literature" is thus often used for literature in England.

⁷ A literary movement of French-speaking black African and Caribbean writers founded in Paris in the mid 1930s in protest against French colonial rule and policy of assimilation. Its primary aim was to assert the identity and cultural values of the black man, and its committed writers (for example, Léopold Sédar Senghor, Aimé Césaire, Léon Damas, Mongo Beti, Tchicaya U Tam'si, etc.) treated themes that extolled traditional black African culture and condemned colonialism. For its supporters, only black Africans formed the authentic race of Africa and could therefore produce African literature. However, the movement was opposed by many anglophone African writers (like Wole Soyinka, Gerald Moore, Ulli Beier, Chinua Achebe, etc.) who accused its supporters of ideological racism. Since the achievement of independence by most African states in the 1960s and given that the main political and cultural goals of the movement were thereby attained, much fewer authors have been writing on negritude themes.

considerations should not be a basis for classifying writers. For instance, Donatus Nwoga asserted that:

a native South African white would be considered an African writer and an African who goes to France for five years and writes of his experience in France... is still writing African literature.⁸

Another writer and critic, Ezekiel Mphahlele, also stressed that it would be absurd to consider the race of writers in the definition of African literature:

When we talk of African English writing then, I suggest, we cannot but discuss literature coming from both black and white in the continent. And by "black" I am including African Arabs. But if I insist on the **cultural** context in which we use the phrase, I should then take in writing by black Africans South of the Sahara, leaving out both whites and Arabs.⁹

Quite understandably, the criterion of race has been very controversial, as native South African white and North African writers vehemently counter any arguments that exclude their works from the body of African literature. While race motivations with respect to the classification of writers and their works are often based on claims of differences of culture and perception (as evident in Mphahlele's statement above), there seem to be good grounds for considering them as African writers, if only because they are nationals of African countries.

1.1.2.3 The origin of the writer

Many writers and critics believe that only writers of African origin can be said to produce African literature. This

⁸ Quoted in T.R.M. Creighton, "An Attempt to Define African Literature", p. 85.

⁹ "African Literature", in *The Proceedings of the First International Congress of Africanists*, ed. by Lalage Brown and Michael Crowder (London: Longman, 1964), pp. 220-232 (p. 221).

criterion is based on the argument that the African origin would acquaint the writer with African cultural values and experience as well as facilitate the expression of thought patterns and sensitivity peculiar to the continent. Nonetheless, opinions vary where the writer is not of African origin but has lived long in Africa and where the writer is an African but is born or has lived outside Africa for a long time. For example, would Peter Abrahams who is of South African origin but has lived most of his adult life in London and Jamaica be considered an African writer or not? On the other hand, would the novel, *Mister Johnson*, which has an African setting but is written by an Englishman (Joyce Cary), be considered a work of African literature? Cyprian Ekwensi's answer to this question is unequivocal: "African writing is unique. It can be written by no one else but the African."¹⁰

However, as other critics and writers have pointed out, it is sometimes not easy to determine who is an African; nationality is not always limited only to persons who are born and bred in a given country. What of Europeans and other foreigners who become Africans by naturalization? Small wonder, therefore, that the criterion of origin or nationality of the writer gives room for diverse opinions when applied to specific cases.

Mazisi Kunene takes the controversy a step further by underlining the complex relationship that could exist between the writer's origin and the language used, when attempting to define African literature (or any other literature, for that matter):

How absurd it would be to classify an Englishman who wrote in Latin as an English writer merely because he had been born in England and was writing works that

¹⁰ "problems of Nigerian Writers", p. 218.

were set in that country! James Stewart wrote in Zulu; why is he not regarded as an English writer?¹¹

The above remark would seem to imply that the language used by the author is also likely to play a significant role in the classification of writers.

1.1.2.4 The language in which the work is written

Given the language situation in Africa today, it is equally not surprising that language has been a battleground for the definition of African literature. Again, along with several other writers and critics, Obiajunwa Wali has affirmed that only literature in indigenous African languages should be considered African, since literatures are commonly defined in terms of their language of expression:

... until these [African] writers and their western midwives accept the fact that any true African literature must be written in African languages, they would be merely pursuing a dead end, which can only lead to sterility, uncertainty, and frustration.¹²

Furthermore, while arguing that any European or foreign language would embody a world view and cultural values alien to Africans,

¹¹ "Problems in African Literature", *Research in African Literatures*, 23.1 (1992), 27-44 (p. 32).

¹² "The Dead End of African Literature?", *Transition*, 3.3 (1963), 13-15 (p. 14). In this article, Wali argues that by using European languages, African writers are doing a disservice to the advancement of African literature and culture. For him, "the basic distinction between French and German literatures, for instance, is that one is written in French, and the other in German. All the other distinctions, whatever they be, are based on this fundamental fact. What therefore is now described as African literature in English and French is a clear contradiction, and a false proposition, just as "Italian literature in Hausa" would be." (p. 14)

Ngugi wa Thiong'o,¹³ has, for his part, stressed that it is mainly by writing in African languages that writers would be able to fulfil effectively their social role and contribute to nation building. He also points out that the use of European languages would perpetuate colonialism, an assertion which seems quite debatable given that a switch to indigenous African languages would not automatically eliminate European cultural domination.

Although his early works were written in English (for example, *Weep not, child*, 1964, *The River Between*, 1965, *Petals of Blood*, 1977, etc.), Ngugi has abandoned the language and is currently writing in his mother tongue, Gikuyu. His recent works in Gikuyu (for example, *Ngaahika Ndeenda*, a play which he wrote with Ngugi wa Mirii and was published in 1980, and *Caitaani Mutharabaini*, a novel published in 1980) are intended for the Kenyan peasants and workers who do not understand English. For Ngugi, works written by Africans in European languages should be termed "Afro-European literature", not African literature. It should be noted, however, that he has already translated the Gikuyu works into English.¹⁴ Countering arguments that emphasize

¹³ These ideas are developed in the essays contained in his work, *Writers in Politics* (London: Heinemann, 1981) and in *Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (London: Heinemann, 1986).

¹⁴ *Ngaahika Ndeenda* has been translated into English under the title *I Will Marry When I Want* (1982) and *Caitaani Mutharabaini* as *Devil on the Cross* (1982). Such translation somewhat acknowledges the fact that African writers need European languages for their works to be read beyond their tribes and countries. Again, writing in African languages and subsequently translating the literary works into European languages does not seem to solve the language question; Ngugi has admitted that he faced enormous problems when translating *Devil on the Cross* which, according to Kimani Gecau, loses a lot in translation. On the other hand, Ngugi has failed in his effort to translate *Petals of Blood* into Gikuyu. Indeed, "Ngugi's own works remain

the multiplicity of African languages and the need to learn them as a prerequisite to reading literature in indigenous languages, he has recently observed: "I do read world literatures and I don't have to learn every single language to do so."¹⁵ This remark, of course, underscores the importance of translation in the dissemination of literatures. That is why Ngugi further laments the fact that "the state of translation in African languages is underdeveloped" and "few publishers are willing to invest money in good quality books in African languages." (p. 1735)

Several other African writers also write in their mother tongues and translate into a European language; for instance, Okot p'Bitek's (Uganda) long poem, *Song of Lawino* (1966), was first written in Acoli and subsequently translated into English by the author himself. Others like Robert Mungoshi, Wole Soyinka, and Mazisi Kunene have written both in their native languages (Shona, Yoruba, and Zulu respectively) and in English. Yet again, others such as D.O. Fagunwa and Shabaan Robert have written exclusively in their mother tongues (Yoruba and Kiswahili respectively).

Like Obiajunwa Wali, Ngugi also believes that problems of many different languages, limited audiences, and the absence of writing systems need not deter African writers from using their mother tongues since this medium is better suited than any

untranslated into African languages, with the exception of six translations into Kiswahili - the earlier ones said to be inferior - and two into Shona." Carol Sicherman, *Ngugi wa Thiong'o: The Making of a Rebel* (London: Hans Zell, 1990), p. 32.

¹⁵ Quoted in Kwisi Owusu, "A Political Choice", *West Africa*, (18 Aug. 1986), 1735.

foreign language for expressing African realities and values:

An African writer who thinks and feels in his own language *must* write in that language. The question of transliteration, whatever that means, is unwise as it is unacceptable, for the "original" which is spoken of here, is the real stuff of literature and the imagination, and must not be discarded in favor of a copy.¹⁶

This position has been echoed quite recently by Mazisi Kunene, who further stresses that writers who use foreign languages "cannot be said to be African cultural representatives", since he feels that "writers who write in a foreign language are already part of foreign institutions".¹⁷

While acknowledging the suitability of African languages for the literature, other writers and critics such as Chinua Achebe and Léopold Sédar Senghor are of the opinion that works written by Africans in European languages should be considered as part of African literature just as much as those in indigenous languages. And Achebe has reiterated this long-standing argument recently:

... [indigenous African] languages must co-exist and interact with the newcomer at the present time and into the foreseeable future. For me it is not either English or Igbo, it is *both*.¹⁸

Achebe and his followers also contend that many African writers have been educated and can write only in European languages; such writers would therefore have to learn how to read and write their mother tongues before they can write in the languages.

¹⁶ Obiajunwa Wali, "The Dead End of African Literature?", p. 14.

¹⁷ "Problems in African Literature", p. 32.

¹⁸ Kirsten Holst Petersen and Anna Rutherford, eds, *Chinua Achebe: A Celebration* (Oxford: Heinemann, 1991), p. 8.

Unfortunately, most African languages do not yet have writing systems, whereas European languages would enjoy a wider audience and market. To a large extent, therefore, the choice of European languages is a historical and practical decision.¹⁹ The manner of language use, not the language, the writers maintain, is what ultimately makes literature. Hence Achebe argues that African writers do not have to write like Europeans; they would do well to adapt English, French or Portuguese to the needs of African speech patterns and world view while ensuring that their peculiar use of the languages does not compromise comprehension outside the African continent:

The African writer should aim to use English in a way that brings out his message best without altering the language to the extent that its value as a medium of international exchange will be lost. He should aim at fashioning out an English which is at once universal and able to carry his peculiar experience.²⁰

This, of course, is precisely what Achebe, Gabriel Okara, and a host of other English-speaking writers have been trying to do in their literary works; their writing strategy also includes the use of African terms without glossing. The same applies to some French-speaking authors like Yambo Ouologuem, Seydou Badian, and Ahmadou Kourouma, among others. Chicaya U Tam'si points out that

¹⁹ Indeed, Wole Soyinka sees no conflict in his choice of English in most of his writings (he also writes in Yoruba): "[English] is the common language between the Ibos, the Efiks, the Hausa, the Yoruba, the Ibibio... I feel I must speak to as many of them at the same time as possible... I want to be able to speak to the Ngugi wa Thiong'os, the Taban lo Liyongs, the Nuruddin Farahs... I think we also have a duty to ensure that any means of communication between these artificially separated peoples should in some way at least be preserved." *African Voices*, p. 69.

²⁰ *Morning Yet on Creation Day* (London: Heinemann, 1975), p. 100.

he often adapts French to suit his literary needs: "La langue française me colonise: je la colonise à mon tour."²¹

Irrespective of all the arguments advanced in favour of African languages or of European languages, however, one cannot but appreciate the pertinence of Chidi Amuta's remark:

African literature written in English, French and Portuguese exists alongside a growing tradition of written literature in Yoruba, Igbo, Gikuyu and Xosa. Given this spectacle, to insist that African literature be created exclusively in either of these sets of languages is to ignore the social and historical predication of the language situation itself.²²

The possibility of adopting an African language that could be used for literary creation all over the continent (e.g. Swahili) has already been raised by Wole Soyinka, but with no apparent success.²³ What still seems to give room for some doubt as to the effectiveness of such a language is that it may not be able, just as European languages, to convey the specificity of each culture and world view on the continent. Nonetheless, many authors have continued to use European languages to portray African cultural values and experience.

²¹ Quoted in Jacques Chevrier, "Ecrire en français? Les réticents, les réalistes et les autres", *Jeune Afrique Plus*, 7 (May 1984), 49-50 (p. 50).

²² *The Theory of African Literature*, p. 113.

²³ Wole Soyinka, "The Choice and Use of Language", *Cultural Events in Africa*, 75 (1971), 3-6. He has been supported in his choice by Tambayi Nyika who has argued in favour of Kiswahili as a panafrikan language; "One African Tongue", *West Africa* (23 Sept. 1986), 1966-67.

Other linguists prefer other languages; D.O. Olagoke has opted for Hausa which he feels would be suitable for Africa's indigenous literature, "Choosing a National Language for Nigeria", *Jolan*, 1 (1982), 200.

1.1.2.5 The subject matter of the work

It has also emerged from various discussions that the subject matter or content of a literary work is an important criterion for qualification as African literature. For the proponents of this criterion, works of African literature should portray African culture and values as well as present the African experience and environment. For example, Christopher Okigbo has asserted that a work of African literature:

must have its roots deep in African soil, must take its birth from African experience, must pulsate with African feeling; in brief, what made a work African was Negritude as first felt and expressed by Senghor and Césaire.²⁴

The African content would help to distinguish African literature from other literatures, especially those of the European languages used by African writers. All the same, although there may well be a case for an African content, it should be borne in mind that if such content is not artistically woven into the work, we may end up with an anthropological or sociological work that has very little in common with good literature.

1.1.2.6 The implied audience of the work

The writer's intended or implied audience has sometimes served as one of the parameters for defining African literature. Should a work of African literature be written primarily for readers in the West, for Africans, or for both? Again, Obiajunwa Wali and Ngugi wa Thiong'o are some of the writers and critics who have considered the question of audience for the African

²⁴ Reported by Bernard Fonlon, "African Writers Meet in Uganda", *Abbia*, 1 (1963), 39-53 (p. 42).

writer. They insist that African literature should comprise only works that are written for an implied African audience; that is why they also call for the use of indigenous African languages, instead of European languages, that would be understood by African readers:

If a Kenyan writer wants to speak to the peasants and workers then he should write in the languages they speak; i.e. in the languages of the Kenyan nationalities or in the all-Kenya national language which is Kiswahili.²⁵

Consequently, works intended for a European or an American readership, even with an African content, cannot be deemed to form part of African literature.

Other critics and writers contend, however, that despite the common practice that writers primarily address an audience that is familiar with what is portrayed in their works, many African works are intended for a European and international audience, especially as the writers often use European languages, their works are published mainly abroad, and they prefer a large readership and market available in other African countries, Europe, the United States, etc. For example, while A. Bodunrin acknowledges the targeting of a foreign audience by a large number of African writers, he denounces such practice as propaganda and advocates the use of African languages for the African audience:

I know it can be argued that the African author writing in a European language reaches a bigger and

²⁵ Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Writers in Politics*, p. 60. This idea has been reiterated very recently: "For the African writer, the language he has chosen already has chosen his audience." "The Writer in a Neo-colonial State", in *Moving the Centre. The Struggle for Cultural Freedom* (London: James Currey, 1993), pp. 60-75 (p. 73).

more international public which is an advantage for African culture. This argument implies that literature is propaganda not culture.²⁶

Furthermore, another critic, Akinwumi Isola, tries to draw a distinction between the audience and the market of African literature. He points out that even though the market for African works in European languages is outside Africa, the real audience should be African readers:

African writers who publish their works in foreign languages are confusing their market with their audience. A genuine audience inhabits the same literary ecosystem as a writer and can immediately understand the writer's allusions to culturally significant events, objects, people, and situations. In contrast a market consists of people who do not inhabit the same literary ecosystem as the writer. These people can only try to understand the writer's exotic story and appreciate his literary qualities from a distance.²⁷

The problem of audience in the definition of African literature is therefore rather complex. Beyond what could be considered the ideal situation in which African writers address first and foremost the African audience, one cannot turn a blind eye to the fact that practical considerations such as the size of the audience and market, as well as the reasons for writing and the publishing opportunities, are often very crucial.

Such are some of the parameters that have often been debated in attempts to define African literature. Conscious of the diverse opinions, and in order to present a more comprehensive perspective for the definition of African literature, Sandra

²⁶ "What is African Literature?", *African Statesman*, 1.1 (1965), 33-42 (p. 42).

²⁷ "The African Writer's Tongue", *Research in African Literatures*, 23.1 (1992), 17-26 (p. 25).

Barkan tried to determine the most widely accepted criteria by sending a questionnaire to members of the African Literature Association of North America; she summarized her analysis of the responses received as follows:

The primary criteria for defining African literature today are geography, race and content but these criteria have become more complex under the influence of structuralism, post-structuralism and other contemporary trends... The "what" of the text continues to be of primary importance to the vast majority of critics interested in African literature, but the roles of the individual author as creator, and of the audience as interpreters, have begun to be seen in a new light.²⁸

Besides, the fact that the texts themselves are constantly changing makes the definition of African literature as problematic as ever. Even if there were widespread consensus on a given set of criteria, how would they be applied to individual works of African literature? Would all the criteria be applied to each work or would they be selectively applied at the critic's discretion? What degree of importance would be attached to each criterion? These, as we can see, are just some of the problems that bedevil attempts to define African literature. The complexity of the literature, given its historical, social, and cultural origins, somewhat accounts for the present difficulty in proposing a definition that would embrace all its relevant facets. Perhaps one could be tempted to wonder, as does Chidi Amuta:

whether a whole body of a people's literary culture is reducible to the status of a biological specimen to be identified, defined, categorized, labelled and displayed for posterity to behold with unquestioning horror! Or whether, in fact, literature (any literature) lends itself to such rigidity in the first

²⁸ "Emerging definitions of African literature", p. 43.

place.²⁹

Nevertheless, on account of the importance of a definition to research and debate, attempts to define the literature are still being made, especially as consensus on the criteria for definition remains remote and there seems to be no single accepted definition.

It is in this vein that some critics and writers object to the idea (implied by the term "African literature") that the literature is homogeneous, without any variations throughout the continent. They insist that the word "African" covers a wide and diverse area that could better be described in terms of countries, hence African literatures made up of national literatures. Consequently, Sandra Barkan writes:

Just as European literary boundaries became narrower once the process of national integration began, similarly at a time when nation states are being created in Africa, there has been a tendency on the part of some Africans to define the contemporary literatures of Africa in increasingly narrow terms.³⁰

This stance, of course, tends to ignore the realities of nationhood on the continent today; not only are most countries far from being homogeneous entities, but they are also polyethnic and multilingual. Furthermore, some ethnic groups and tribes occupy areas that go beyond national political boundaries, such that members of the same ethnic group could, in certain cases, belong to different countries. For example, the Ewe people are found in Togo which is a French-speaking country, and in Ghana, an English-speaking country.

²⁹ *The Theory of African Literature*, p. 104.

³⁰ "Emerging definitions of African literature", p. 32.

On the other hand, several others like Chinua Achebe prefer to consider "African literature" as a blanket term for the many literatures on the continent, divided according to language and culture rather than to political boundaries:

... you cannot cram African literature into a small, neat definition. I do not see African literature as one unit but as a group of associated units - in fact the sum total of all the national and ethnic literatures of Africa.³¹

Again, other writers and critics would rather divide African literature according to region, race or main European languages, with groupings like francophone (anglophone) Sub-Saharan literature, francophone Maghrebian literature, West African literature, South African literature, Negro-African literature, and so on. In point of fact, other divisions are usually made, depending on the criteria chosen. Talking about African literature in indigenous languages, Abiola Irele aptly remarks:

What we have is a diversity of literatures expressed in the various languages native to Africa, and each one bound to the specific peoples and cultures using those languages... Without a common African language, we can only speak as yet of various literatures in African languages.³²

Indeed, it is evident that the concept of African literature will often vary with the political, social and cultural changes that take place on the continent, as well as with the subject matter and style of the works themselves; the term would need to be redefined from age to age.

³¹ *Morning Yet on Creation Day*, p. 92.

³² Abiola Irele, *The African Experience in Literature and Ideology* (London: Heinemann, 1981), pp. 45 & 47.

1.1.2.7 Proposal of a working definition

Given that there is no single generally accepted definition of African literature, and since a working definition would help to map out the field of investigation in this thesis, I intend to consider African literature as literature by native Africans with an African content and setting. The literature may be either oral or written, traditional or modern, and expressed in either European or indigenous African languages. Furthermore, "African literature" will be used as a blanket term for all the national and ethnic literatures of Africa; in this respect, Abiola Irele's comment ties in with my perception:

... the notion of Africa as a geo-political concept serves as the primary validation for the continued application of a term whose all-inclusive character does not seem to impair its efficacy of reference.³³

Of course, national literatures may further be grouped according to language, cultural affinities, region, and other parameters.

I believe that despite the differences in the works of individual writers even within the same country or area, various similarities in viewpoint, content, language, style, etc. could be used as the basis for grouping works into larger categories. In this way, African literatures in European languages could be grouped together in terms of language, and similarities among them used for further research and debate. "African literature in European languages" will therefore in this thesis be used as

³³ Abiola Irele, "The African Imagination", p. 51. Abiola further points out that the term "African literature" has continued to be used despite categorization of African literature in terms of indigenous languages. The idea of national literatures in European languages has not been widely adopted since the languages are neither indigenous to the countries nor national in their use.

a blanket term for all the literatures written in European languages in African countries.

It goes without saying that the above considerations do not account for all the facets of African literature, nor are they intended to give an all-embracing perspective of the literature. There may well be certain works that defy classification using the criteria already discussed. Nevertheless, any credible definition of African literature would have to take into account the present historical, political, social, and cultural realities of Africa. Since I am concerned in this thesis with African literature written in European languages, and it is precisely this part of the literature that has generated and continued to generate much controversy, a review of current opinions has helped to indicate some of the essential aspects of African literature and provided the basis for a working definition.

As several critics, for example Janheinz Jahn, have argued, African literature in European languages cannot be regarded merely as an extension of the corresponding European literatures; it presents certain distinctive features:

In contrast to Western literature, however, Neo-African literature has certain stylistic elements which stem from Negro-African oral tradition. It is this style which characterizes Neo-African literature and not the author's language (for the most part European), birth place or color of skin.³⁴

Indeed, there are also other aspects which combine with those

³⁴ "Introduction to *A Bibliography of Neo-African Literature from Africa, America and the Caribbean*" (London: Deutsch, 1965), p. vii. The term "neo-African literature" was suggested by Janheinz Jahn to describe modern literary works produced in European languages by blacks on both sides of the Atlantic, as distinguished from "African literature" which is expressed in African languages.

above to make the literature stand out as a literature in its own right. I will now examine some of the significant features of African literature in English and French; this is mainly because the translator would need to be aware of them when trying to analyze and interpret similar texts before translation.

In my attempt to look at typical features, my primary task will be to focus my analysis and illustrations on a body of writing that could be considered as forming a unified corpus. Various similarities in the viewpoints, content, language, and style of certain African literary works in French and English will serve as basis for grouping them together for my study.

Generally speaking, African literature in French is produced in the former French colonies. However, the literature is not usually deemed to be homogeneous throughout the continent. In fact, some researchers would divide African literature in French into two categories: Maghrebian (North Africa) and sub-Saharan (West and Central Africa).³⁵ Although the division seems merely to split Africa into regions, it is mainly based on certain linguistic and cultural affinities shared by the writers of each category. Despite the fact that writers of the two categories had the same colonial masters and experience, the differences between them have been underscored by Hédi Bouraoui in the following terms:

The (francophone) literatures of the Maghreb and of sub-Saharan Africa show distinctive differences as well as similarities. Generally speaking, the

³⁵ Hédi Bouraoui, "The Present State of Francophone Maghrebian Literature: Perspectives and Problems", in *African Literature Studies: The Present State: L'état présent*, ed. by Stephen Arnold (Washington D.C.: Three Continents Press, 1985) pp. 257-267 (pp. 257-258).

similarities are on the thematic level whereas the sharpest differences are linguistic. (p. 265)

It could also be argued that the differences are often evident at the cultural and spiritual levels too. For these reasons therefore, it would be difficult to treat the two categories together as if they formed one homogeneous unit, especially at the linguistic and cultural levels which play a significant role in translation.³⁶

Taking into account the above argument, I will select one of the categories of francophone African literature for my analysis. I will focus on sub-Saharan francophone literature; this choice is dictated primarily by the fact that I come from that part of Africa, the body of literature is significant in comparison to that of the Maghreb, and my studies in African literature have often been concentrated on writers from the region. As I decide to orientate my analysis on the literature of this region, however, I am well aware of arguments that even within sub-Saharan Africa there are national literatures which could be distinguished from each other. Admittedly, differences could even be stretched to the level of individual writers within national literatures; nevertheless, these differences are

³⁶ Frederic Michelman has noted the constant separate treatment of literatures in French from sub-Saharan and Maghreb (Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and sometimes Libya) regions precisely for these reasons: "Most critical works on African literature limit themselves to one area or the other on the assumption that the geographical separation of the Maghreb from the rest of Africa as well as its ethnic, cultural, religious, and linguistic unity set it apart from the rest of Africa in such a way as to justify the independent treatment of the literature from each region." Book review on Mildred Mortimer, *Journeys Through the French African novel* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann; London: James Currey, 1990) in *Research in African Literatures*, 24.2 (1993), 139-141 (p. 139).

significantly outweighed by the cultural and linguistic similarities that militate in favour of literature in the region being considered as an entity. This idea has also been emphasized by O.R. Dathorne:

the corpus (of francophone sub-Saharan literature) presents an interesting body of literature, unified not merely by the French language or even by a common set of experiences and privations within the French colonial structure; it represents a whole, along with the literatures in African languages, English and Portuguese, because it charts the course of concern away from the group to personal affiliations.³⁷

As for African literature in English, while most of the literature is produced in sub-Saharan Africa, the content and style of West and East African writing are often different in certain aspects from those of South Africa. Most anglophone West and East African writers draw on their culture and oral lore, whereas South Africans have "shown little interest in cultural salesmanship"³⁸ in their portrayal of urbanization and the social effects of apartheid.

Thus, given the similar thematic concerns and influence of cultural and traditional setting in works by anglophone and francophone African writers south of the Sahara (except South African writers), this category of writing will serve as the basis for my analysis of typical features of African literature in English and French.

³⁷ *African Literature in the Twentieth Century* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1975), p. 307.

³⁸ Oyekan Owomoyela, *African Literatures: An Introduction* (Massachusetts: Crossroads Press, 1979), p. 98. Owomoyela further notes: "The language of the South African writer also reflects his urbanization (or cosmopolitanism), being free, for example, of ostentatious proverbializing and showing instead close kinship with the language of American Blacks." (p. 98).

1.2 Significant features of African literature in European languages: English and French

Although many African writers use European languages for literary creation, their use of the languages is different in certain respects from that of European writers of the corresponding languages. In addition to the peculiar use of the European language, Abiola Irele draws attention to the different subject matter:

The striking feature that gives interest to this literature is a noticeable preoccupation not only with the African experience as the central subject of their works, but also with the problem of a proper and adequate reflection of that experience, which involves, in formal terms, a reworking of their means of expression for that purpose.³⁹

Broadly speaking, differences between African literature in European languages (English and French) and European literature of corresponding languages could be said to be reflected particularly at the levels of content, cultural references, language use, and receptors of the work.

1.2.1 African content of the work

African writers often describe societies and experiences quite different from those portrayed by European writers. These societies are usually traditional societies that have changed or are being transformed. For example, in *Things Fall Apart* (1958), Chinua Achebe presents the traditional Igbo society in turmoil as it comes to grips with the advent of the white man, his religion and culture. In such circumstances, many writers explore themes like colonization and its effects, the clash of cultures,

³⁹ "The African Imagination", p. 60.

the conflict of generations within the society, and several others. In fact, the main themes of African literature have been changing to reflect the political and social evolution of the continent since colonization.

Before the independence of most African states in the early 1960s, many African writers participated in the revolt against colonialism and in the struggle for political independence by producing works that extolled precolonial African customs and cultural values; they also revived traditional legends, myths, epics, folklore, etc., and the war exploits of past heroes were presented as examples to be emulated by the people in their struggle. Works in this category include novels such as *Doguiçimi* (1938) by Paul Hazoumé (Dahomey) and *Soundjata ou l'épopée mandingue* (1961) by Djibril Tamsir Niane (Guinea), poems such as *Vers la liberté* (1961) by Mamadou Traoré (Guinea) and *Rythmes du khalam* (1962) by Ousmane Socé (Senegal), and plays like *La Mort de Chaka* (1962) by Seydou Badian (Mali) and *Les derniers jours de Lat Dior* (1965) by Amadou Cisse Dia (Senegal).

After independence, the themes gradually changed as several writers sought to depict the social and political situation in the newly independent countries. The writers focused on such themes as the conflict of generations, tradition versus modernity, the exploitation of the masses by the new political leaders and the middle class, and urbanization. Examples of works in this category include novels like *Remember Ruben* (1974) by Mongo Beti (Cameroon), *Princesse Mandapu* (1972) by Pierre Bamboté (Central African Republic), *The River Between* (1965) by Ngugi wa Thiong'o (Kenya), *La Plaie* (1967) by Malick Fall (Senegal), and

The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born (1969) by Ayi Kwei Armah (Ghana), plays such as *Trois prétendants, un mari* (1964) by Guillaume Oyono-Mbia (Cameroon), and poetry collections such as *Crépuscule équinoxial* (1977) by Ngandu Nkashama (Zaire).

Since the 1970s, although a good number of writers have continued to dwell on urbanization and its effects and on various social and political issues, other more general themes such as love, life, death, and solitude have also been treated. This is evident in such poetical works as *La nuit de ma vie* (1961) by Jean-Paul Nyunaï (Cameroon) and *Leurres et lueurs* (1960) by Birago Diop (Senegal), plays like *La dérive ou la chute des points cardinaux* (1973) by Sonso Sangu (Zaire) and *Kafra-Biatanga* (1973) by Alexandre Kum'a N'Dumbe III (Cameroon), and novels like *Le Fils d'Agatha Moudio* (1968) by Francis Bebey (Cameroon) and *Une Vie de boy* (1956) by Ferdinand Oyono (Cameroon). In fact, Ngandu Nkashama's summary of the evolution of themes in poetry could also apply to other literary genres:

Les poètes de la dernière décennie accordent au lyrisme, aux sentiments intimes et personnels, à une certaine mystique et aux problèmes existentiels (la vie, la mort, la souffrance humaine) plus d'importance qu'aux autres thèmes, alors que les poètes de la période qui précède les indépendances sont tournés vers la libération politique, et que ceux des années chaudes des indépendances politiques continuent à chanter les héros de la libération.⁴⁰

Thus even though some of the themes (for example, love, death, etc.) that are treated in Europhone African literature today are also found in many other world literatures, works which reflect the social, political and historical aspects of the continent

⁴⁰ *Comprendre la littérature africaine écrite en langue française: la poésie, le roman, le théâtre* (Issy les Moulineaux: Les Classiques Africaines, 1979), p. 16.

give the literature its particular identity with respect to other literatures expressed in the same European languages. More significantly, the themes are changing constantly as writers try to keep pace with the dynamic society and meet the aspirations of the people. Indeed, Bassirou Dieng has insisted that the literature "is strongly referential, with a pragmatic function."⁴¹ That is why some writers have recently sought to portray certain aspects of the present urban society: Amadou Ganour's (Senegal) *La Graine de vermine* (1989) and Sokhna Benga's (Senegal) *Le Dard du secret* (1990) deal with drugs, gangs and prostitution.

1.2.2 Cultural environment of the work

Furthermore, the cultural environment often serves as setting for many literary works. The names of places, geographical features, and characters are often in the local language. For example, in Ferdinand Oyono's *Le vieux nègre et la médaille* (1956), the local names of the characters (Meka, Evina, Ondoua, Engamba, Nti, Kelara, etc.) indicate that the novel is set in the South Province of Cameroon. Although some of the names in certain works are fictional, several African writers often use names as a means of revealing the setting of their works. In *Arrow of God* (1964), Chinua Achebe uses the names of places (Umuaru, Okperi, Nkisa, Umuachala, etc.), characters (Oduche,

⁴¹ "Narrative Genres and Intertextual Phenomena in the Sahelian Region (Myths, Epics, and Novels)", *Research in African Literatures*, 24.2 (1993), 33-45 (p. 43). Dieng also notes that the early "classical" literary works "with cultural, political, and panafricanist echoes" are gradually being "subverted" by "a less political generation [which] speaks about its distress and its personalized feelings." (p. 44).

Ezeulu, Edogo, Nwaka, etc.), days of the week (Oye, Afo, Nkwo, etc.) and other means to set his novel in the Igbo society of Nigeria. Similarly, the local names of objects, dishes, drinks, dress, and institutions, which have no suitable equivalents in the European language are maintained in many literary works. For instance, one comes across names of local objects such as "tara", "kora", "kundi", "ogene", "ikenga", "jigida", "aba", "obi", "mboso", etc., food and dishes like "ewedu", "lakh", "foofoo", "miondo", etc., drinks such as "arki", "tyapalo", "hargui", "ngbako", etc., dresses such as "boubou", "sanja", "agbada", "dansiki", etc., and institutions and concepts such as "ndichie", "yenekat", "dja", etc. Various aspects of life and customs of the people are also sometimes portrayed: the family, ceremonies, beliefs, folklore, and other cultural aspects.

In fact, the cultural background is prominent in some legends and epics such as Jean Malonga's (Congo) *La Légende de M'Pfumou Ma Mazono* (1954). Ngandu Nkashama comments on African novels with conspicuous cultural setting in the following words:

Le roman décrit la vie courante dans l'Afrique traditionnelle, observe l'équilibre instauré entre l'homme et la nature, entre l'individu et la collectivité, entre la conscience individuelle, les traditions et le cosmos, entre la création et le Créateur. D'où une part importante accordée aux cosmogonies, aux mythes qui polarisaient les consciences et les croyances, aux institutions sociales, à l'autorité des chefs, aux rigueurs de l'éthique collective, à la fidélité aux coutumes et aux traditions.⁴²

For example, *Crépuscule des temps anciens* (1962) by Nazi Boni (Burkina Faso) is a novel almost entirely devoted to the

⁴² *Comprendre la littérature africaine écrite en langue française: la poésie, le roman, le théâtre*, p. 55.

description of Bwamu culture. Moreover, peculiar aspects of African culture are often also depicted in other literary genres such as poetry, drama, etc. In communities undergoing social change, traditional customs and modernity exist side by side.

It is worth bearing in mind, however, that the specific cultural setting of a work often reflects the language and culture with which its author is familiar. In this way, the peculiarities of the various African cultures are portrayed along with aspects that could be considered as common throughout the continent. Consequently, the cultural setting could be said to contribute to the work's local and continental identity.

1.2.3 Peculiar use of European languages

As concerns the use of European languages in African literary works, Abiola Irele underlines its peculiar features:

Despite the fact that our writers use the European language to express themselves, the most original of them do so with the conscious purpose of presenting an African experience, and the best among them reflect in their works a specific mode of imagination which derives from their African background.⁴³

These original writers use oral literary forms such as proverbs, songs, folktales, riddles, and others in their works. Given that the European languages are not all well-equipped for expressing the cultural aspects of the traditional forms, the writers seek ways of making the portrayal of the aspects as authentic as best they can. That is why Chinua Achebe feels, for example, that English-speaking writers have to forge a new type of English in their works:

⁴³ *The African Experience in Literature and Ideology*, p. 33.

I feel that the English language will be able to carry the weight of my experience. But it will have to be a new English, still in full communion with its ancestral home but altered to suit its new African surroundings.⁴⁴

In his novels, Achebe effectively adapts English to suit his depiction of the Igbo society. Other writers such as Yambo Ouologuem, Ferdinand Oyono, and Sembène Ousmane also tailor French to accommodate their mother tongues and cultural environment. In fact, since many African writers are very often influenced by the thought patterns and expression of their native tongues, they sometimes translate the languages into the European language. This fact is underscored by Makouta M'Boukou:

L'écrivain négro-africain, dans la plupart des cas, pense en sa langue, et s'exprime en français. De sorte qu'il faut considérer sa langue d'expression comme une traduction très soignée de sa langue maternelle.⁴⁵

Such translation and special use of the language are evident at various levels (lexical, syntactic, sentence, discursal) as well as in the imagery, proverbs, dialogue, and other rhetorical devices used in the works.

At the lexical level, many authors incorporate African culture-bound words in their writing in various ways. First of all, some writers use culture-bound words in the text and explain or define them in footnotes; for example, in *Une Vie de boy*, Ferdinand Oyono defines "aba" in the sentence, "La masse de l'aba

⁴⁴ *Morning Yet on Creation Day*, p. 103.

⁴⁵ *Introduction à l'étude du roman négro-africain de langue française* (Abidjan: Les Nouvelles Editions Africaines, 1980), p. 270. Indeed, Olympe Bhêly-Quenum, a writer from Benin, has confirmed Makouta-M'bouko's assertion by noting that he basically follows this method of writing: "Je suis obligé d'écrire en fon ou en yoruba en deux ou trois lignes, et plus tard je développe et je traduis..." "Ecriture noire en question (débat)", *Notre Librairie*, 65 (1982), 14.

se détachait dans la nuit" (p. 11) in a footnote as "case à palabre" while Massa Makan Diabaté (Mali) in his novel, *L'Assemblée des Djinns* (1985), defines "kora" in "Il fit venir un joueur de kora de grand renom comme associé." (p. 31) in a footnote as "harpe à vingt et une cordes." Secondly, certain writers define or explain the culture-bound terms in a glossary either at the beginning or at the end of the literary work; for example, Sembène Ousmane (Senegal) provides a glossary at the beginning of his novel, *Le Dernier de l'Empire* (1981), while Wole Soyinka's glossary in *The Interpreters* (1965) is at the end of the novel. Thirdly, some writers avoid using either the glossary or footnotes; they define or explain the words in various ways within the text itself. For instance, Chinua Achebe is resourceful in the ways he defines or explains Igbo cultural terms:

"Give me the **omu**." Edogo passed the tender palm leaves to him. (*The Arrow of God*, p. 119)

"The fish in it was either **asa** or something equally good..." (*Arrow of God*, p. 166)

"His own hut or **obi**, stood immediately behind the only gate in the red walls." (*Things Fall Apart*, p. 11)

"This man told him that the child was an **ogbanje**, one of those wicked children who, when they died, entered their mothers' wombs to be born again." (*Things Fall Apart*, p. 68)

In addition, the Nigerian novelist, Elechi Amadi, puts definitions or short explanations within brackets: "She could hear the sound of oduma (a dance employing a xylophone)." (*The Concubine*, 1966, p. 12) while Ahmadou Kourouma (Ivory Coast) places a French near equivalent in brackets next to the culture-bound term: "La colonisation, les maladies, les famines, même les

Indépendances ne tombent que sur ceux qui ont leur ni (l'âme), leur dja (le double) vidés et affaiblis par les ruptures d'interdit et de totem." (*Les Soleils des Indépendances*, 1968, p. 116). These ways of defining or explaining culture-bound terms within the text are also used by Pierre Bamboté in *Princesse Mandapu*, Ngugi wa Thiong'o in *The River Between*, and several other writers. Finally, certain authors use culture-bound terms within contexts that tend to suggest their meaning; for instance, in "He bailed the water with a mboso, using his right hand while his left hand held his paddle in the river." (*Because of Women*, 1970, p. 31), Mbella Sonne Dipoko (Cameroon) has amply contextualized "mboso" so that the reader can guess that it is a sort of local container. On the other hand, other writers provide no clues within the immediate context, hoping that the reader will construct the term's meaning as he or she reads further; for example, Sembène Ousmane in *Le Dernier de l'Empire* uses the word "boubou" several times but offers no definition or explanation, and the reader is expected to guess its meaning within the wider context of the novel.

It should be noted, however, that some writers scarcely use African culture-bound terms in their works; they seem to believe that African ideas and concepts can be adequately expressed in European languages. That is probably why in *Perpetue ou l'habitude du malheur* (1974), Mongo Beti virtually uses no cultural terms or expressions peculiar to his language and culture; only the names of characters and places (Amougou, Esola, Akomo, Nsimalen, etc.) give an indication as to the novel's setting.

Again, instead of transferring the culture-bound terms to the European languages, some writers translate the terms and use them according to the idioms of their mother tongues. Such is the case with Gabriel Okara (Nigeria) in many instances in *The Voice* (1964): "So the many years which I have killed in the hut have put many things into my inside which have made me see differently." (p. 33) Amos Tutuola also uses this method extensively in *The Palm-wine Drinkard and his Dead Palm-wine Tapster in the Dead's Town* while in *Crépuscule des temps anciens* (1962), Nazi Boni translates concepts literally from his mother tongue into French: "Il y a de cela environs trois cents ans moins vingt..." (p. 21).

At the syntactic level, the structure or word-order of a sentence in the European language is sometimes based on that of the writer's native tongue. For example, in *The Voice* Okara⁴⁶ uses strange English syntax which, apparently, derives from his mother tongue, Ijaw:

"Because a son you have in college nobody will speak the straight thing?" (1973, p. 45)

"The engine man Okolo's said-things heard and started the engine and the canoe once more, like an old man up on a slope walking, moved slowly forward until making-the-

⁴⁶ It is worth noting, moreover, that Okara's imposition of Ijaw syntax on English stems primarily from his belief that "the only way to use [African ideas] effectively is to translate them literally from the African language native to the writer into whatever European language he is using as his medium of expression." "African Speech... English Words", *Transition*, 10 (1963), 15-16 (p. 15).

For more detailed discussion of Gabriel Okara's use of English in this novel, refer to B.O. Okikwelu, "Gabriel Okara: *The Voice* and Transliteration", in *Critical Theory and African Literature*, ed. by Ernest Emenyonu (Ibadan: Heinemann, 1985), pp. 276-287 and Patrick Scott, "Gabriel Okara's *The Voice*: The Non-Ijo Reader and the Pragmatics of Translingualism", *Research in African Literatures*, 21.3 (1990), 75-88.

people-handsome day appeared." (1973, p. 47)

Ahmadou Kourouma also recasts French sentence structure in *Les Soleils des Indépendances* in order to use the speech pattern of his mother tongue in expressing his ideas; he describes his use of the French language as follows:

Qu'avais-je donc fait? simplement donné libre cours à mon tempérament en distordant une langue classique trop rigide pour que ma pensée s'y meuve. J'ai donc traduit le malinké en français en cassant le français pour trouver et restituer le rythme africain.⁴⁷

Very often, the European language structure is brought as close as possible to the speech patterns of the indigenous languages, especially in drama when a playwright wants to give the impression that he or she has translated the speech of certain uneducated characters who are in fact expressing themselves in their own mother tongues. For example, Guillaume Oyono-Mbia and Wole Soyinka have in their plays tried to adapt French and English respectively to the speech patterns of their own mother tongues in order to render the characters lifelike within their environment. Chantal Zabus has referred to such use of English or French vocabulary with an African language structure as "relexification", the result being that "it is not 'metropolitan' English or French that appears on the page but an unfamiliar European language that constantly suggests another tongue."⁴⁸ She further notes that

such texts are... palimpsests for, behind the scriptural authority of the target European language, the earlier, imperfectly erased remnants of the source

⁴⁷ Quoted in Makhily Gassama, *Kuma* (Dakar: Les Nouvelles Editions Africaines, 1978), p. 237.

⁴⁸ *The African Palimpsest: Indigenization of Language in the West African Europhone Novel*, p. 103.

language are still visible. (p. 106)

At the sentence level, many writers use the standard forms of European languages to express concepts and ideas derived from African culture, while maintaining the African world view or perception. This is often evident in the way proverbs and imagery are conveyed by certain authors. For example, in *Sous l'orage* (1963), Seydou Badian (Mali) translates some proverbs and expressions from his mother tongue into French as follows: "Le séjour dans l'eau ne fait jamais d'un tronc d'arbre un crocodile" (p. 125), "Mais le père Djigui avait dit: "Birama, tu resteras du côté des hommes." (p. 110). Such translation, however, need not be considered as devoid of creativity and literary art, especially as the authors' individual styles are portrayed by the literary quality of their works.

At the discourse level, some of the characters are often made to speak the European language even though under normal circumstances they would express themselves in their own mother tongues, using images and idioms based on their environment, speech patterns and cultural values. Chinua Achebe foregrounds the Igbo oral style in standard English in the speech of some of his characters; for instance:

"What I say is this," continued Nwaka, "a man who brings ant-ridden faggots into this [sic] hut should expect the visit of lizards. But if Ezeulu is now telling us that he is tired of the whiteman's friendship our advice to him should be: *You tied the knot, you should also know how to undo it. You passed the shit that is smelling; you should carry it away.* Fortunately the evil charm brought in at the end of the pole is not too difficult to take outside again... "My words are finished. I salute you all." (*Arrow of God*, p. 144)

Other authors, like Ferdinand Oyono in *Le vieux nègre et la*

médaille, also portray the mode and idiom of the native tongues in the way characters use the European languages, especially in forms of greetings, praise-names, repetitions, exclamations, idiophones, etc. Furthermore, other elements of oral literature are often woven into the literary work; these include songs, folktales, oral poetry, and riddles. Senghor, Okigbo, and others use some of these elements in their works. For example, songs are either left as they are in the indigenous languages in order to maintain their structure and poetic rhythm (*Because of Women*, p. 51), an approximate translation is offered in a footnote (several songs in *La Légende de M'Pfoumou Ma Mazono*), or a translation of the song into the European language is given in the text instead of the original indigenous language version (*Mission terminée*, pp. 164-165). Achebe also uses an Igbo folktale about why the tortoise's shell is not smooth (*Things Fall Apart*, pp. 85-88).

The use of the European language is also interspersed with Krio, Pidgin English, or "français petit nègre" in certain works. Very often, these *linguae francae* are used in dialogue to indicate the status of the character or to signal an informal occasion. For example, Ferdinand Oyono makes one of the uneducated guards in *Une Vie de boy* speak "petit nègre" as he tries to express himself in French which he scarcely masters: " - - Movié! s'exclama le garde, Zeuil-de-Panthère cogner comme Gosier-d'Oiseau! Lui donner moi coup de pied qui en a fait comme soufat soud... Zeuil y en a pas rire..." (p. 40). In fiction, therefore, "petit nègre" is often used by characters who have received little or no formal education in French; these include cab-drivers, houseboys, and prostitutes, among others. Thus a

cab-driver in *Les Saisons sèches* (1979) by Denis Oussou-Essui (Ivory Coast) speaks to a passenger:

- Ah! patron, tu n'es pas difficile, toi. On va passer par ici. Je tiens à montrer toi le deuxième pont.
- Ah! les autres ont donné lui un nom de Blanc. (p. 8)

Compared to Pidgin English, however, "petit nègre" is used less frequently in African literary works. This seems to be somewhat due to the fact that unlike Pidgin English which is sometimes also used by educated characters who speak standard English, "petit nègre" is not an alternative to standard French; characters do not switch between "petit nègre" and standard French.

Like "petit nègre", Pidgin English is mostly used by characters of low social status with scarcely any formal education; such is the case in Joseph Mangut's (Nigeria) *Have Mercy* (1982) in which Pidgin English is used by prostitutes, etc. As mentioned earlier, however, certain educated characters also switch to Pidgin English in informal situations. In *A Man of the People* (1966), Achebe makes Chief Nanga, an educated politician, switch from standard English to Pidgin English, and even to his native tongue, depending on the situation or occasion; he addresses audiences in standard English but uses Pidgin English in informal situations: "Eleanor, why you wan disgrace me and spoil my name so for public for nothing sake? Wetin I do you? Everybody here sabi say me na good Christian." (p. 18) He uses Igbo with his wife.

Similarly, some writers use Krio to reflect the language situation within the setting of their works, as well as portray the educational and social background of certain characters. The

mixture of English and Krio, and the switch from one to the other are evident in the works of some Sierra Leonean playwrights such as Kolosa Kargbo, Isaac Randy Wright, and Dele Charley. For example, in *Titi Shain-Shain* by Dele Charley, Reverend Hamilton-Douglas switches from English to Krio within the same speech:

But I also believe that time will speak. Da lif we swit got, na im go mek i get makru o ron-bele. No child is too young to learn from the dangerous obstacles of life. Pikin we se i no go gi im mami chans fo slip, yu tink se insef go slip?⁴⁹

The use of European languages by African writers is therefore quite different from that of their European counterparts. Since they are using foreign languages to express concepts and ideas peculiar to their own cultures and languages, many of them have resorted to adapting the European languages to the idiom, speech pattern, and mode of their own native tongues, thereby creating new forms of the languages.⁵⁰ While very few authors have rigidly imposed the structure of their mother tongues on the European languages, many of them endeavour to express African speech structure and world view following the grammatical and syntactic structures of the foreign languages. It should be pointed out also that although the aim of such use of the European languages is to stress the exotic nature or

⁴⁹ Quoted in Julius Spencer, "Language Pluralism in Sierra Leonean Drama in Krio", in *The Question of Language in African Literature Today*, ed. by Eldred Durosimi Jones, Eustace Palmer and Marjorie Jones (London: James Currey, 1991), pp. 91-97 (p. 94).

⁵⁰ This has led Loreto Todd to conclude that "English [and one might add, just like French] has become an African language [which] has been modified to suit its new users." "The English Language in West Africa", in *English as a World Language*, ed. by R.W. Bailey and M. Görlach (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1982), pp. 281-305 (p. 299).

otherness of their own cultures, most African writers seem to be looking for the best ways in which to use the foreign languages to portray the African world as authentically as possible.

In conclusion to this section on major distinctive features of African literature in European languages, it is worth noting that all the above features are not found in every work of African literature; most works contain only some of them, used in various degrees. The features have been selected mainly because they recur in many works; there are of course other features that have not been mentioned. The question that continues to bedevil Europhone African writers, however, has been aptly described by Abiola Irele:

The question that presents itself to the African writer then becomes how to create a formal harmony between expression and the objective reference of that expression. Formulated differently, the problem of the African writer employing a European language is: **how to write an oral culture.**⁵¹

This brief survey of some of the major features of African literature in European languages has sought to offer an insight into ways in which some writers try to cope with the problem. The various solutions adopted have, to some extent, been influenced by several factors, not least among which is the public for whom the African authors are writing.

1.3 Audience of African literature in European languages

Generally speaking, the oral and written literatures of Africa have different audiences. The audience of oral literature, which is often in a specific indigenous language, is limited to

⁵¹ Abiola Irele, "The African Imagination", p. 61.

persons familiar with the language in question. In certain cases, such an audience would be very limited indeed given the rather low population of some language communities. Furthermore, members of the audience do not need to know how to read and write the language.

With written literature in both European and indigenous languages, on the other hand, the audience consists of persons who can read and write the languages in question. Even though it can be argued that a literary work is available to any member of the public, African writers usually have a reading public in mind when writing works of literature. Their choice of themes, language, and ways of expressing their ideas is, to a large extent, conditioned by such target readership. Moreover, certain techniques of inclusion or exclusion of the reader as well as the dedication of works to specific groups or classes of people can sometimes be taken as clues signalling the intended audience.

Taking into account the frequent references to African culture and the peculiar use of the European language to reflect African thought patterns as demonstrated earlier, it would be reasonable to claim that the writers are primarily addressing an African audience that is literate in the said European language. Where the writer uses indigenous language words and expressions from an ethnic group in Africa and makes no attempt to give an equivalent in the European language, we can presume that the writer expects readers to understand them; in such case, only readers who are familiar with the native language would be likely to understand and would thus be construed as the author's primary audience. On the other hand, where the writer provides an

explanatory footnote, endnote or glossary for any indigenous words or aspects of culture deemed likely to be misunderstood or not understood at all, this is mainly because readers outside the ethnic group or language are also expected to read the work.⁵²

While from the very beginnings of African literature in European languages writers needed a foreign audience because of their desire to assert their cultural values and fight for political independence, that need is still felt today even though for different reasons. The vast majority of the African population is illiterate; only a very small proportion of the people are educated in European languages. Thus the writer is often aware of the fact that out of the small number of educated Africans, only an even smaller number would read the literary work. This tiny readership comprises, in particular, school children and students who read some of the works as set books in class and in preparation for examinations, university lecturers and students for academic and research purposes, and a few other educated people. In most cases, the educated youth tend to regard African literary works as academic, meant to be read and studied in school; during their spare time, they would rather read

⁵² The use or avoidance of footnotes and/or other explanatory strategies in writing is, of course, often ideological. Where a writer wants to go out to his or her readership, explanatory additions are made to facilitate understanding and spare the reader the need to look for further information; on the other hand, where the writer wants readers to come to the work, no effort will be made to explain or define words and expressions that could be misunderstood or not understood at all without background material. In the first case, the writer is making efforts to gain wide readership whereas in the latter, the writer feels that anyone interested in the work should be ready to look for further information if necessary.

Western best sellers and detective novels.⁵³ Furthermore, works of African literature are not always available, given the scarcity of bookshops (which are very often found only in towns) and the fact that most of the books are published abroad. Finally, the low purchasing power of most potential readers and the exorbitant prices of the books only make the situation worse.

Consequently, the literature is often directed to a varied foreign audience, a situation described by Abiola Irele as follows:

At the present moment, therefore, our writers are finding that their audience is located elsewhere than where their original vision has its roots.⁵⁴

This, of course, creates a complex situation, with the works received mainly by a foreign audience who are often not familiar with the issues and environment portrayed.

The foreign audience of African literature, especially for works in French and English, is quite varied, given the international status of the languages. For example, African works of literature in English are likely to be read in Great Britain, the United States, Canada, Africa, and other English-speaking countries. The readers in these countries use different varieties of English and would apply their different horizons of expectations and cultural values in interpreting and appreciating the works.

Nonetheless, in certain works, the authors seem to be

⁵³ This situation, observable among Cameroonians, has been noted in Nigeria by Chidi Amuta; he gives examples of the popular authors (Hadley Chase, Agatha Christie, Denise Robins, etc.) in his book *Towards a Sociology of African Literature* (Oguta, Nigeria: Zim Pan African Publishers, 1985), pp. 80-81.

⁵⁴ *The African Experience in Literature and Ideology*, p. 55.

talking to the reader as an African, using techniques of inclusion; for example, in *Une Vie de boy*, Toundi seems to want his fellow Africans to read the diary he has kept while serving as houseboy for the white administrator: "Mon frère, ... mon frère, que sommes-nous? Que sont tous les nègres qu'ont dit les français?" (p. 12-13). Such inclusion of Africans would, however, also seem to indicate the exclusion of the whites who are the target of most of the irony in the diary. Yet, as an attack on colonialism, the work seems to be directed to the colonial masters. In another connection, a work may be dedicated to a given group of people; for example, Camara Laye dedicates *Dramouss* (1966) to the African youth: "Ce livre es dédié aux jeunes d'Afrique... Que cet ouvrage contribue à galvaniser les energies de cette jeunesse..." (pp. 6-9).

The audience of African literature in European languages could therefore be regarded as consisting of educated Africans who are familiar with the specific culture and indigenous language which form the setting of the work, other educated Africans and non-Africans who use the European language all over the world. Within this context, Sipho Sepamla's (South Africa) comment on the intended audience of South African writing in English is significant:

We are writing not only for ourselves, but also for the general public, whether inside or outside of South Africa. So if somehow a book can reach many people, all the better.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ *African Voices*, p. 61.

1.4 Implications for translation

The differences between African literature in European languages and the corresponding European literatures with respect to content, frequent references to the African environment and culture, language use, and audience would certainly carry noteworthy implications for translation. Since the translator usually determines and transfers what he or she deems significant in a text, our attention here will focus on the common translation problems encountered between the European languages and, more specifically, on the differences between African literature in European languages and the European literatures concerned. However, given that many of the common translation problems have already been examined for some pairs of European languages,⁵⁶ I will dwell mainly on the differences, leaving out the common problems which should nevertheless be regarded as complementary to the said differences.

1.4.1 The content of the work

With regard to the content of African literature, the translator would have to analyze and interpret the issues and ideas presented by the author. It would be necessary to place the work within its geographical, historical, political, social and cultural contexts as well as against the background of the

⁵⁶ For example, Jean-Paul Vinay and Jean Darbelnet in *Stylistique comparée du français et de l'anglais* (Paris: Didier, 1977) for French and English, Alfred Malblanc in *Stylistique comparée du français et de l'allemand* (Paris: Didier, 1968) for French and German, P. Scavée and P. Intravia in *Stylistique comparée du français et de l'italien* (Paris: Didier, 1979) for French and Italian, Jacques Zajicek in *Etudes stylistiques comparatives néerlandais-français* (The Hague: Mouton, 1973) for Dutch and French, etc.

writer's experience and ideology. Consequently, the translator would have to be acquainted with the extralinguistic information that gives the text its full meaning. Such information would, to a large extent, serve as basis for suitable non-linguistic choices in translation.

1.4.2 Frequent references to African culture

As for the frequent references to the African environment and culture, the translator would have to cope with analyzing and rendering the culture-bound terms and values within the setting of the work. In fact, he or she would need to go beyond the origin of the references and examine their role and significance in the work. For example, how would the names of local objects, dishes, drinks, dress, and institutions, among others be rendered? Would near equivalents be sought in the TL or would the African terms be preserved? Again, apart from being familiar with some general aspects of African culture, the translator would do well to discern the distinctive features of the cultural environment in the literary work and convey such features to the readers, most of whom may not be acquainted with the culture. Since the text has two cultural dimensions, the African and the European, how would the translator convey both dimensions? Indeed, should the translator even try to convey both?

1.4.3 The special use of the European language

The special use of the European language to reflect African thought patterns and linguistic features would require that the translator analyze and interpret such use so as to adequately

render the characteristic features of the indigenous language which influence the writing. For example, how would the African-based proverbs, imagery, dialogue, and other rhetorical devices be conveyed in translation? Would the proverbs and images be maintained in the translation or would the translator look for functional or near equivalents in the TL? Would the translator need to be acquainted with the native African language (if any) that has influenced the way the text is written? How would the dialogue of characters who speak their mother tongue but are translated into the European language by the author be rendered? Would the peculiar African exclamations and idiophones, for instance, be transferred unaltered to the TL or would they be replaced by normal TL forms? Given that some of the works contain dialogue in Pidgin English, Krio, or "français petit nègre", how would these language switches be indicated in the translation? If they cannot be conveyed, what strategies would the translator adopt in order to compensate for the apparent loss? Moreover, how would the author's individual style be rendered? As we can see, these questions would have far-reaching implications for the translator's choices and overall strategies.

1.4.4 The target audience

The translator's decisions would also, to a large extent, be influenced by the audience for whom the translation is done. Will the translation be intended for an African audience that is familiar with the specific culture and indigenous language against which the original work has been written or for any African reader? Or is it for non-Africans deemed not to be

acquainted with the setting of the work? Given the international status of the European language in question, how would the translation be made accessible to the heterogeneous audience of Africans and non-Africans? In other words, how would the translator cope with the different realms of experience and cultural values? Would the presumed uninformed reader need more information in order to understand and appreciate the work? If so, how would the translator provide such information?

All in all, the foregoing considerations make the translation of African literature from one European language into another rather different from that between the literatures of the two European languages. Ade Ojo has summarized what he believes is the task that awaits the translator of African literature from one European language into another:

Not only is he to be faced with the African version of the European language that he is to translate from but he has to do a very thorough study of the socio-cultural backgrounds against which the ST is written and where the TT will be read. The translated version of the ST must therefore have a tinge of Africanness; it must also possess the style of the original text and express very appropriately the mind of the writer.⁵⁷

The overall strategy of the translator would also derive from a careful consideration of the implications outlined so far. In the final analysis, would the translator emphasize the peculiar African features of the text, or would he or she dissimulate and even totally disregard them? It should be noted, however, that since literary translation may have far-reaching political, ideological and cultural implications, producing an African-

⁵⁷ "The Role of the Translator of African Written Literature in Inter-cultural Consciousness and Relationships", p. 296.

oriented translation of African literary texts could be viewed as a way of projecting African culture and correcting some misconceptions about the continent. On the other hand, a non-African-oriented translation could be interpreted as an attempt to disparage African culture and perpetuate various misconceptions. Just as there is widespread call for focus on gender issues in writing and translation (e.g. Myriam Diaz-Diocaretz, Lori Chamberlain, etc.) and several African critics are today clamouring for a criticism of African literature from an African perspective, the translation of African literature could also gain from an African-oriented approach. Taking into account the peculiar use of European languages, leading to the ultimate creation of new forms of the languages, how would a translation of an African literary text be different from that of a European text in French or English? In any case, the translator would need to bear in mind Samia Mehrez's remark:

By drawing on more than one culture, more than one language, more than one world experience, within the confines of the same text, postcolonial anglophone and francophone literature very often defies our notion of an "original" work and its translation. Hence, in many ways these postcolonial plurilingual texts in their own right resist and ultimately exclude the monolingual and demand of their readers to be like themselves: 'in between', at once capable of reading and translating, where translation becomes an integral part of the reading experience.⁵⁸

Indeed, the distinctive features of europhone African literature and the "bilingual" nature of its texts as well as their political, cultural and literary implications may well call into question the validity of "fluent" or "transparent" translations

⁵⁸ "Translation and the Postcolonial Experience", in *Rethinking Translation*, ed. by Lawrence Venuti (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 120-38 (p. 122).

of African literary works in European languages.

In the light of these implications, the translator's analysis and transfer strategies and choices would seem crucial in the perspective that the translation ultimately projects. The response of both theorists and practitioners to the implications will, as would be expected, be largely influenced by their conception of translation as regards African literature. Thus an examination of how translators of African literature have so far coped with the implications as well as work done by theorists on the translation of African literature, notably from French into English, will be helpful in my attempt to present an analysis and transfer pattern in the translation of African literature.

CHAPTER 2

TRANSLATING AFRICAN LITERATURE: HISTORY, THEORY, AND PRACTICE

Given the significant features of African literature in European languages and their implications as outlined in Chapter 1, it might be assumed that translating the literature could present particular problems. In the various translations produced to date, translators have tried to cope with these problems, proposing solutions that are largely dictated by considerations such as the functions they want their translations to fulfil, their conception of translation, and their target readership. In this chapter, I intend to present a historical overview of the translation of African literature, with particular emphasis on translation from French into English, and to examine some of the ways in which translators have approached their source texts and the expectations of their target audience. Furthermore, the work of certain prominent scholars on the translation of African literature will be discussed in order to assess their contribution to the development of literary translation studies in Africa.

2.1 A historical overview of the translation of African literature

The translation of written African literature has involved various languages: indigenous African languages, Arabic, European languages of colonization such as French, English, Portuguese, and Spanish, and other world languages like Swedish, German, Italian,

etc. Although it would not be possible to consider translations in all these languages in this chapter, I feel that it is necessary, as a prelude to tracing the evolution of the translation of African literature, to explore the origins of creative writing in Africa and the subsequent need for translation as a result of contact between languages. The main trends in literary translation from French into English will also be delineated, paying special attention to which works have been translated, the major translators, and the foremost publishing companies involved.

2.1.1 Origins of creative writing in Africa: introduction or creation of scripts

Generally speaking, creative writing began in Africa with the introduction and use of various scripts. Prominent among these scripts are the Arabic script, the Bamoun script, the Vai script, and the Roman script.

Arabic was introduced in Ethiopia by Semitic tribes from Southern Arabia as early as the eighth century. These tribes brought along the Arabic script which was used in writing the local language, Ge'ez. According to Albert Gérard,¹ Ge'ez was a liturgical language used by the Ethiopian Orthodox Church for hymns, theology, and various books for prayers and worship. Such restricted use of Ge'ez made the language so inaccessible that by the fourteenth century it could no longer be understood by the common people. Consequently, there emerged another indigenous language, Amharic, for secular writing and communication.

¹ Albert Gérard, *Contexts of African Literatures*, pp. 47-48.

Religious works in Ge'ez were then translated into Amharic in an effort to spread the religion. Literary works were also created in Amharic, comprising mainly songs and praise poems dedicated to the rulers of that period. Ge'ez and Amharic thus existed side by side for different purposes until the twentieth century when Amharic became the predominant language, and its creative use was extended to fiction, drama, and poetry. It is worth noting, however, that some conservative Ethiopian writers still use Ge'ez today for literary purposes.

The Arabic script was also used for writing another African language, Swahili, in the east of the continent. This, again, was as a result of Muslim conquest of areas along the coast of the Indian Ocean and the islands offshore. Only the script was adopted; Arabic was not used. Writing in Swahili, mainly religious epics on Mohammed's holy wars against the Christians, started in the early part of the eighteenth century. The trend changed in the nineteenth century as creative writing also included narrative poems on contemporary events in the community.

In West Africa, Arabic culture and writing were introduced in the eleventh century by the Berber dynasty of the Almoravids, a monastic Muslim sect of Sanhaja Tuaregs. Arabic writing, which consisted mainly of verse on aspects of the culture, prospered from the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries, as Timbuctoo became the centre of Islamic learning. Converts to Islam were encouraged to memorize texts from the Quaran, and they were subsequently taught to read and write Arabic. Scholars wrote poetry and verses in Arabic on Islamic law and theology as they sought to win over the people from their traditional customs and

beliefs. Furthermore, efforts were made to disseminate Arabic culture and Islam to the people in their own mother tongues in the eighteenth century. Accordingly, the Arabic script was used for writing some of the local languages: Fulani in various parts of West Africa, Wolof in Senegal, and Hausa in parts of Nigeria, among others. Writing in these languages led to the emergence of local literatures in Arabic script, known as *ajami*. For example, Shehu Usman Dan Fodio, a Fulani scholar and cleric, composed poems in Hausa as part of his holy war (*jihad*). Literature in Hausa showed marked Muslim influence, with several references made and homage paid to Mohammed. Many of these local languages have maintained the Arabic script in their writing to this day, except Swahili and Hausa which have adopted the Roman script introduced by the Europeans.

In addition to the Arabic script, some parts of Africa have developed scripts for writing their own native languages. For example, in western Cameroon, Sultan Njoya (1880-1933) invented the Bamoun script which he used for his writings on the history and customs of the Bamoun people, as well as for religious and scientific works:

Pour rédiger ses oeuvres, il a inventé sa propre écriture. On peut situer la naissance de cette littérature en 1895, date de l'invention de l'écriture bamoun... Aidé de plusieurs notables de son royaume, il créa les premiers signes. Chaque signe représentait un mot entier. Il aboutit ainsi à plus d'un millier de signes différents... Il se remit à l'oeuvre et après une vingtaine d'années, des 1300 signes du début, l'écriture bamoun n'en comptait plus qu'une trentaine.²

As Albert Gérard further points out, this form of writing was

² Patrice Kayo, *Panorama de la littérature camerounaise* (Bafoussam: Librairie Africaine, 1978), p. 30.

learned by the notables and their children and used for sending messages and drafting administrative documents.³ The sultan also invented a printing press for the publication of his works using the script.

Similarly, in 1833, a syllabic form of writing was developed by Duwalu Bukele (1810-1850), a member of the Vai tribe in Liberia. Throughout the century, many Vais learned how to use the script; it was used for correspondence and writing Vai tales, legends, and history. Kali Bara's autobiographical and aphoristic work, *Book of Rora*, was printed in the Vai script in 1851. However, most of the writings have remained in manuscript form; only the Christian missionaries and foreign scholars seem to have been interested in the study and further development of the script, obviously for their own purposes. Today, there are virtually no creative literary works in the script.

The same could be said of the script devised in 1921 by Kisimi Kamara, a member of the Mende tribe in Sierra Leone; it was used mainly for writing personal letters. Other attempts to invent scripts in Africa include special scripts developed by secret societies for their members; for example, the Ekpe secret society among the Nsibidi in Nigeria and the Poro secret society among the Mende (Sierra Leone). All the above scripts were thus restricted to specific tribes, secret societies, or even individuals and were therefore not for popular use; in comparison with the Arabic script, they could be said to have done very little to promote literary creativity in Africa.

³ Albert Gérard, *African Language Literatures: An Introduction to the Literary History of Sub-Saharan Africa* (Harlow: Longman, 1981), pp. 284-285.

What emerges from the foregoing outline of forms of writing, however, is the fact that writing had already been introduced in certain parts of Africa and used for correspondence and creative writing before the advent of the colonial powers. Furthermore, some tribes and secret societies devised special scripts for their members during colonization.

The arrival of the Europeans marked a turning point in the evolution of creative writing on the continent. The Roman script, brought along by the European colonialists, would be used for writing both the indigenous and the European languages. The colonial powers pursued different language and cultural policies in various parts of the continent under their rule; as would be expected, the divergent policies led to different literary trends.

Broadly speaking, the British encouraged the development of indigenous languages for literary creativity and, in most cases, the translation of religious and literary works from English into the local languages. However, the other colonial masters - France, Portugal, Spain, Italy, and Belgium - favoured the assimilation of Africans into their own cultures and the use of European languages for imaginative writing. The early British missionaries, in their drive to convert Africans to Christianity, felt that their evangelization mission would be more successful if the message of God were propagated in the languages of the people. Thus many of the indigenous languages were transposed to writing and vocabularies as well as grammars produced; schools were opened to educate converts and the printing press was introduced. Moreover, the Bible as well as other religious works

were translated into African languages. In South Africa, for example, after the arrival of the British in 1806, the missionaries transposed one of the local languages, Xhosa, to writing, opened a school, and set up a printing press at Lovedale in 1824. Other printing presses were founded later: the Marianhill Mission Press in Natal for the publication of works in Zulu and the Sesuto Book Depot in Morija in 1862 for works in Sotho. The Bible was translated into Xhosa and hymns were written with the help of some of the converts. In addition, newspapers and journals were published in Xhosa and other local languages; the Xhosa-English magazine, *Ikwezi* (Morning Star) was started in 1841, to be replaced later by *Indaba* (The News) in 1862. One of the major Xhosa writers, Tiyo Soga (1829-1878), translated part of John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* into his native tongue in 1866; the rest was done by his son in 1929. Other South African languages were also transposed to writing; writing in Sotho started in the 1880s, while Zulu grammars, glossaries and translations appeared by 1883. Literary works were produced in the local languages, and some of them were translated into English; for instance, in 1921 Thomas Mofolo wrote *Chaka* in Sesotho and it was later translated into English by Frederick Hugh Dutton and published in 1931.

This policy of translating the scriptures and developing indigenous languages was also implemented in other British territories in West Africa (Nigeria, Ghana), East Africa (Uganda, Tanganyika, Kenya), and elsewhere. In fact, O.R. Dathorne underscores the contribution made by British missionaries as follows:

Besides the oral sources, the Bible and Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, which were usually the earliest books translated into the vernacular languages and thus provided examples of writing, had the greatest influence on indigenous literature... Religious leaflets, ethnographical accounts, history and geography books, written translations of the oral literature (suitably expurgated) intended for schools and in some cases the general public were the main publications of these missionary bodies.⁴

Newspapers, magazines, and journals were also published in local languages in order to promote creative writing; for example, a newspaper in the Yoruba language was established in Abeokuta (Nigeria). Moreover, during the first half of the twentieth century, literature bureaux were opened in East and Central Africa to encourage budding writers; for instance, the East African Literature Bureau was set up in 1947. Prizes were also awarded for excellence in creative writing in indigenous languages; the International African Institute founded in London in 1926 awarded literary prizes to such writers as Kwasi Fiawoo from the Gold Coast (Ewe), Medou Njemba from Cameroon (Bulu), Samuel Ntara from Nyasaland (Chewa), Benedict Vilakazi from the Union of South Africa (Zulu), and several others.

As for the Germans, they fostered the development of Swahili in Tanganyika and contributed immensely to the emergence of Ewe and Twi writing in German Togoland (today part of Ghana) despite their short stay on the continent. Like the British, the German missionaries of the *Basler evangelische Missionsgesellschaft* and the *Norddeutsche Missionsgesellschaft* transposed the said native languages to writing, taught the people how to read and write in schools, established printing presses, and translated many

⁴ O.R. Dathorne, *African Literature in the Twentieth Century*, p. 2.

religious works into the languages. Newspapers and magazines were also launched to promote writing in indigenous languages; in Tanganyika, *Msimulizi* (Teller of Tales) was started in 1883 and *Habari Mwesi* (Monthly News) in 1895.

Unlike the British, however, the French pursued a policy of cultural and linguistic assimilation in their colonial territories in Africa. The use of indigenous languages both in education and in creative writing was actively discouraged. In Madagascar, for example, the Governor-General General Galliéni implemented the typical French policy as from 1896:

From the beginning he set out to destroy the educational system that had been established in the course of the nineteenth century by the missionaries with the approval of the Malagasy authorities: French was to become the sole medium of education in all schools, at all levels; and intellectual pursuits were to be discouraged in favour of a curriculum designed to provide industrial and agricultural manpower for the French settlers.⁵

In fact, the ultimate aim of such policy was to make Frenchmen out of the Africans. Since writers were encouraged to use only French for literary creation, very few works were produced in indigenous languages. Furthermore, whereas translation played a major role in British territories, the activity was virtually insignificant in French territories. A few works in native tongues were produced in Madagascar; these included a collection of folktales, *Masapo ma Bangala* (Stories of the Bangala) by André Roumain Bokwango in 1955, a collection of mock heroic verses by a group of poets, *Icara nkumare irungu* (Sit Down So I Can Take Your Boredom Away) in 1946, and Alexis Kagamé's pastoral poem in 1952, *Umulirimbyi wa nyili-ibiremwa* (The Song of the Mother of

⁵ Albert Gérard, *African Language Literatures*, p. 83.

Creation) which he later translated into French as *La divine pastorale*. Even though some works were produced in indigenous languages in Cameroon (for example, *Nnanga Kôn* by Medou Njemba in Bulu in 1932), this could be attributed largely to the fact that the country had been a German colony before part of it was handed over to France as a mandated territory after the First World War. Indeed, the consequences of French colonial policies were still evident in literary creativity, especially in drama, by the mid-1970s, as noted by Anthony Graham-White:

Even today not a single play in an African language has been published in a French-speaking country. And while comedies are performed in the vernacular there is a sense that serious, historical plays should be in French.⁶

The Portuguese, for their part, colonized Angola, Cape Verde, Mozambique, Guinea Bissau, Sao Tomé and Príncipe. They opened schools and taught the Africans how to read and write. In 1880, a bilingual journal, *O Echo de Angola* (The Echo of Angola), was founded. The journal published works translated from Portuguese into Kimbundu, one of the major Angolan languages, and translations of oral literature from native languages into Portuguese. For example, Joaquim Dias Cordeiro da Matta published a collection of Kimbundu proverbs and riddles in Portuguese (*Philosophia popular em proverbios angolanos*); he also wrote a Kimbundu grammar (1892) as well as a Kimbundu-Portuguese dictionary (1893).

Broadly speaking, Albert Gérard has aptly summarized colonial policies towards indigenous African languages and

⁶ *The Drama of Africa* (New York: Samuel French Inc., 1974), p. 61.

literary creativity as follows:

where the British (and to a much lesser extent German) authority was paramount, the literary use of vernacular languages was encouraged and eventually flourished, so that a bilingual tradition emerged, some of the writers using their own languages, others resorting to English. By contrast, the peoples of the areas ruled by France, Portugal, Spain and Italy produced hardly any writing in their own languages (the exception being the written art of the Muslim communities); in French and Portuguese territories, all the literary energy was released in the languages of the conquerors.⁷

2.1.2 Effects of the scripts and colonial policies on translation

The various scripts and colonial policies had profound effects on the origin and development of translation in Africa. After certain indigenous languages were transposed to writing using the Arabic script, many works were translated from Arabic into other languages. For example, in 1553, Embaqom translated the legend of *Barlaam and Josephat* into Ge'ez; it was based on a Christian Arabic version composed before the thirteenth century. Under Iyasu the Great, more Arabic texts were translated into Ge'ez. Furthermore, by the seventeenth century, many religious works in Ge'ez were translated into Amharic in order to make them available to the common people. In contrast, the other scripts in limited use such as the Bamoun script, the Vai script and those developed by secret societies and individuals, had somewhat negligible influence on translation. As concerns the Bamoun script, Sultan Njoya's manuscript on the history and customs of his people was translated in 1952 into French by H.

⁷ Albert Gérard, *African Language Literatures*, p. 176.

Martin as *Histoire et coutumes des Bamoum*. Kali Bara's work in the Vai script was translated into English as *Book of Rora* and published in 1849 in S.W. Koelle's *Narrative of an Expedition into the Vy country of West Africa*. The Vai script was also used by Momolu Massaquoi in his translation of a chapter of Saint John's Gospel into the Vai language early this century. More significantly, the Roman script and, to a large extent, certain colonial policies could be said to have played a decisive role in the evolution of translation in Africa.

The consequences of colonial policies for translation were, to say the least, obvious throughout the continent. While translation was very much in practice in territories where indigenous languages were promoted, it was virtually dormant in areas where these languages were discouraged and even prohibited in creative writing.

In British territories, translation was done for mainly religious, educational, and cultural reasons. Several works were therefore translated from English into native languages and vice versa. As this review of colonial policies has shown, the Bible, prayer books, hymns, and other religious texts were translated into many African languages in order to spread Christianity; even today, as evangelical activities continue, missionary bodies are still carrying on translations into other indigenous languages. For example, the American Bible Society has been translating the Bible into several Cameroonian languages. In addition, John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*, a work with religious overtones, has been widely translated into African languages, and many African writers have drawn inspiration from its moral and

allegorical aspects for their works in their own mother tongues. In fact, according to C.E. Wilson,⁸ Bunyan's work had been translated into thirty-three African languages by 1923. These languages include Sotho (in 1857), Xhosa (by Tiyo Soga in 1866), Yoruba (by David Hinderer in 1866), Efik (Nigeria) in 1868, Twi (by Rev. David Asante in 1885), Fante (by Jacob Benjamin Anaman in 1886), Swahili (by Bishop Edward Steere in 1888), Amharic (by Gäbrä Giyorgis Terfé in 1892), Zulu (by Henry Callaway in 1895), Ewe (by Andreas Aku in 1906), and Ndebele (Zimbabwe) in 1913.

The works of William Shakespeare have also been translated into many African languages; in most cases, translations of works by English and European authors were used in schools for education. Solomon Plaatje (1876-1932), the prominent writer in the Tswana language (Botswana), translated Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, *Julius Caesar* (translation published posthumously in 1937), *Othello*, *Comedy of Errors* (1930) and *Much Ado About Nothing* into his native tongue; Michael Seboni also translated *The Merchant of Venice* and *Henry IV* into the same language in the 1960s. Furthermore, Julius Nyerere rendered *Julius Caesar* into Swahili in 1963. Adeboye Bababola translated *The Merchant of Venice* into Yoruba in 1954. Samuel J. Baloyi produced a prose version of *Julius Caesar* in Tsonga (South Africa) in 1957 and translated *Up from Slavery* by Booker T. Washington into his native tongue in 1953. Indeed, Shakespeare's plays have been translated into several African languages:

The plays most frequently translated into African languages have been *Julius Caesar* (into 9 languages),

⁸ Quoted in Albert Gérard, *Contexts of African Literatures*, p. 63.

The Merchant of Venice (6) and *Macbeth* (4). Their popularity may rest as much upon a familiarity gained in school, where these plays are often set books, as upon their thematic appeal.⁹

Bishop Edward Steere also translated some of the tales in Charles Lamb's *Tales from Shakespeare* into Swahili in 1867 under the title *Hadithi na Kiingereza*. The translation of some of Kingsley's tales took place in 1889, followed by selections from Aesop's *Fables* in 1890. A Malagasy version of thirteen of Aesop's *Fables* was published by missionaries under the title *Angano* (Fables) in 1834. Other English writers such as Rudyard Kipling, Jonathan Swift, R.L. Stevenson, and Rider Haggard were also translated into Swahili in the 1930s. Furthermore, selected stories from *The Arabian Nights* have been translated into Swahili. Chief Isaac Oluwole Delano translated Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* into Yoruba in 1933 while E.A. Swari rendered Matthew Arnold's *Rustum and Zorab* into Mende (Sierra Leone) in 1950. Excerpts from works such as Grimm's *Fairy Tales*, *Tales from Shakespeare*, and *The Arabian Nights* have been translated into Igbo (Nigeria) for use in schools. In 1952, Shaaban Robert rendered Edward Fitzgerald's version of the *Rubaiyat* by Omar Khayyam into Swahili.

In addition, from 1957, Omar Juma and other translators started producing Swahili versions of some Russian creative writing, and in 1964 a collection of Chinese short stories were translated into Swahili. Robert Asare Tabi (1910-1958) translated some of Tolstoy's tales into Twi (Ghana) under the title *Ayese mmiensa bi* in 1952 from an English version. Daniel Abbiu also

⁹ Anthony Graham-White, *The Drama of Africa*, p. 199.

translated some of Tolstoy's tales into Fante (Ghana) in 1961.

Even though this survey so far points to the apparent abundance of English¹⁰ or European translations into Swahili, the situation should not, however, mask the fact that only a few African languages have been affected by these translations. Not surprisingly, Albert Gérard paints a similar picture when commenting on translations from African into world languages:

Less than a dozen of the many Bantu-language works produced in the Southern sub-continent have so far been translated into a world language; it is difficult to believe that none of the others deserve this honour.¹¹

Furthermore, translators have had to cope with certain difficulties when rendering European literary works into African languages. Translations have varied from renditions that keep close to the original texts, to adaptations or "creative translations" which translators seek to make intelligible to the readers. For example, Richard Pankhurst comments on Fasil Gäbrä Kiro's Amharic version of *Julius Caesar* (*Juliwes Qésar*, 1956) as follows:

Though following the original fairly closely, he was anxious to produce a version intelligible to the average Ethiopian readers and, therefore, deviated from the text when faced with difficult metaphors and

¹⁰ Some classical Greek and Latin literary works have also been adapted or translated into African languages (from English); for example, Olanipekun Esan has attempted to "africanize" such works: *Teledalase* (The Creator's will must prevail) is a verse rendering of Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* into Yoruba (1965), Plautus' *Mercator* was adapted into Yoruba in 1965 as a prose comedy entitled *Orekelewa* (Beauty Personified), and in 1966 *Esin atiroja* (The Tiptoeing War-horse) was produced as a Yoruba play in verse based on the Trojan horse story in Virgil's *Aeneid*. Rather than remain quite close to the Greek and Latin originals, Esan adapted them to Yoruba setting, using Yoruba names for the characters and places.

¹¹ Albert Gérard, *Contexts of African Literature*, p. 67.

puns. Antony's address to Caesar's body as "thou bleeding piece of earth" (Act 3 Sc. 1) thus came out as "bädenä sega" ("body without a soul")¹²

On the other hand, in order to facilitate comprehension for his readers, Sägayé Gäbrä Mädhén provided an introduction to his Amharic version of *Hamlet* (*Hamlét*, 1972); the introduction summarized the plot and commented on the use of words borrowed from Oromo language. He also produced an adapted version of *Othello* (*Otélló*, 1961).¹³

As concerns *linguae francae* such as Krio and Pidgin English, efforts have recently been made to translate certain European literary works into the languages. For example, by 1964 Thomas Decker had translated Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* and *As You Like It* into Krio. However, most of the translations into these languages consist of religious and liturgical works since missionaries sought to use widely spoken languages in evangelization. When German Catholic missionaries arrived in Douala (Cameroon) in 1890, they initially used the local languages in spreading the faith; however, in view of the multiplicity of languages, each with relatively few speakers, the missionaries eventually resorted to the widely spoken Pidgin

¹² "Shakespeare in Ethiopia", *Research in African Literatures*, 17.2 (1986), 169-196 (p. 181). Käbbädä Mika'él also kept close to the original text of *Romeo and Juliet* when rendering it into Amharic under the title *Roméwana Julyät: Té'ater* (1953); the work was adopted as a textbook for students in Amharic and was enjoyed and memorized by many boys and girls in Ethiopia.

¹³ Richard Pankhurst comments on the version thus: "The work was a 'creative translation', or adaptation, of the original and made use of considerably longer lines of verse than had been employed by Käbbädä Mika'él and other earlier translators. Sägayé's poetry and general sense of the theater won the acclaim of many of the young generation." "Shakespeare in Ethiopia", p. 182.

English. As their activities extended inland to the grassfields of Bamenda, the missionaries had the Bible, prayer books, and other liturgical books translated into Pidgin English. These translations are being updated nowadays as Pidgin English continues to be widely used in the churches, especially for sermons and doctrine lessons. It is also of interest to note that missionaries have used either slightly modified English spelling conventions (e.g. Father Kerkvliet's translations in *Sunday Gospels and Epistles*) or phonemic transcription (e.g. translation of St. Mark's Gospel by the "Société Biblique" in 1966)¹⁴ in Pidgin English publications.

On the other hand, since works in indigenous languages could be read only by a few members of specific tribes or localities, efforts were made to translate some of them into European languages so as to reach a wider audience of non-Africans and other Africans who were curious to know about literature in African languages other than theirs. Accordingly, Yohanna Abdallah's *Chiikala cha Wayao* (The Olden Times of the Yao) in the Yao language (Malawi) was translated into English by Meredith Sanderson and published in 1919 under the title *The Yaos*. Gaddiel Robert Acquaaah (1884-1954) translated some Fante (Ghana) poems into English under the title *Fante Classical Poems* in 1920. Enoch Sillinga Guma's work in Xhosa, *U-Nomaliza* (1918), was rendered into English in 1928 by S.J. Wallis under the title *Nomaliza, or the Things of this Life are Sheer Vanity* for use in mission schools; it was also translated into Ewe (Ghana) and Swahili,

¹⁴ Loreto Todd, *Varieties of English Around the World: Cameroon* (Heidelberg: Julius Groos Verlag, 1982), pp. 68-69.

still for educational purposes. Thomas Mofolo's *Chaka* was translated into English in 1931 and into French in 1940¹⁵. Kwasi Fiawoo's 1932 play in Ewe, *Toko atolia* (The Fifth Landing), was translated into German in 1937. Furthermore, Rev. Cullen Young translated some of Samuel Ntara's works from the Chewa dialect of Nyanja (Malawi) into English, *Man of Africa* in 1931 and *Headman's Enterprise: An Unexpected Page in Central African History* in 1949. Okot p'Bitek's long poem in Acoli (Uganda), *War pa Lawino*, published in 1969, had been translated into English by himself as *Song of Lawino* and published earlier in 1966; it has also been rendered into French, Spanish and Portuguese. A collection of short stories in the Tsonga language (Mozambique) by Natala Sumbane was translated and printed in German as *Lichter im Dunkeln* in 1950.

In fact, it would be tedious to list all the works that have been translated from African into European languages.¹⁶ Suffice it to say, however, that many works in indigenous languages were not translated until after the Second World War. This applies to works by writers such as B.W. Vilakazi, J.L. Dube, Gaddiel Acquah, etc. *Uhuru wa Watumwa* (1934), a semi-historical novel

¹⁵ Abridged versions of *Chaka* have been published in English, German, French, Italian, and Swahili. The work has also been translated into Afrikaans (South Africa) by Chris Swanepoel; however, some portions (extensive in certain cases) of the original were left out without any explanation. More recently, in 1981, a new English version was produced by Daniel P. Kunene.

¹⁶ David Westley has compiled a bibliography of African-language literature in English translation: "African-Language Literature in English Translation: an Annotated Bibliography", *Research in African Literatures*, 18.4 (1987), 499-509. Although some of the works in Westley's list have been mentioned in this overview, the bibliography can be consulted for supplementary information.

by James Juma Mbotela, was translated in 1956 into English as *The Freeing of the Slaves in East Africa*. Similarly, in 1951 John Dube's *Insila Ka Tshaka* (1933) was translated from Zulu into English under the title *Jeque, the Body-servant of King Tshaka*. Sahle Sellassie Berhane Mariam's work in the Chaha language (Ethiopia) was translated into English by Wolf Leslau in 1964 as *Shinega's Village*. In 1989, Njemba Medou's *Nnanga Kôn* (The White Ghost) was translated from Bulu (Cameroon) into French by Fame Ndongo who maintained the original Bulu title, while Fagunwa's *Ogboju Ode Ninu Igbo Irunmale* (1948) has been rendered from Yoruba into English as *The Forest of a Thousand Daemons* (1968) by Wole Soyinka, and into French as *Les Odyssées du chasseur à coeur vaillant dans la forêt* by J.O. Abioye. Several other works have been translated from Yoruba into English or French; for example, Val Olayemi has translated Duro Lapido's opera, *Eda* (1970), into English, while Timothy Asobele has rendered it into French.

Early translations of African oral literature were made into the colonial languages - English, French, and German; nowadays, translations have extended to other languages such as Italian, Russian, Spanish, and Portuguese. As Philip Noss has already indicated, the translation of African oral literature into European languages has been spurred by various motives; these include the researchers' desire to learn and understand the culture and thought of the people, the need to make the literature available to a wider international audience, and the

desire to preserve cultural heritage.¹⁷ A French version of a number of Malagasy songs was published by Chevalier de Parny as early as 1787. Gustavus Reinhold Nylander published a collection of Bullon tales in English translation under the title *Grammar and Vocabulary of the Bullon Language* in London in 1814. Although interest in African oral literature seemed to have waned in Europe thereafter, it was rekindled during the second half of the nineteenth century as Europeans sought to put an end to the slave trade. Accordingly, in 1852, Samuel Ajayi Crowther, a Nigerian bishop, published a collection of Yoruba proverbs in English in a glossary entitled *A Vocabulary of the Yoruba Language*. This publication was closely followed in 1854 by Sigismund Wilhelm Koelle's *African Native Literature, or Proverbs, Tales, Fables, and Historical Fragments in the Kanuri or Bornu Language, to which are added a translation of the above and a Kanuri-English Vocabulary*; the work included sixty-two proverbs, seventeen tales, and nine stories. Henry Callaway worked on Zulu oral tradition and published *Nursery Tales, Traditions and Histories of the Zulus* in 1868. Franz Boas published *Tales and Proverbs of the Vandau of Portuguese South Africa* in 1922. G.P. Lestrade translated some Venda (Transvaal) stories into English and published them as a collection under the title *Some Venda Folk-Tales* in 1949. Many publications were thus devoted to translations of the oral traditions of specific African tribes and languages. This trend continued after the independence of a

¹⁷ Philip Noss, "Translation and the African Oral Tale", in *Black Culture and Black Consciousness in Literature*, ed. by Ernest Emenyonu (Ibadan: Heinemann, 1987), pp. 211-28 (p. 213-14).

majority of African countries in the 1960s; some recent examples include Jean Derive's *Collecte et traduction des littératures orales. Un exemple négro-africain: les contes ngbaka-ma'bo de R.C.A.* (1975) and his joint work with Marie-José and Jacqueline M.C. Thomas, *La Crotte tenace et autres contes ngbaka-ma'bo de la République Centrafricaine* (1975), Harold Scheub's *The Xhosa Ntosimi* in 1975, Dominique Noye's *Contes peuls de Baba Zandou* in 1982, and Pierre N'Da's *Le conte africain et l'éducation* in 1984.

In certain cases, translations of various oral traditions in Africa have been presented in anthologies. In 1903, René Basset published an anthology of 162 narratives from 90 African languages into French entitled *Contes populaires d'Afrique*. More recent anthologies include Roger Abraham's *African Folktales* in 1983, *Contes du Cameroun* published by Editions CLE in Yaounde in the 1970s, and others. It is noteworthy that there were practically no translations of oral literature between African languages themselves. There were a few translations, however, between European languages; for example, Leo Frobenius' *Das Schwarze Dekameron* (1910) was translated into English as *African Nights: Black Erotic Tales* in 1971.

Efforts at translating African oral literature have also been made by modern African writers who, in most cases, narrate traditional tales, legends and epics in European languages. Generally speaking, these works are literary creations based on oral literature, although the writers do not always follow the original lore very closely. Such treatment of oral literature is evident in works like *Légendes africaines* (1954) and *Le pagne noir* (1955) by Bernard Dadié, *Contes et légendes d'Afrique* (1962)

by Ousmane Socé, *Au Tchad sous les étoiles* (1962) by Joseph Brahim Seid, *Les contes d'Amadou Koumba* (1966) by Birago Diop, and *Tales from Southern Africa* by A.C. Jordan.

Like translators of European literary works into African languages, translators of African literary works into European languages faced a number of problems. Some of these problems were outlined by Timothy Jide as he commented on his translation of Kola Ogunmola's opera, *Lanke Omu*, from Yoruba into French:

In the French translation we had difficulty in establishing some equivalents between Yoruba and French because of the fundamental differences between the two languages, manifested for instance in linguistic habits like proverbs; riddles; esoteric language of the spirit world or of cults and secret societies; drum language of the bata drums; non-verbal languages like the colour of costumes... body language, facial scarifications - all features that carry meaning and give clues to character portrayal or depiction.¹⁸

Daniel Kunene also discusses how he solved certain translation problems in his new English version of Mofolo's *Chaka*; he had to solve problems such as the rendition of culture-bound words, imagery, style (especially repetition structure) of the original, interference of Zulu words in the original, etc.¹⁹ Some of the

¹⁸ "Literary Translation in Africa: the Nigerian Experience", p. 72.

¹⁹ "[The translation of] culture-bound words... has been handled in different ways. First, and perhaps the most common, is that the original Sesotho word is retained, immediately preceded or followed by a defining statement, which is woven into the narrative in as unobtrusive a manner as possible... Sometimes I felt the original imagery had to be retained since it was so striking. But since a close (or 'literal') translation would make no sense in English, I often had to resort to a kind of paraphrase of the original... I have also sometimes felt that the style of the original needed to be reflected in translation. Where I succumbed to this, the result has been to introduce an element of exoticism (not deliberate nor for its own sake), at the same time stretching the idiom of the receiving language. In these situations, a 'free' translation would have smothered the

problems faced by translators have been solved using reference grammars and terminology books such as dictionaries, lexicons, and glossaries between European and African languages that were compiled to facilitate the translation of religious and literary works.²⁰

Another important trend in the practice of translation was the setting up of translation bureaux responsible for translating works between African and European languages. For example, in the early 1930s a translation bureau was established in Zaria (Northern Nigeria) under Rupert East to translate school textbooks from English into Hausa using the Roman script. Another was opened in Calabar for translations into Efik in 1945.

These, then, are some of the trends that can be observed in the evolution of translation in Africa from the precolonial to the colonial and postcolonial eras. While translation was not the main preoccupation of those who sought to propagate Islam and

freshness of the original... In many cases I have refrained from attempting to carry [the repetition] structure over into my translation... Writing in Sesotho about a Zulu king, Mofolo could not help breaking into Zulu at certain appropriate moments. Where he has then gone on to provide a Sesotho translation, I have followed the practice of giving the original Zulu and then translating Mofolo's Sesotho into English. It has sometimes been necessary to correct Mofolo's translation of the Zulu. In that case I have translated direct from Zulu into English, placing my translation in parentheses; I have then translated Mofolo's Sesotho translation of the Zulu as *it is* in the open text." "Introduction" to *Chaka* (London: Heinemann, 1981) pp. xx-xxiii.

²⁰ These works include *Dictionary of the Amharic Language* (1842) by Karl W. Isenberg, *Vocabulary of the Hausa Language* (1843) by Jacob F. Schön, *Vocabulary of Six East-African Languages* (1851) by Johann Ludwig Krapf, *English-Kikuyu Vocabulary* (1904) by A.W. McGregor, *Isizulu: A Grammar of the Zulu Language* (1859) by Lewis Grout, etc. In fact, the usual practice was to compile dictionaries and glossaries, as well as write grammars for the African languages transposed to writing.

Christianity, it played a major role in their activities and spread literacy among the Africans. It would also seem that translating European authors into African languages served as a stepping stone to creative writing for several writers, such as C.A.R Necku who adapted parts of Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* and some of Grimm's *Tales* into Ewe in 1943, H.K.B. Setsoafia who translated Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* into Ewe in 1950, and Rev. L.G. Baëta who rendered Lamb's *Tales from Shakespeare* into Ewe in 1954 and 1959. As more Africans received further education, writing in indigenous languages increased and improved; literacy also enhanced their mastery of the European languages which could then be used for imaginative writing. As a result, when Africans started to fight against colonialism and call for political independence after the Second World War, many writers turned to European languages so as to internationalize their plight and struggle. Adele King sums up the literary situation as follows:

African literature in European languages had a remarkable development in the years just before and after independence... It was a moment when the tensions of traditional and modern cultures produced a heightened sensibility and when the definition of self seemed also to be the definition of the tribe, the country, or even Africa itself. The poetic and the social functions of literature could be united to a degree seldom possible in modern western civilization.²¹

2.1.3 Translation between European languages: from French into English

In contrast to the rapid development of literary creativity,

²¹ Adele King, *The Writings of Camara Laye* (London: Heinemann, n.d.), p. 125.

however, the situation of the translation of African literature between European languages before the independence of most African countries in the 1960s was rather bleak. Very few works were translated from one European language into another; moreover, such translations were done only by Europeans for their domestic audiences. Ade Ojo attempts to explain this state of affairs in terms of the educational policies of the colonial masters:

Under the colonial education system, every educated indigene was restricted to the learning of the colonizing language and the classics: Latin and Greek. This meant that no educated African, trained especially in his native country, could be proficient in two languages of colonization.²²

Since there were virtually no Africans who could translate African literary works between European languages, the works were translated by Europeans whose choice of originals often reflected the interests of their readership as well as their own ability to understand and convey the texts. This is mainly because even though European translators were well acquainted with the languages in question, they usually lacked an adequate grasp of the world and themes portrayed in African literary works. On the other hand, although Africans could understand the socio-cultural setting of the works, their education was not remotely geared towards translation between European languages. This difficult situation, as Ade Ojo further stresses, was compounded by the attitude of the European publishers; for them:

Encouraging literary works to move beyond their original geo-political and linguistic sources, through

²² Ade Ojo, "The Role of the Translator of African Written Literature in Inter-cultural Consciousness and Relationships", p. 296.

translation, would have meant helping to internationalize or globalize the African cause. It would also have sensitized educated and articulate Africans from the other linguistic groups and make [sic] them become fully aware of the predicament of the African.²³

It is hardly surprising therefore that very few African literary works were translated between European languages before the 1960s. Regarding English and French, these translations include *The Dark Child* (1954) which is James Kirkup and Jones Gottlieb's English version of Camara Laye's *L'Enfant noir* (1953), *The Radiance of the King* (1956) which is James Kirkup's English version of Camara Laye's *Le Regard du roi* (1954), Peter Green's *Mission Accomplished* or *Mission to Kala* (1958) which is his English version of Mongo Beti's *Mission terminée* (1957), and *L'Ivrogne dans la brousse* (1953) which is Raymond Queneau's French version of Amos Tutuola's *The Palm-wine Drinkard and his Dead Palm-wine Tapster in the Dead's Town* (1952).

From the 1960s, after most African countries gained independence, education systems received new orientations, enabling many Africans to learn European languages in universities both in Africa and abroad. Although translations of African literary works between European languages have increased since the 1960s, such evolution could be attributed more to international interest in the literature than to the involvement of African translators. Indeed, today only very few Africans are interested in or do literary translation. The vast majority of professional translators in Africa work for government services,

²³ Ade Ojo, "The Role of the Translator of African Written Literature in Inter-cultural Consciousness and Relationships", p. 293.

international organizations, and private companies; most translators are reluctant to take up literary translation since it is usually not lucrative, permanent jobs are hard to come by, and contracts are few and far between. Besides, many translators have not received appropriate training in literary translation, given that most professional schools concentrate on non-literary translation. Despite the small proportion of literary translators, however, a number of African literary works have so far been translated into and between European languages used in Africa such as English, French, Portuguese, and Spanish, as well as into other world languages like Russian, Chinese, German, Italian, Swedish, Bulgarian,²⁴ and so on. The few Africans who have already translated literary works between European languages include Modupé Bodé-Thomas (*So Long a Letter*, 1981), Simon Mpondo (*Hammer Blows*, 1974), Guillaume Oyono Mbia (*Three Suitors, One Husband*, 1968; *Until Further Notice*, 1968), and Olga Simpson (*La Flèche de Dieu*, 1978). This means therefore that most of the translations of Europhone African literary works into other European and world languages have been done by non-Africans. Very often, these translators are university scholars and critics who engage in literary translation only in addition to their professional activity as professors and lecturers. In such cases, since translation is considered merely as a subsidiary activity or hobby, they do it during their spare time - hence the very few

²⁴ Emilia Ilieva has compiled a bibliography of works of African writers translated from French, English, and Portuguese into Bulgarian [*Research in African Literatures*, 21.4 (1990), 183-4.]. Authors translated from French or English include Mariama Bâ, Chinua Achebe, Léopold Sédar Senghor, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Sembène Ousmane, and Nadine Gordimer.

translations. Dorothy Blair, Clive Wake, and Richard Bjornson, among others, fall within this group.

Moreover, the bulk of the translations have been published (and in most cases requested) by companies in Europe and America such as Heinemann (African Writers Series), Longman, and Macmillan in Britain, Three Continents Press in the United States, and *Présence Africaine*, Hatier, *Peuples Noirs*, P.J. Oswald, and Gallimard in France. In Africa, a few translations have been published by New Horn Press in Nigeria, *Les Nouvelles Editions Africaines* in Senegal, and regional branches of Heinemann in Ibadan (for West Africa), Nairobi (for East Africa), and Gaborone in Botswana (for Central and Southern Africa).

Taking into consideration the fact that this thesis is focused on the translation of African literary works from French into English and in order to avoid a somewhat tedious chronological listing of translated works, I have provided an indicative list of the francophone works that have been translated into English.²⁵ The list gives information on which works have been translated, the translators concerned, the publishing companies, and the dates of publication. Although a good number of works have been translated since 1960, translators have been scarcely able to keep pace with the writers. In fact, Ade Ojo indicates that less than five percent of African literary works have been affected by translation.²⁶ A close look at the list will also reveal certain trends in the translation of

²⁵ The list is in Appendix 1.

²⁶ Ade Ojo, "The Role of the Translator of African Written Literature", p. 298.

African literature from French into English.

A major trend that has characterized the translation of African literature is the preponderance of novels or prose fiction; to a large extent, this seems to reflect the taste and preferences of readers as well as the fact that African authors have written more novels than any other literary genre. Besides, as Dorothy Blair is quick to point out:

Publishers have so far been cautious about bringing out translations of dramatic literature, claiming that there is not sufficient readership, as compared to the large public interested in the novel, or even poetry.²⁷

Oyono Mbia's plays and Seydou Badian's *La Mort de Chaka* are among the very few that have been translated from French into English.

Some translators also prefer to translate the works of a specific author or authors; for example, James Kirkup has more or less specialized in the works of Camara Laye (*The Dark Child*, 1954; *The Radiance of the King*, 1956; *A Dream of Africa*, 1968; *The Guardian of the Word*, 1980), while John Reed has focused on those of Ferdinand Oyono (*Houseboy*, 1966; *The Old Man and the Medal*, 1967). This is probably because the translators have become quite familiar with the themes and styles of the writers in question. On the other hand, certain translators work on a wide range of authors. For instance, although Dorothy Blair has translated several works, the authorship is quite varied; her translations include the works of Birago Diop (*Tales of Amadou Koumba*, 1966), Olympe Bhely-Quénum (*Snares Without End*, 1981), Aminata Sow Fall (*The Beggars' Strike*, 1981), Alioum Fantouré

²⁷ Dorothy Blair, *African Literature in French* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), p. 331.

(*Tropical Circle*, 1981), Nafissatou Diallo (*A Dakar Childhood*, 1982), and Myriam Warner-Vieyra (*As the Sorcerer Said...*, 1982). She has also translated several works by North African writers.²⁸

In certain cases, authors have translated their own works into another European language; Guillaume Oyono Mbia has translated his works (*Trois prétendants... un mari*, 1964; *Jusqu'à nouvel avis*, 1970; *Le Train spécial de son Excellence*, 1979) into English (*Three Suitors, One Husband*, 1968; *Until Further Notice*, 1968; *His Excellency's Special Train*, 1979). In another connection, selections of poems by one or more poets have also been translated and published together in anthologies; for instance, Clive Wake has published *French African Verse with English Translation* (1972), and Melvin Dixon has translated and published a collection of Léopold Sédar Senghor's poems under the title *Léopold Sédar Senghor: The Collected Poetry* (1991).

Some translations have been published in two editions with different titles, probably in order to accommodate the linguistic differences between American and British English-speaking readers. Accordingly, the translation of Ferdinand Oyono's *Une Vie de boy* was published in London as *Houseboy* (1966) and in New York as *Boy!* (1970) while Mongo Beti's *Mission terminée* appeared in English in New York as *Mission Accomplished* (1958) and in London as *Mission to Kala* (1958).

²⁸ The works include Assia Djebar, *A Sister to Sheherazade* (London: Quartet Books, 1985), Fadhma Amrouche, *My Life Story: The Autobiography of a Berber Woman* (London: The Women's Press/Rutger's University Press, 1988), Leïla Sebbar, *Sheherazade* (London: Quartet Books, 1991), Gisèle Halimi, *Milk for the Orange Tree* (London: Quartet Books, 1990), etc.

Furthermore, some translations have been subsequently expanded to contain other works of the same author; for example, Richard Bjornson's English version of René Philombe's *Lettres de ma cambuse*, published as *Tales from my Hut* in 1977, was expanded to contain other stories by René Philombe (four stories from *Histoires queue-de-chat*, 1971) and reissued in 1984 under the title *Tales from Cameroon: Collected Short Stories of René Philombe*.

As concerns the translators themselves, it would be impossible to provide biographical details in a short overview of this nature. Information on their individual works in the translation of African literature from French into English can be gathered from the list. Nevertheless, most of them are scholars and critics specialized in African literary studies, are quite familiar with English and French, and have developed interest in the translation of African literature. For example, Richard Bjornson has explained how he became involved in the translation of African literature and why he continued translating, in addition to his normal activities as professor and scholar in African literature:

As far as my own work in the field of translation is concerned, I fell into it rather by accident. I was teaching in Yaounde in 1976-77, and I became acquainted with the work of René Philombe... After I had spoken with Philombe himself on a number of occasions, I undertook to translate one of the stories in [*Histoires queue-de-chat*] for my own amusement... I suppose that the reason I continue to do translations occasionally and to teach a translation workshop from time to time is the sheer creative joy that one derives from the satisfaction of having solved a puzzle, of finding words in English that have somewhere near the same effect that the original

French ones did.²⁹

Although Africans are becoming increasingly involved in translating African literature, the field is still dominated by non-Africans, especially British and Americans. The needs and interests of the large readership in Europe and America continue to play a decisive role in determining the African literary works to be translated. Moreover, publishers are often guided by market forces, publishing only translations of works that they feel would satisfy their readers and be economically profitable.

In reaction to the paucity of African literary translators, efforts are being made in certain African institutions to introduce students to the translation of African literature.³⁰ In Nigeria, scholars such as Ade Ojo and Jide Timothy Asobele of the University of Lagos are actively engaged in research work on the translation of African literature. Although there are practically no learned journals and reviews in Africa devoted solely to research in the translation of African literature, scholars have continued to contribute to literary translation and related publications both in Africa and abroad. Associations of translators have also been formed in certain countries such as Nigeria, Zambia, etc. to further the professional interests of

²⁹ Quoted from a letter dated 18 December 1991 by Richard Bjornson to me. Regrettably, he died not long afterwards, on 16 July 1992, of a heart attack. A copy of the letter is included in this thesis as Appendix 3.

³⁰ Such is the case, for instance, at the Advanced School of Translators and Interpreters (ASTI) in Cameroon where students are encouraged to translate excerpts from African literary works, especially between English and French, in partial fulfilment of the requirements of postgraduate diploma in translation. The translation school in Morocco, "Ecole Supérieure Roi Fahd de Traduction", also concentrates on translation from and into Arabic.

translators.

At the present stage, therefore, literary translation in Africa could be said to be searching for an identity. More efforts need to be made to foster translation not only between European languages but also between African languages themselves on the one hand, and between African and other world languages, on the other. Translators have started translating African literary works in European languages into African languages; for instance, J.O. Abioye has translated Sembène Ousmane's *Le Mandat* (1962) into Yoruba under the title *Sowedowo*.³¹ Although much translation work is currently being done mainly by missionary and religious bodies, government policies in several African countries are yet to attach any importance to literary translation. Measures to encourage the reading of translated works and the inclusion of such works in school syllabuses and public examinations would go a long way in improving the situation. In addition, Timothy Asobele's suggestion deserves some attention:

It is our hope that international symposia, conferences, seminars, and congresses on literary translations in Africa will be multiplied in the not too distant future to highlight the need for literary translations and co-operation of translators and publishers in Africa's march toward self-sufficiency in a continent where more than 85% of the cultural commodities, books included, are written and printed abroad.³²

More significantly, sustained research work on the translation of African literature would address some of the problems

³¹ Jide Timothy Asobele, "Literary Translation in Africa: The Nigerian Experience", p. 82.

³² Jide Timothy-Asobele, "Literary Translation in Africa: The Nigerian Experience", p. 81.

encountered and stimulate debate in the field.

2.2. Theoretical research in the translation of African literature

The translation of African literature has received very little attention from scholars and researchers. Although this somewhat dismal situation could in part be attributed to the rather complex language aspects of the literature, it is worth bearing in mind, however, that the translation of African literature is still a very young discipline and there are very few scholars interested in or competent to do the appropriate research. Publications in the field are so far limited to research papers, articles, and reports, particularly as concerns English and French. Discussions of theoretical issues can therefore only be gleaned from these publications which are scattered in learned journals and reviews. Scholars who have written on various translation problems and approaches include Ade Ojo, Irène D'Almeida, Brenda Packman, Charles Nama, and Samia Mehrez, among others.

2.2.1 Ade Ojo: In a recent article, Ade Ojo has outlined what he feels should be the goals of the translator of African literature in the dissemination of culture; he suggests some of the prerequisites of such translator, stressing the problems likely to be encountered and the eventual task to be accomplished:

... he must be able to identify and distinguish culture-bound, structure-bound and time-place-tradition bound elements in the ST and express them

adequately in the target language.³³

He also dwells on the importance of the personal style of the ST author in literary translation. One of his main arguments is that the peculiar use of the European languages by African writers as well as the double cultural and linguistic layers of their works have to be analyzed and conveyed in translation. Furthermore, Ojo does not show how the translator can achieve these objectives, nor does he apply his views to any specific texts. His ideas would therefore at best provide only a general notion of some of the translation options and choices. Admittedly, the limited goals of his article need to be extended and applied to a text to be of any valuable help to the translator.

2.2.2 Irène D'Almeida: On the other hand, Irène D'Almeida's views take the form of an article³⁴ presenting some of the difficulties she encountered in translating Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God* into French. Her approach, unlike that of Ade Ojo, is mainly empirical, indicating translation problems and advancing reasons for the choices she ultimately made in her attempt to solve the said problems. For example, she outlines the following problem and discusses the solution she proposed:

Sometimes one comes across some problem-words like doctor, medicine-man, herbalist, which all represent the same reality, that of the "dibia", a word that Achebe does use in a few instances. In French, "docteur" is unsuitable, "rabouteux" is derogatory, "herboriste" is inappropriate. All these words were

³³. Ade Ojo "The Role of the Translator of African Written Literature", pp. 292-293.

³⁴ Irène D'Almeida, "Literary Translation: The Experience of Translating Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God* into French", *Meta*, 27.3 (1982), 286-294.

translated by "guérisseur" a word which is increasingly used in French-speaking West Africa in this context.³⁵

Understandably, her views are restricted to one text; other problems likely to be encountered in the translation of African literature are therefore ignored. Moreover, although her experience would be of some help to the translator, she makes no obvious attempt to arrange her ideas within a coherent framework.

2.2.3 **Brenda Packman:** Another scholar, Brenda Packman, also discusses some of the problems encountered in the translation of African literature from French into English. Instead of dwelling on problems that are common to literary translation from French into English, she focuses on those peculiar to African literature. She cites examples from John Reed's English translation of Ferdinand Oyono's *Une Vie de boy* and Dorothy Blair's English version of Birago Diop's *Les Contes d'Amadou Koumba* in order to illustrate how some of the difficulties can be overcome. Generally speaking, she is of the opinion that:

the translator must have an affinity with the author, be aware of the African scene, and also of the varied nature of his new public which in the case of English translation will be no more homogeneous than that envisaged by the original author.³⁶

Unfortunately, Packman does not show how a translator can cope with the problem of varied public. Here again, the study deals only with a few unrelated problems and therefore fails to give

³⁵ Irène D'Almeida, "Literary Translation: The Experience of Translating Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God* into French", p. 291.

³⁶ Brenda Packman, "Some Problems of Translation in African Literature", in *Perspectives on African Literature*, ed. by Christopher Heywood (London: Heinemann, 1975), pp. 64-77 (p. 69).

a coherent perspective of the task that awaits the translator of African literature. However, the use of examples and the proposal of alternative translations shed some light on certain difficulties likely to be encountered in the translation of African literature and thereby contribute towards debate on the theoretical issues involved.

2.2.4 Charles Nama: Similarly, Charles Nama considers some of the problems involved in the translation of African literature, citing examples from a variety of sources. For him:

The translation of works in African literature poses several major questions to the translator, including fidelity to the original, formal and dynamic equivalence in the target language, the question of meaning, traditional titles, philosophical expressions, literal translation, and conveying the author's style or techniques in the translated version without distorting the context.³⁷

He further points out that several translations into European languages have so far been marred by serious errors due essentially to inadequate analysis or understanding of the socio-cultural context of the works. He therefore insists that the translator needs to analyze the original text from various perspectives - linguistic, cultural, philosophical, and socio-political. Basing his argument on the nature of literary translation, he is of the opinion that the translator of African literature would also need to be a knowledgeable critic of the literature. His recourse to examples notwithstanding, his views seem rather sketchy and present only a limited picture of the

³⁷ Charles Nama, "A Critical Analysis of the Translation of African Literature", *Language and Communication*, 10.1 (1990), 75-86 (p. 79).

issues. All the same, the approach he adopts offers valuable insight into some of the difficulties the translator is likely to face when translating African literature, particularly from French into English.

2.2.5. Other research work: Other scholars like Samia Mehrez have stressed the peculiar nature of the African literary text in European languages. For her, the francophone North African text comprises a "culturo-linguistic layering" which creates a new language:

Hence, in many ways these postcolonial plurilingual texts in their own right resist and ultimately exclude the monolingual and demand of their readers to be like themselves: 'in between', at once capable of reading and translating, where translation becomes an integral part of the reading experience.³⁸

The nature of such "double" or "bilingual" texts, she argues, poses peculiar translation problems, challenges the tenets of existing Western translation theories, and calls for changes in approach to account for differences. Her examples are taken from texts of francophone North African literature.

Finally, some research has been done on the translation of African literature between English and French by students of the Advanced School of Translators and Interpreters at the University of Buea, Cameroon, and by other Cameroonian students who have studied abroad, especially in Canada. Their focus has to a large extent been limited to highlighting translation problems encountered in the translation of extracts from African literary

³⁸ Samia Mehrez, "Translation and the Postcolonial Experience: The Francophone North African Text", p. 122.

works, and suggesting some ways of solving them.³⁹ These studies are often fragmentary and limited in scope; what is more, there has been much duplication as the students seem to be discussing certain problems over and over again, as well as confining their work primarily to novels instead of exploring other literary genres.

By and large, the above views and perspectives show that research and debate on the translation of African literary texts, especially between European languages, have hitherto been cursory, fragmentary, and scattered. Empirical studies, commented translations of excerpts from literary works, and pieces of advice to the translator usually consider theoretical issues only partially, leaving the translator and other interested persons the task of piecing them together and developing an overall perspective of the basis for translation strategies and the ultimate choices. Nevertheless, such research could contribute to fostering literary translation studies in Africa as well as offer useful insights into the translation of African literature between European languages, thereby helping practising translators to become aware of some of the translation options, and suggesting reasons for certain decisions and choices.

2.3 Practice of the translation of African literature

As already indicated, a number of African literary works have so far been translated between European languages. Several translators are also engaged in translating into and between

³⁹ Some of the titles of these studies are listed in Appendix 2.

African and other European and world languages. My attempt to survey translation practice will consist mainly in exploring what some translators have said about their works, particularly in prefaces, introductions, and translator's notes, as well as in analyzing and commenting on how translators effectively translate.

2.3.1 Remarks by translators on their own works

In addition to the views expressed by scholars and theoreticians on the translation of African literature, some translators have discussed their approaches to certain problems that confronted them in the translation of specific works. As we have already seen, Irène D'Almeida wrote on her experience in translating *Arrow of God* into French, trying to explain and justify her strategies as well as the choices she ultimately made. In like manner, Raymond Queneau explained how he coped with certain difficulties when translating Amos Tutuola's *The Palm-wine Drinkard and his Dead Palm-wine Tapster in the Dead's Town* into French:

La traduction présentait quelques problèmes particuliers. L'auteur, par exemple, utilise les conjonctions de la langue anglaise (notamment but et or) d'une façon inhabituelle qui m'a donné bien de souci. D'autre part, j'ai dû résister à la tentation de rationaliser un récit dont les "inconséquences" et les "contradictions" se glissent parfois dans la structure même des phrases... Un palm-wine tapster est un "tireur de vin de palme". J'ai traduit cette expression par "malafoutier", bien que ce mot soit employé au Congo et non en Afrique Occidentale. "Gris-gris" est pour juju et "féticheur" pour juju-man.⁴⁰

Several other translators briefly present their strategies and

⁴⁰ Raymond Quéneau, *L'Ivrogne dans la brousse* (Paris: Gallimard, 1953), p. 7.

decisions in prefaces and translator's notes, while yet others offer substantial introductions which attempt to present the literary works in order to facilitate comprehension by readers. For example, in his English version of the Zulu epic, *Emperor Shaka the Great: A Zulu Epic*, Mazisi Kunene elucidates his translation approach in the preface:

I have tried to give a faithful but free translation of the original. I have also cut out a great deal of material which would seem to be a digression from the story, a style unacceptable in English but characteristic of deep scholarship in Zulu. Throughout the epic I have attempted to give as accurate a historical account as possible... In translating, I have used words that correspond to similar concepts in English, although the meanings in the societies may not be exactly the same.⁴¹

Other translators from African into European languages have adopted different approaches which they defend in the prefaces to their translations. For instance, Daniel Biebuyck and Kahombo Mateene declare that they translated *The Mwindo Epic* (1969) into English by keeping quite close to the original in the Nyanga language (Congo Republic) while making the English version readable:

We have tried to be as literal as possible, yet produce a readable text. We often draw attention to an interpreted translation in the notes... The Nyanga language is very much concerned with repetitions indicating place, relative time, and circumstance... Although these repetitious statements are cumbersome in reading, they are a typical expression of Nyanga thought patterns and have therefore been left as they are.⁴²

Such brief remarks shed light on translation options and could

⁴¹ Mazisi Kunene, *Emperor Shaka the Great: A Zulu Epic* (London: Heinemann, 1979), p. xxvii.

⁴² Daniel Biebuyck and Kahombo, *The Mwindo Epic* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1969), pp. 37 & 38.

be beneficial to other translators and scholars. Although certain translators do not strictly adhere to their prefatory statements, such comments usually give at least an indication of the translator's attempts.

Certain translators between French and English have also commented on their translations in prefaces; for example, John Reed and Clive Wake explained their approach in the translation of Léopold Sédar Senghor's poetry from French into English in the preface:

The translations offered here try to keep as close as possible to the detailed meaning of the French text and to be readable as English free verse poems. A glossary has been added to explain the African words used by Senghor which we have kept in the translations and to serve as a guide to the West African history and geography referred to in the poems.⁴³

Furthermore, Richard Bjornson systematically provides introductions to his translations. Irrespective of what translators have asserted in the prefaces, introductions, and translator's notes, however, a review of some of the existing translations would indicate some of the difficulties encountered and how they have been overcome.

2.3.2 A review of some of the existing translations

Since the vast majority of the translators of francophone African literary works into English are reasonably well acquainted with the languages involved, it could be said that most of the difficulties relate to cultural references and the peculiar use of the European language, particularly in dialogue

⁴³ *Léopold Sédar Senghor: Selected Poems* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964.), p. xix.

and imagery. With regard to culture-bound terms and expressions as well as proverbs, translators have generally maintained those that have no suitable equivalent in English and translated the culture-bound proverbs literally. In his English version of Ferdinand Oyono's *Une Vie de boy*, John Reed retained such terms as "aba", "bilaba", "arki", etc. for which he could not find English equivalents, given that the words are specific to the cultural setting of the novel: "La masse de l'aba se détachait dans la nuit." (p. 11) is rendered as "The dark mass of the aba stood out against the night." (*Houseboy*, p. 6); he subsequently translated the footnote which defines "aba" into English. Similarly, Katherine Woods maintained "tabala", "chahâda", etc. in her translation of Sembène Ousmane's *L'Aventure ambiguë* into English: "tabala" in "Alors, au dehors, le grand tabala funèbre retentit." (pp. 194-195) is retained in the translation: "Then, outside, the great funeral tabala sounded." (*Ambiguous Adventure*, p. 169).

As for African proverbs, Modupé Bodé-Thomas gives a literal translation of the proverbs in Mariam Bâ's *Une si longue lettre* instead of looking for typical English proverbs that could convey the same ideas: "On ne brûle pas un arbre qui porte des fruits." (p. 49) is rendered literally as "You don't burn the tree which bears the fruit." (*So Long a Letter*, p. 31). African proverbs are also translated literally by many other translators; for example, John Reed in his translation of *Une Vie de boy* by Ferdinand Oyono also renders proverbs literally: "Nos ancêtres disaient qu'il faut savoir se sauver lorsque l'eau n'arrive encore qu'au genou." (p. 151) is translated into English as "Our ancestors used to say

that you must escape when the water is still only up to the knees." (*Houseboy*, p. 115). Again, most translators often attempt to convey the ST image: the cultural image or comparison by Ferdinand Oyono in *Une Vie de boy*: "Les grosses jambes de Mme Gosier-d'Oiseau étaient empaquetées dans son pantalon comme du manioc dans une feuille de bananier." (p. 76) is rendered into English by John Reed as "Madame Gullet was stuffed into her slacks like cassava in a banana leaf." (*Houseboy*, p. 57). Such retention of African cultural terms, proverbs, and images seems to indicate the translators' preference for conveying the cultural setting or local colour of African literary works.

The use of "français petit nègre" or Pidgin English in certain African literary works has also posed translation problems. The most common solution seems to be the creation of an ungrammatical variety in the target language. For example, John Reed attempts to render the guard's "bad" French by using ungrammatical English: "--Movié! s'exclama le garde, Zeuil-de-Panthère cogner comme Gosier-d'Oiseau! Lui donner moi coup de pied qui en a fait comme soufat'soud... Zeuil y en a pas rire..." (p. 40) is translated by "'Man," said the sentry, "Panther-Eye beat like Gullet. Him kick me bam! Go like dynamite. Panther-Eye no joke." (p. 30). John Reed's attempt, however, raises a few questions. Does his translation reflect an uneducated African's attempt to speak standard English? In what situation would an uneducated African, or Cameroonian in this case, attempt to speak standard English, with all the ungrammatical constructions, instead of Pidgin English? Of much interest also is the fact that Irène D'Almeida faced similar problems in her attempt to convey

dialogue in Pidgin English in Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God* into French:

Perhaps one of the most teasing problems was to translate the passages which the writer elected to render in Pidgin English. After much deliberation we have chosen to invent a kind of French gibberish as it were.⁴⁴

D'Almeida therefore translated Pidgin English into French by "français petit nègre". As she herself has conceded, this is a very debatable solution, and one can understand why she wonders whether "the shortcomings notwithstanding this device does convey the meaning and the feeling conveyed by the writer." (p. 293).

In addition, where the author of a literary text has provided footnotes or a glossary of indigenous terms, such explanations or definitions have generally been translated. For example, John Reed translated the footnotes of *Une Vie de boy* at the bottom of the pages, while Modupé Bodé-Thomas preferred to place the notes at the end of his translation. On the other hand, Ralph Manheim in *Bound to Violence* (1971), his English version of Yambo Ouologuem's *Le Devoir de violence* (1968), inserted notes at certain points to explain or define what he felt might not be obvious to his readers; thus he inserted a footnote on the pronunciation of "Saïfs" and another to define griot (p. 3). However, most of the translators have not explained or defined terms for which there is no glossary or for which footnotes have not been provided.

Although it could be said that many of the popular translations seem to have, on the whole, been reasonably well

⁴⁴ Irène D'Almeida, "Literary Translation: The Experience of Translating Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God* into French", pp. 291-292.

done, there are certain clear mistranslations which seem to be due primarily to inadequate analysis of the original text or lack of familiarity with the extralinguistic context. For instance, in Peter Green's translation of *Mission terminée* by Mongo Beti, "noix de cola" (p. 59) is rendered by "chewing gum" (p. 64). Even though "chewing gum" is probably used by the translator as a way of adapting an African text to the experience and expectations of non-African readers, it is in fact a mistranslation of "noix de cola" which represents quite a different reality (kola nut). Again, the symbolic importance of the nut in the novel and in the African society as a whole has been lost in the translation, especially as the nut is eaten mainly by adults and in ceremonies while chewing gum is mostly for children and adolescents and scarcely has any significance in the European or American society comparable to that in Africa. Other cases of mistranslated cultural terms are evident in John Reed's rendition of "bâton de manioc" (*Une Vie de boy*, p. 7) as "cassava sticks" (*Houseboy*, p. 3) and in James Kirkup's translation of "griot" (*Dramouss*, p. 80) by "witch-doctor" (*A Dream of Africa*, p. 127) and by "praise singer" (*The African Child*, p. 80). When Reed proposes "cassava sticks", this refers more to pieces of the cassava stem used for planting than to the local staple food,⁴⁵ known as "bobolo" in the Centre and South Provinces of Cameroon and as "miondo" in the Littoral and North-West Provinces. On the other hand, the word

⁴⁵ "Bâton de manioc" is grated and fermented cassava, rolled in banana leaves in the form of sticks and cooked. It is often eaten with fish or groundnut pudding. The word "miondo" is used by Mbella Sonne Dipoko in *Because of Women*: "There is some sauce," she said, "and miondo. But I don't like those miondo. I'd rather cook a little pepper soup for you." (p. 66).

"griot" is widely used in English in the African context and would perhaps, where necessary, require a footnote to define it.

Several attempts have been made by certain scholars to point out what they consider to be mistranslations in some specific works. These include Fredric Michelman and Adele King who have commented on James Kirkup's English version of Camara Laye's *L'Enfant noir*. Fredric Michelman observes that Kirkup sometimes leaves out or alters words, whole sentences, and even paragraphs in his effort to improve on the author's style, especially where he feels that repetition is unnecessary and clumsy.⁴⁶ However, these omissions and, in certain cases, avoidance of repetition affect the tone and content of the works, as well as result in a flat text that communicates only very little of the writer's individual style. These same comments and others have also been underlined by Adele King:

Although there is no editorial indication that the translation is incomplete, there are sentences and paragraphs omitted in the English version... At times Kirkup has toned down some emotional descriptions... Occasionally, some sentences and phrases are incorrectly translated... Laye's prose is more logical than would appear from the English text... Kirkup occasionally uses a metaphor which appears strange in the Guinean context... Laye's prose is more subtle than the translation reveals.⁴⁷

Most of the above shortcomings, it should be noted, could very well apply to other translators of African literature in European languages.

In some cases, however, translators have made additions in

⁴⁶ Fredric Michelman, "From *L'Enfant noir* to *The Dark Child: The Drumbeats of Words Silenced*", in *Toward Defining the African Aesthetic*, ed. by Lemuel Johnson and others (Washington D.C.: Three Continents Press, 1982), pp. 105-111.

⁴⁷ Adele King, *The Writings of Camara Laye*, pp. 103-105.

order to clarify or amplify the context; these additions, where skilfully made, often facilitate reading in the target language. For example, Peter Green in his attempt to capture the overall atmosphere of:

--Mon Dieu! s'écria tante Amou, c'est toi? Ta mère n'est pas à la maison, ton père non plus, naturellement.
(*Mission terminée*, p. 19)

feels he has to make certain additions that would render the English version more logical and clear:

"Lordy!" gasped Aunt Amou, "it's you, is it? You gave me quite a turn." She took a deep breath and got into her stride. "Well, your mother's not at home, nor your father, of course." (*Mission to Kala*, p. 5)

Nonetheless, additions sometimes also introduce new elements in the translation; such unnecessary additions can be found in Oyono Mbia's translation of his plays; for example:

ONDOUA: (méthodique) Il me faut, pour moi... euh... un grand lit en fer... un matelas en coton... euh... une armoire, des cou... (*Trois prétendants*, p. 42)

is rendered with additions into English as:

ONDUA (thinking methodically): You'll bring me... er... a large iron bed, a cotton mattress, a big cupboard... ten cases of red wine, twenty bottles of... (*Three Suitors*, p. 27)

Peter Green also makes other types of alterations or adjustments in *Mission to Kala*: the translation of direct speech by indirect (p. 6), formal changes to paragraphs (pp. 6-7), and others. These changes as well as the coining of nicknames ("Yohannès le Palmipède" becomes "Duckfoot Johnny") show that Green, like several other translators of African literary works, also exercises some creativity in translation. Such creativity which respects the spirit of the original could be said to have contributed immensely to the success of translations like *Mission*

to *Kala*, *Houseboy*, *The Old Man and the Medal*, *The African Child*, etc. which are regarded and studied today as literary works in English rather than as translations. That is perhaps why despite the mistranslations pointed out in Kirkup's translation, Adele King recognizes the intrinsic merit of the work and reiterates the fact that much criticism of African literature is currently based on translations:

Undoubtedly the English translations of Laye's work have been of value in establishing a critical dialogue between Anglophone and Francophone West Africans. Indeed more criticism has been written on Laye by English-speaking than by French-speaking Africans.⁴⁸

One may even go as far as asserting that the translations have introduced English-speaking readers to Francophone African literature.

Attempting to introduce readers to the literature in another European language, however, has posed serious problems to translators, especially in cases where the audience may not be familiar with the extralinguistic context of the literary work. For instance, despite the apparent fact that translations in Britain are intended primarily for domestic readers, the bulk of translations in the Heinemann African Writers Series provide no background information or explanatory notes which would enable non-African readers to understand adequately and appreciate the writers' message. The readers are therefore expected to be acquainted with African realities and environment, a presupposition which is sometimes mistaken. In most cases, readers unfamiliar with the African setting would approach and interpret the translations according to their own cultural

⁴⁸ Adele King, *The Writings of Camara Laye*, p. 107.

perspectives, hence the possibilities of misinterpretations or lack of understanding.

Although it is still a moot question as to whether or not the translator should assume that the reader is totally ignorant of the world in the literary work, some translations published by certain other companies have frequently provided brief introductory information on the setting of the work and given an insight into the translator's approach; for example, in *God's Bits of Wood*, published in 1962 by Doubleday (New York) as Francis Price's translation of *Les Bouts de bois de Dieu* (1960) by Sembène Ousmane, a short introduction which gives relevant historical background information is provided by an African historian, Adu Boahen. Other translators, like Richard Bjornson whose works are published mainly by Three Continents Press (Washington), provide introductions to their translations.

Several translators have made conscious efforts to ensure that their translations are adequately understood by their target readership. In addition to brief introductions, some translators adopt such strategies as providing footnotes or glossaries for terms or ideas likely to be misconstrued or not understood, using familiar colloquial or slang expressions in dialogue, and so on. Melvin Dixon's translation of Senghor's poetry is intended for the American public; he therefore makes adjustments with his public in mind:

I have followed the conventions of modern American prosody, my own poetic usage, and regular breath stops to establish line breaks, rather than sticking too rigidly to the longer-line verset common to Senghor's poetry in the original... My principal source for the spelling of foreign terms that have passed into American usage (balaphon, pagne, pirogue, etc) is Webster's Third International Dictionary... Italicized

foreign terms are defined in the Glossary provided by Senghor and augmented by me. I have made every effort to present as uniform and accessible a text as possible for American readers.⁴⁹

In *The African Child*, Kirkup's use of expressions like "plump as a partridge" (p. 37) and "sent to Coventry" (p. 73) shows that he had a British audience in mind.

In their practice therefore, translators of African literature from French into English have adopted various strategies to solve translation problems. While some translators have discussed their choices and tried to cope with the expectations of their primary audiences, others have relied on the fact that readers will be acquainted with the relevant contextual information or find out such information where necessary.

What emerges from this brief survey of the evolution of the translation of African literature seems to be the crucial role of missionary language and education practices in laying the groundwork for creative writing through translation. Thanks to education and literacy in European and African languages, as well as to translation between them, literary creativity developed from mainly religious writing, oral literature and prose fiction in indigenous languages to modern literature in European languages.

My approach in the historical overview has consisted in presenting the major trends in the evolution of translation and citing relevant examples. This is mainly because I believe that

⁴⁹ Melvin Dixon, *Léopold Sédar Senghor: The Collected Poetry* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1991), p. xli.

a strictly chronological treatment in terms of historical periods (e.g. precolonial, colonial, and postcolonial) would inevitably lead to a good deal of repetition and wearisome listing of translated works, which is reduced largely because the various trends often run across more than one period. Furthermore, the unequal length of the periods (the precolonial period spans several centuries whereas the colonial period covers barely a single century) would result in a rather unbalanced treatment. Examples have also been kept to manageable proportions and emphasis laid on aspects relevant to this thesis.

The translation of African literary works in general, and between English and French in particular, has received much impetus during the second half of this century but still has a long way to go. Similarly, theoretical investigations are still limited in scope, and are yet to benefit from insights from other parts of the world. It might therefore be helpful to explore some modern theories of translation, particularly literary translation theories in the West, with a view to determining if and how they could be relevant to studies on the translation of African literature from French into English.

CHAPTER 3

TRANSLATION THEORIES AND THE TRANSLATION OF AFRICAN LITERATURE

In the previous chapter, theoretical research on the translation of African literature between European languages (English and French) was shown to be scanty, fragmentary, and dispersed in various learned journals and publications. Faced with this present situation therefore, research of wider scope and relevance might enhance debate and supplement opinions currently held. A broader perspective on the translation of African literature could be gained perhaps by drawing on applicable aspects of literary translation theories developed in Europe, America, and other parts of the world.

This chapter examines a range of theories (especially literary theories) of translation with a view to exploring if and how they could contribute towards deeper understanding of analysis and transfer strategies and choices already used or that could be used in the translation of African literature from French into English.

3.1 Modern theories of literary translation

Generally speaking, these are translation theories which have drawn on literary theory or dealt specifically with the translation of literary works. Studies on the translation of literary texts have frequently centred around the extent to which the ST author's intentions and formal devices (genre, stylistic

features, and rhetorical devices) have been, or could be, accounted for or recreated in translation. In such cases, literary texts and their translations are compared and contrasted in terms of corresponding literary devices as well as of the functions of literary genres. As Eugene Nida has pointed out:

In place of treating the form in which the text was first composed, [some literary translation theories] deal with corresponding structures in the source and receptor languages and attempt to evaluate their equivalences.¹

During the second half of this century, many scholars have, in addition to studying translations as products, attempted to analyze the process of literary translation, and examine the reception of translated texts.² Translation has therefore been considered not only in terms of the interpretation of the original within its historical, social, cultural, and literary contexts, but also in the light of how it is rendered such that it is integrated into the target literary system. Consequently, research and debate have dealt with literary translation as a process and as a product, highlighting such factors as the creativity of the original author and of the translator, ways of analyzing and interpreting the ST, the translator as reader and as writer, the understanding and expectations of readers, the

¹ "A Framework for the Analysis and Evaluation of Theories of Translation", in *Translation: Applications and Research*, ed. by Richard Brislin (New York: Gardner Press, 1976), pp. 47-91 (p. 67).

² Some studies have already reviewed and discussed recent developments in western translation theories. These include Edwin Gentzler's *Contemporary Translation Theories* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993) and Robert Larose's *Théories contemporaines de la traduction* (Sillery, Québec: Presses de l'Université du Québec, 1989). My discussion of theories in this chapter will be limited to aspects that might relate to the translation of African literature from French into English.

role of translated literary texts in target systems, and other specific translation problems. Moreover, as will be discussed later in this chapter, philosophical discussions by scholars such as Walter Benjamin, Jacques Derrida, and Paul de Man have questioned certain traditional views on translation.

3.1.1 Literary translation as a process

Some studies have attempted to describe the process carried out by the literary translator. As Candace Séguinot has noted, the process of literary translation can be studied in a number of ways: a translator could be observed at work, successive translations of a work compared, or deductions made from a comparison of a text and its translation.³ Much of the problem, however, lies in the fact that part of the process is mental and it is difficult to know exactly what goes on in the mind of the translator. While some scholars have attempted to describe the mental process in translation, others have preferred to consider the process in terms of options available to the translator as he or she creates a TT, the translation strategies and decisions to be made, the way a translator manipulates the ST, and so on.

3.1.1.1 Literary translation as a creative process

In certain approaches, translation is perceived as a creative process intended to convey as many of the literary qualities of the original text as possible. According to Pavel

³ *The Translation Process* (Toronto: H.G. Publications, 1989), p. 7.

Toper,⁴ and several other scholars, literary translation is a creative process because the translator can select freely from the linguistic alternatives available in the TL in order to express the ST message, and can create a new literary text in another language and literary system. This creative process, some scholars have argued, is evident especially in the translation of poetry where more than one translation could be acceptable for a poem, or an entirely new poem is created in the TL; the various translations:

reflect the individual translators' readings, interpretations and selection of criteria determined by the concept of the *function* both of the translation and of the original text... the variations in method do serve to emphasize the point that there is no single *right* way of translating a poem just as there is no single right way of writing one either.⁵

In fact, some of the contemporary views which tend to emphasize the creative process in poetry translation are, in a large measure, an extension of earlier debates in translation theory.⁶

⁴ "The Achievement of the Theory of Literary Translation" in *Translating, A Profession. Proceedings of the Eighth World Congress of the International Federation of Translators, Montreal, 1977* (Montreal: Canadian Translators and Interpreters Council, 1978), pp. 48-54.

⁵ Susan Bassnett-McGuire, *Translation Studies* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), p. 101. Further references to this work will be indicated in brackets within the text.

⁶ For example, John Denham, like many other translators of his era and since, argued that translating a poem entailed more than simply rendering the language; accounting for the meaning or general impression of a poem required that another poem be created in the TL with the same "graces and happinesses": "I conceive it a vulgar error in translating Poets to affect being *Fidus Interpres*... for it is not his business alone to translate Language into Language, but Poesie into Poesie, & Poesie is of so subtile a spirit, that in pouring out of one Language into another, it will evaporate; and if a new spirit be not added into the transfusion, there will remain nothing but a *Caput mortuum*, there being certain Graces and Happinesses peculiar to every language, which gives life and energy to the words." Extract from

Furthermore, some theorists have proposed models to describe the creative process in literary translation. Such models often attempt to present what the scholars believe to be the various stages in the translation process. For example, George Steiner⁷ has suggested a four-stage "hermeneutic motion" model consisting of "initiative trust" or the translator's belief that the ST is worth translating, "aggression" or analysis and interpretation of the form and meaning of the ST, "incorporation" or the transfer of ST form and meaning to the TL, and "compensation" or adaptation of the TT to its context and to the understanding of readers.

The process is also described by James Holmes in a two-map two-plane text-rank model. In trying to break away from the sentence-rank model proposed earlier by Eugene Nida and Charles Taber⁸ mainly for Bible translation, he argues that a text is both serial and structural, and therefore translation takes place at the serial and structural planes.⁹ For him, the translator's choices are made on the basis of certain sets of rules:

"The Preface" to *The Destruction of Troy* (1656). Quoted by T.R. Steiner, *English Translation Theory* (Amsterdam: Van Gorcum, 1975), pp. 64-65.

⁷ *After Babel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 312-318.

⁸ Their model consists of ST analysis, kernel-level transfer, and restructuring in the TL. *The Theory and Practice of Translation* (Leiden: Brill, 1969), pp. 33-162.

⁹ On the serial plane, the translator translates sentence by sentence, while on the structural plane he or she forms a mental picture of the ST and then uses such picture to test each translated sentence.

derivational, correspondence, and projection rules.¹⁰ Holmes describes the process as follows:

The translator ... derives a map of the source text from the text itself, next applies a set of correspondence rules, some of them more or less predetermined and some more or less *ad hoc*, to develop a target-text map from the source-text map, and finally uses this second map as a guide while formulating his target text. (p. 87)

His model is subsequently applied to the translation of Charles Baudelaire's poem, "La géante", into English. He demonstrates that the options available to the translator require that certain decisions be made.

Roger Bell's psychological model of the translation process comprises three major stages: syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic processing.¹¹ Arguing that the translation process is essentially mental rather than physical, Bell has drawn on recent work in cognitive science, text processing, and systemic linguistics to present the mental aspects of translation. According to his model, what is read in the ST is processed by the memory systems through the syntactic (for its structure and lexical meaning), semantic (for its content), and pragmatic (for its stylistic characteristics and purpose) analysers. This results in a semantic representation of the text which is used

¹⁰ Derivational rules determine "the way in which the translator abstracts his map of the source text from the text itself", the correspondence rules determine "the way in which he develops his target-text map from his source-text map", and projection rules determine "the way in which he makes use of his map of the prospective target text in order to formulate the text." *Translated! Papers on Literary Translation and Translation Studies* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1988), p. 84. Subsequent references to this work will be indicated in brackets within the text.

¹¹ *Translation and Translating: Theory and Practice* (London and New York: Longman, 1991), pp. 43-76.

as basis for formulating a text in the TL. Translation takes the representation through the reverse process. The TL pragmatic processor maps out the suitable purposes, thematic structures and discourse parameters of mode, tenor and domain. The semantic processor "works to create structures to carry the propositional content and produce a satisfactory proposition to pass on to the next stage of synthesis." (p. 60) The syntactic processor looks for suitable lexical items and structure to represent the ST message. The message is finally expressed in the TL writing system to produce a TT.

In poetry translation, Robert Bly has proposed stages in terms of the various versions produced by the translator in the attempt to create a TL poem that takes into account the meaning of the original poem.¹² Rather than consider poetry translation in terms of stages, André Lefevere has looked at the various strategies that could be adopted by the translator.¹³ Depending on the elements to which priority is given (often at the expense of others), the resulting translation could be either phonemic, literal, metrical, prose, rhymed, blank verse, or interpretation. Each of these translations, however, is unbalanced since other aspects of the original poem are ignored; a poem needs to be

¹² The stages are: producing a literal version of the original poem, seeking its meaning, retranslating it according to the idiom of the TL, translating it into the TL spoken language, translating its mood, making adjustments to TL sounds, asking a TL native speaker to read it, and making the final draft. His discussion is based on the translation of a sonnet from Rilke's *Sonnets to Orpheus* from German into English. *The Eight Stages of Translation* (Boston: Rowan Tree Press, 1983), pp. 13-49.

¹³ *Translating Poetry: Seven Strategies and a Blueprint* (Amsterdam: Van Gorcum, 1975). The strategies are discussed in the light of various translations of Catullus' *Poem 64*.

treated as an organic whole in translation.

The creative process, in terms of its stages, has therefore been viewed in varying degrees of complexity. While for some scholars the process starts with the choice of a text to be translated (e.g. Steiner, Gaddis Rose¹⁴), others take this stage for granted and proceed with an analysis of the ST (e.g. Holmes, etc). Again, while some researchers present models of three major stages (Nida and Taber, Bell, etc.), others propose more complex models with up to six or eight stages (Gaddis Rose, Ronald Bathgate¹⁵). These differences, as Candace Séguinot has suggested, are due mainly to the fact that "the passage from [ST to TT] is largely a matter of conjecture" and it is difficult "to define what is or is not part of the translation process."¹⁶

¹⁴ She has proposed a six-step scheme consisting of stages which may be performed simultaneously even though they are presented sequentially; the stages are: i) preliminary analysis, ii) exhaustive style and content analysis, iii) acclimation of text, iv) reformulation of the text, v) analysis of the translation, and vi) review and comparison. "Introduction: Time and Space in the Translation Process", in *Translation Spectrum: Essays in the Theory and Practice of Translation*, ed. by Marilyn Gaddis Rose (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1981), pp. 1-7.

¹⁵ After a review of previous models, Bathgate presents what he calls an "operational model" consisting of the following stages: i) tuning or getting into the right frame of mind, ii) analysis, iii) understanding, iv) terminology, v) restructuring, vi) checking, vii) discussion, viii) target-language text. "Studies of Translation Models 1", *The Incorporated Linguist*, 19.4 (1980), 113-4 and "Studies of Translation Models 2", *The Incorporated Linguist*, 20.1 (1981), 10-16. The model is designed for various types of texts, the translator determining the relevance of each stage to the text in question. He further explains that "the phases may not always occur in the order stated, and may overlap." (p. 113.)

¹⁶ "The Translation Process: An Experimental Study", in *The Translation Process*, pp. 21-53 (p. 21).

3.1.1.2 Literary translation as a decision-making process

Rather than consider the translation process in terms of stages, some scholars have focused on decisions and choices that the translator might have to make while translating. For Jiří Levý, literary translation involves:

a series of a certain number of consecutive situations - moves, as in a game - situations imposing on the translator the necessity of choosing among a certain (and very often exactly definable) number of alternatives.¹⁷

The comparison of the process to a game is significant because the translator develops a strategy in which "every succeeding move is influenced by the knowledge of previous decisions and by the situation which resulted from them." (p. 1172). The choices are therefore made one after the other, within an overall orientation; the alternatives at each stage depend on the range of possible solutions and the limitations imposed by previous as well as subsequent choices. Levý also believes that the translator will often choose options that have "a maximum effect with a minimum effort." (p. 1179).

In the same vein, Stephen Straight has pointed out that the translator has to make certain decisions at various stages of the translation process:

the translator usually has a large number of alternatives to choose from in conveying the meaning of a word, phrase, sentence, or opus to people in a

¹⁷ "Translation as a decision process", in *To Honor Roman Jakobson: Essays on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday, 11 October 1966*, Vol. II (The Hague: Mouton, 1967), pp. 1171-1182 (p. 1171). Further references to this work will be indicated in brackets within the text.

different cultural-linguistic group.¹⁸

While the translator's decisions will be influenced by factors such as the function intended for the translated text and the expectations of readers, Straight insists that alternatives will have to be weighed carefully and that decisions will be made for each text, rather than on absolute grounds.

Again, Lance Hewson and Jacky Martin have developed a variational model of translation which attempts to explore translation options and how choices can be made. The two-stage model looks at the meaning of the source and target texts in terms of paraphrastic sets or alternatives from which the translator selects:

The first stage is a *generative* process describing the development of variations [in the source and target languages] and the definition of correspondences between the two sets. The second stage is a *normative* process defining the socio-cultural parameters corresponding to each pair of correspondences between [the two languages]. Translation production proper is situated beyond these two operations.¹⁹

The model is designed for a wide variety of text types, including literary texts. The element of choice in literary translation often results in different versions of the same original text, and thereby underlines the creative aspect of the translation process.

Other scholars like Jean Paul Vinay and Jean Darbelnet,

¹⁸ "Knowledge, Purpose, and Intuition: Three Dimensions in the Evaluation of Translation", in *Translation Spectrum*, pp. 41-51 (p. 43).

¹⁹ *Redefining Translation: The Variational Approach* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), p. 42.

Hélène Chuquet and Michel Paillard, Peter Newmark,²⁰ etc. have examined some of the procedures used by translators: transposition, expansion, modulation, compensation, contraction, cultural equivalence, and transcription, among others. The procedures have been defined mainly on the basis of comparisons between texts and their translations at the lexical, syntactic, and situational levels for various language pairs. However, Jean Delisle has stressed that the use of the word "procedures" is inappropriate since it describes results, rather than methods in the translation process:

Quel intérêt y aurait-il en effet, à savoir qu'un adjectif de l'énoncé deviendra un verbe, qu'un autre se mutera en une locution adverbiale et que le substantif se métamorphosera en verbe? Rien ne lui indiquerait de quels verbes ou de quelle locution adverbiale il s'agit. Disposant des contenants, il lui manquerait encore les contenus. Cette forme d'analyse linguistique pratiquée *a posteriori* par les comparatistes est tout à fait étrangère au processus cognitif de la traduction.²¹

Moreover, given that some of the procedures rely on parts of speech, it would be difficult to work with languages which do not have parts of speech, for example, agglutinative and inflected languages. Despite the shortcomings of these contrastive studies, however, Robert Larose feels that:

[les] travaux demeurent utiles au début de la formation du traducteur (sur le plan pédagogique) et à l'étape de l'évaluation des textes (sur le plan de

²⁰ *Approaches to Translation* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1981), pp. 30-32. Hélène Chuquet and Michel Paillard, *Approche linguistique des problèmes de traduction* (Paris: Ophrys, 1989), pp. 11-39.

²¹ *L'Analyse du comme méthode de traduction: initiation à la traduction française de textes pragmatiques anglais* (Ottawa: Presses de l'Université d'Ottawa, 1980), p. 89.

la recherche linguistique).²²

The translation process has also drawn on insights from discourse studies, text linguistics, linguistics, sociology, anthropology, semiotics, etc. for application to the analysis of texts. These aspects, the translator's role as reader and as writer, as well as some specific translation problems will be examined in the next chapter.

3.1.2. Literary translation as a product

Despite the amount of work that has already been done on the translation process, some scholars have argued that:

since the actual process is unobservable and has been reconstructed speculatively on the basis of the comparison of two products... we should [rather] concern ourselves with the various ways in which translated literature functions in the wider context of the target literature.²³

Certain studies have therefore focused on translation as the result of a manipulatory process, the reception and role of translated texts in the target literary polysystem, and so on.

3.1.2.1 Literary translation as manipulation

The possibility for the translator to make decisions and choices from a number of alternatives has led certain scholars to suggest that translation, like other forms of rewriting, is a manipulatory process. This view is held by members of the "Manipulation Group", with leading exponents such as André

²² *Théories contemporaines de la traduction*, p. 22.

²³ André Lefevere, "Beyond the Process: Literary Translation in Literature and Literary Theory", in *Translation Spectrum*, pp. 52-59 (p. 55).

Lefevere, Susan Bassnett, José Lambert, Theo Hermans, and Gideon Toury. Although their writings were published as a collection of essays entitled *The Manipulation of Literature: Studies in Literary Translation* in 1985 and their views expressed in other publications, their central ideas have again been clearly stated recently:

Translation is, of course, a rewriting of the original text. All rewritings, whatever their intention, reflect a certain ideology and a poetics and as such manipulate literature to function in a given society in a given way. Rewriting is manipulation, undertaken in the service of power, and in its positive aspect can help in the evolution of a literature and a society. Rewritings can introduce new concepts, new genres, new devices and the history of translation is the history also of literary innovation, of the shaping power of one culture upon another.²⁴

Seen from this perspective, translation can therefore influence the way a work is received by readers and whether or not it becomes canonized. Various factors (for example power, ideology, institution, etc.), as reflected in the strategies and choices of the translator, will affect the fate of the translated text within the target literary system. Furthermore, research has been carried out on some of the ways in which a translation could be made to conform to an ideology or to the expectations of a given audience. Indeed, some translations even turn out to be more important or popular than their originals.

The perception of literary translation as manipulation could, to a certain degree, also be seen as the continuation of the age-old controversy over whether or not the translator is

²⁴ Susan Bassnett and André Lefevere, "General Editors' Preface" to André Lefevere, *Translation, Rewriting, and the Manipulation of Literary Fame* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), p. vii.

allowed to alter the original text in translation and to what extent. Although alterations today have been viewed mainly in terms of ideology and the reception of translations, certain translators have, over the centuries, made additions, explicitations, explanations, deletions, and other changes in the presentation of the ST for various other reasons: to create a work that would compare with the original in literary art, to achieve clarity of expression and logical presentation, to meet the social and cultural taste and expectations of readers, and so on. In some cases, such practice resulted in versions of various lengths for the same work, or new works that had very little in common with the ST. Many early Roman translators, for example, viewed the originals of Greek classics as a source of ideas for literary creativity, and did not hesitate to change their form and content to such end.²⁵ In fact, translation was seen as a means of rivalling or transferring the rhetorical power of Greek writers into Latin, so as to produce similar creations, or works that surpassed their originals in literary quality. Similarly, a good number of French and English translators during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (period of "Les Belles Infidèles") made significant omissions, additions and other alterations in their translations in order to meet the social and aesthetic expectations of readers.²⁶ Many literary texts were

²⁵ For example Cicero, Horace, Quintilian, etc. Moreover, during the Renaissance (16th century) in France, some translators (e.g. Clément Marot) felt that the literary possibilities of the French language could be improved by imitating the style of the classical Latin and Greek authors whose works they translated; translation was therefore done primarily for aesthetic reasons.

²⁶ For example, Perrot d'Ablancourt (1640-1662), Abraham Cowley, etc.

thus manipulated with little or no regard for the intentions of the authors or qualities of the works. On the theoretical level, some scholars also expressed views on alterations in translation. Alexander Tytler (1747-1813) discussed circumstances in which he believed the translator could alter the original text; in addition to correcting what appears illogical, the translator should ensure that:

the superadded idea shall have the most necessary connection with the original thought, and actually increase its force. And, on the other hand, that whenever an idea is cut off by the translator, it must only be such as is an accessory, and not a principal in the clause or sentence. It must likewise be confessedly redundant, so that its retrenchment shall not impair or weaken the original thought.²⁷

As Theo Hermans has pointed out, the manipulation approach is descriptive and TL-oriented; "the normative and source-oriented approaches typical of most traditional thinking about translation" is rejected.²⁸ Such shift of focus from the ST and rejection of a normative or evaluative approach have, to say the least, been controversial. Mary Snell-Hornby's comment on the status of a translated text is revealing:

Taken to its extreme, this view implies that any text is to be accepted as a translation of another text if it is declared as such, and is hence to be treated by the scholar as an accepted part of the literary system. One is left wondering whether the element of evaluation and judgement can ever be completely dispensed with.²⁹

As would be expected, normative critics like Peter Newmark have

²⁷ *Essay on the Principles of Translation* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1978), p. 36.

²⁸ *The Manipulation of Literature* (London: Croom Helm, 1985), p. 9.

²⁹ *Translation Studies. An Integrated Approach* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1988), p. 25

also voiced the same concern, criticizing the group's tendency "to analyse their 'norms' without any close reference to the original."³⁰

While acknowledging that emphasis on the "fortunes" of the translated text in the target system "is the view of some people working in the field, who see their principle [sic] task as that of examining the impact of a translation on the target system", Susan Bassnett has pointed out that the approach is only one of the diverse perspectives in translation studies.³¹ Indeed, the approach is not solely target-oriented; it also attempts to examine changes in cultural history as a result of translation practices. For example, a study of the literary functions of translations in France from 1800 to 1850 has shown the role and influence of translations on the literary system of the period.³²

By and large, the shift of emphasis from the ST to the types of patronage that induce translations and the reception of translated texts has also signalled a shift from a prescriptive

³⁰ *About Translation* (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 1991), pp. 53-54. He further comments: "Hermans' group is not interested in value judgements, in the retrospective comparison of translations with originals (after all, the group is merely TL oriented), in the setting-up of criteria relating referential to pragmatic accuracy in a way that might be helpful to translators today. All studies are relativized to a consideration of the functions of a translation at a given period. Any idea that functions might be universal and not entirely bound to a literary coterie or social class at a particular period, that translation may have an essence if not necessarily a prototype, is seen as beside the point. In the language of these writers, function becomes its own self-justification." (p. 54).

³¹ *Translation Studies*, p. xiii.

³² José Lambert, Lieven D'hulst, and Katrin van Bragt, "Translated Literature in France, 1800-1850", in *The Manipulation of Literature*, pp. 149-163.

to a descriptive approach. As Susan Bassnett has further remarked "there is room in the discipline for many approaches, and the value of so much of the research that has taken place over the past decade is that finally the old normative discussions have begun to die away." (p. xviii) Indeed, much of the debate on translation today considers the original text and its translation within their different contexts, and has turned its focus "to the larger issues of context, history and convention", given "the demise of the notion of equivalence as sameness and recognition of the fact that literary conventions change continuously."³³

Of course, there are still some scholars who feel that the normative approach to translation is necessary, especially in the teaching of translation. Furthermore, it is worth noting that the prescriptive approach to translation has held sway for many centuries. In fact, until the second half of this century, although many translators explained and justified their strategies and choices in the prefaces and introductions to their translations or in short treatises, the tone in the discussion of translation problems and how they could be solved were largely prescriptive, telling the translator what to do or not to do and laying down rules and principles for good translation. Etienne Dolet (1509-1546) defined translation rules in *La manière de bien traduire d'une langue en aultre* (1540) and Alexander Tytler wrote a treatise which presented and discussed principles of translation, *Essay on the Principles of Translation* (1790). These

³³ André Lefevere and Susan Bassnett, "Introduction: Proust's Grandmother and the *Thousand and One Nights*", in *Translation, History and Culture*, ed. by Susan Bassnett and André Lefevere (London and New York: Pinter Publishers, 1990), pp. 1-13 (pp. 11 & 12).

rules and principles have varied from one era to another, reflecting the changes in readers' expectations and views on appropriate translation methods. André Lefevere and Susan Bassnett have pointed to the ephemeral nature of standards in translation:

Translations made at different times therefore tend to be made under different conditions and to turn out differently, not because they are good or bad, but because they have been produced to satisfy different demands. ...the production of different translations at different times does not point to any 'betrayal' of absolute standards, but rather to the absence, pure and simple, of any such standards.³⁴

Linguistic rules and principles in translation have therefore often been overshadowed by factors such as time, and social as well as cultural demands.

3.1.2.2 Literary translations within the target polysystem

Sharing similar views with the Manipulation Group, some literary translation scholars have also laid emphasis on the position and function of translations in the target system. These scholars (Itamar Even-Zohar, Gideon Toury, James Holmes, André Lefevere, Van den Broeck, and others), have borrowed the polysystems hypothesis of literature developed by Russian and Czech formalists (e.g. Tynianov, Jakobson, Mukarovsky, Vodicka, etc.) and applied it to their study of literary translations. The polysystems approach to literature is based on the assumption that literature is never, at any given moment, a fixed system; rather, it is:

a collection of various systems, a system-of-systems

³⁴ "Introduction: Proust's Grandmother and the *Thousand and One Nights*", p. 5.

or polysystem, in which diverse genres, schools, tendencies, and what have you, are constantly jockeying for position, competing with each other for readership, but also for prestige and power.³⁵

For members of the group, literary translations have always played a vital role in literary systems. Some translated texts have occupied primary positions, introducing into the polysystem innovations such as new ideas, new genres, new literary styles and forms, and new world perceptions. A number of these innovations have subsequently been imitated by native writers in original creative works, and integrated into the literary system. On the other hand, certain translations may occupy a secondary position, "complementing and supplementing the existing picture, adjusting it slightly perhaps, but not enough to upset the system." (p. 108). Literary translations are therefore seen as text types that form part of the target literary system, constantly struggling and competing with other elements of the polysystem; they are not simply reproductions of other texts in other languages and systems. Considerations of how closely a given translation reflects its original are thus ignored, and its position (central or peripheral) within the target system is analyzed.

Given the innovative character of primary translations, they usually tend to deviate from the traditional themes, ideas, forms, styles, etc. of the target literature. Secondary translations, for their part, largely conform to the expectations and norms of the target system. As Even-Zohar has also noted,

³⁵ James Holmes, *Translated! Papers on Literary Translation and Translation Studies*, p. 107. Further references to this work will be indicated in brackets within the text.

translated literature can play a major role in a given literary system under certain circumstances.³⁶ These situations arise, for example, where a young literature needs to adopt and integrate new models so as to function better as a literature, where a "relatively established" literature seeks to improve its position within a larger literary system and so allows translations to provide genres and styles it does not have, and where an established model or genre is no longer acceptable for a new generation and there is no other suitable model within the literary system.

Conversely, translations may play a minor role in a given literature; this happens when translated texts keep to traditional forms, without introducing innovations in original writings in the TL. Or again, sometimes translations may neither be completely innovative nor conservative, as was the case in Hebrew literature between the two world wars when literature translated from Russian brought along new forms unlike translations from English, German, Polish, and other languages which introduced no innovations. Even-Zohar has further suggested that marginal and unestablished literatures tend to translate more than well-established and strong literatures.

In another connection, Even-Zohar has also tried to consider features that distinguish translated texts from original works. In the case of primary translations, he points out that it is difficult to distinguish them from original works which use

³⁶ "The Position of Translated Literature within the Literary Polysystem", in *Literature and Translation: New Perspectives in Literary Studies*, ed. by James Holmes, José Lambert, and Raymond van den Broeck (Louvain: ACCO, 1978), pp. 117-127.

foreign models and styles. Sometimes many foreign works are imitated and pseudotranslations produced.³⁷ As for secondary translations, they often conform to the conventions of the TL; for example, many translations in France during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Advocates of the polysystems approach to literary translation encourage researchers to carry out descriptive studies which examine factors that may affect the nature of translations; these factors include the influence of foreign literatures, a given audience's expectations of translations, the publishing patterns, etc. The case studies³⁸ are usually conducted without reference to the ST, since translations affect only the target system: "Not only have they left the source system behind, but they are in no position to affect its linguistic and textual rules and norms, its textual history, or the source text as such."³⁹ Focus is therefore centred on how translations are integrated into different target systems at different times.

³⁷ Pseudotranslations here are original works which are presented as translation for a variety of reasons. Further discussion of pseudotranslations is found in Gideon Toury, "Translation, literary translation and pseudotranslation", *New Comparison*, 6 (1983), 73-85.

³⁸ Case studies carried out in the polysystems approach include José Lambert, Lieven D'hulst, and Katrin van Bragt, "Translated Literature in France, 1800-1850" (pp. 149-163); Hendrik van Gorp, "Translation and Literary Genre. The European Picaresque Novel in the 17th and 18th Centuries" (pp. 136-148); Ria Vanderauwera, "The Response to Translated Literature" (pp. 198-214) in *The Manipulation of Literature*.

³⁹ Gideon Toury, "A Rationale for Descriptive Translation Studies", in *The Manipulation of Literature*, pp. 16-41 (p. 19).

3.1.3 Literary translation and cultural transfer

Cultural problems in translation have been examined by some literary translation theorists. These problems arise mainly from the cultural differences that exist between languages. As Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf have suggested, the structure of each language influences its users' world view and description of reality:

... every language is a vast pattern-system, different from others, in which are culturally ordained the forms and categories by which the personality not only communicates, but also analyzes nature, notices or neglects types of relationships and phenomena, channels his reasoning, and builds the house of his consciousness.⁴⁰

The picture of the world therefore differs from one language to another, resulting in the non-correspondence of lexical and grammatical categories between languages. Although the hypothesis is debatable, given that speakers can conceptualize in categories other than those of their mother tongue when they learn and speak other languages, it is the implication of unbridgeable different world views between languages that presents problems to the translator:

No two languages are ever sufficiently similar to be considered as representing the same social reality. The worlds in which different societies live are distinct worlds, not merely the same world with different labels attached. (p. 69)

Rather than uphold the pessimistic view of untranslatability implied by the above statement, many literary translation theorists have sought ways of coming to terms with the

⁴⁰ Edward Sapir, *Culture, Language and Personality* (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1956), p. 252. Further references to this work will be indicated in brackets within the text.

differences. Translation is, to some extent, consequently taken to be an attempt to describe or explain the world view of a given linguistic community to another. The translator thus needs, in addition to being bilingual, to be bi-cultural in order to understand and convey meaning in terms of each of the two cultures and languages. Viewing translation in terms of a cultural, rather than merely linguistic, transfer, some theorists have argued that translations be situated within their cultural contexts:

Translations are never produced in an airlock where they, and their originals, can be checked against the *tertium comparationis* in the purest possible lexical chamber, untainted by power, time, or even the vagaries of culture. Rather, translations are made to respond to the demands of a culture, and of various groups within that culture.⁴¹

In advocating a cultural turn to translation, Mary Snell-Hornby has therefore proposed that culture, rather than the text, be considered the appropriate unit of translation.⁴² The translated text will thus be regarded as part of the target culture; it will not simply be a transcoding of the original - an idea also central to the polysystems approach discussed earlier.

Furthermore, in their attempt to translate the Bible into various languages and cultures, translators and theorists such as Eugene Nida, Charles Taber, Rudolf Kassühlke, etc. have regarded meaning as culture-bound and have sought ways of

⁴¹ André Lefevere and Susan Bassnett, "Introduction: Proust's Grandmother and the *Thousand and One Nights*", p. 7.

⁴² "Linguistic Transcoding or Cultural Transfer? A Critique of Translation Theory in Germany", in *Translation, History and Culture*, pp. 79-86 (p. 84). It is worth noting that "all contributions [in this volume] deal with the 'cultural turn' in one way or another." (p. 4)

translating the message of God such that the receptors respond in a manner as similar as possible to that of the original readers. Differences in environment, customs, and institutions present serious transfer difficulties. For Nida and Taber:

since in different languages the semantic areas of corresponding words are not identical, it is inevitable that the choice of the right word in the receptor language to translate a word in the source language text depends more on the context than upon a fixed system of verbal consistency.⁴³

Although there will unavoidably be some loss of semantic content in translation due mainly to the fact that each language structures and presents reality in its own way, Bible translators try to analyze the meaning of words, expressions, and sentences using such methods as componential analysis and back transformation.⁴⁴ Emphasis is also laid on the linguistic and cultural contexts of the TT; indeed, for Nida, "the principles [of such translation] must be primarily sociolinguistic in the broad sense of the term. As such, translating becomes a part of the even broader field of anthropological semiotics."⁴⁵

With respect to the translation of culture-bound terms and expressions, Nida and Taber propose techniques such as borrowing of the SL term, contextual conditioning (unknown term borrowed and a classifier added for clarification), use of a descriptive phrase, retention of SL word and an explanatory note provided,

⁴³ *The Theory and Practice of Translation*, p. 15.

⁴⁴ Componential analysis involves analyzing the semantic components of a word such that it is contrasted with other words within the very semantic field, while back transformation involves reducing a phrase or sentence to its basic kernel or semantic structure.

⁴⁵ "A Framework for the Analysis and Evaluation of Translation Theories", p. 78.

various cultural adjustments, etc. (pp. 110-117) All these solutions form part of their global translation strategy of ensuring that the response of receptors be similar to that of the ST receptors; this is the principle of dynamic equivalence,⁴⁶ defined as:

the degree to which the receptors of the message in the receptor language respond to it in substantially the same manner as the receptors in the source language. This response can never be identical, for the cultural and historical settings are too different, but there should be a high degree of equivalence of response. (p. 24)

The response is considered in terms of the receptors' understanding, their emotional reaction, or the decision or action they take after reading the translation. This means that concepts such as the receptor's ability to decode and understand a message, as well as the adapting of a message to the presumed knowledge and background of the receptor have been borrowed from communication and information theory and applied to translation. The receptor is thus given priority over SL forms, emphasis being laid on conveying the message as clearly as possible and making stylistic and cultural adjustments where necessary. The resulting translation can, under such circumstances, be viewed as just one possible version of the ST, employing forms which can be understood and accepted by a given receptor or group of receptors, rather than SL cultural forms and expressions. Even in poetry where the form could be regarded as forming part of the message, the content and receptors must come first; indeed,

⁴⁶ Also referred to by other researchers as "communicative translation" (Newmark, as opposed to semantic translation), "equivalent effect principle" (Koller), "cultural translation" (Catford, as opposed to linguistic translation), "ethnographic translation" (Mounin, as opposed to linguistic translation), etc.

"under no circumstances should the form be given priority over the other aspects of the message." (p. 118) Dynamic equivalence is thus contrasted with formal correspondence which, because it seeks to preserve the form of the original, "tends to distort the message more than dynamic equivalence."⁴⁷ Moreover, such opposition could, to some extent, be seen as a perspective of the long-standing controversy over literal and free translation.⁴⁸

However, dynamic equivalence has sometimes been given an unduly wide range of interpretation, with virtually no limit as to the degree of adjustments that can be made for the receptors, since it is difficult to accurately measure receptor response. Reactions to the ST and TT cannot be expected to be identical

⁴⁷ Eugene Nida, *Toward a Science of Translating* (Leiden: Brill, 1964), p. 192. Since formal equivalence aims at making the reader aware of the strangeness and antiquity of the Bible, it is sometimes misleading and even incomprehensible. However, some translators feel that the "mystery" of the Bible ought to be preserved, and that translation cannot be expected to replace the sermon: "Acculturation, the transferring of the biblical message into the time and thoughts of today, its application to the present situation, is a problem of the sermon, not of the translation." Rudolf Kassülke, "Linguistic and Cultural Implications of Bible Translation", in *Translation: Applications and Research*, pp. 279-301 (p. 281). Indeed, the emphasis on dynamic equivalence also seems to imply that the translator needs to be a missionary or at least assume that role.

⁴⁸ This controversy has, for centuries, been prompted largely by the search for the best way of being faithful to the ST and the amount of freedom the translator can exercise in conveying the original. While the search has continued to the present day, preferences have varied within and across historical periods, along with views on what a good translation is or should be. Many French and English translators in the nineteenth century argued that fidelity to the ST was determined by how close the translator kept to the original and took the word as the appropriate translation unit. Thus Chateaubriand produced a strict word-for-word French rendition of Milton's *Paradise Lost* in 1828 and Robert Browning "spared no effort to be literal" in his English version of *Agamemnon*. On the other hand, during the 17th and 18th centuries, many of the translators gave preference to free translation as they sought to satisfy the needs and expectations of readers.

since the historical and cultural contexts are different.

Furthermore, while the dynamic equivalence approach seems to satisfy the Bible translators' purposes of communicating mainly the message, some critics have pointed out that the literary qualities of the Bible and the "otherness" of the text are thereby disregarded.⁴⁹ Henry Schogt draws attention to the situation as follows:

So with Nida and Taber we are already entering the area of specific texts and specific audiences... and have left behind the general level on which linguistics operates.⁵⁰

Similarly, Henri Meschonnic indicates that the Bible is a work of literature, and so needs to be considered as such in translation; excessive concentration on the content tends to overshadow its literary qualities. This, Meschonnic contends, can be remedied if the formal aspects of the Hebrew original are accounted for in translation. By disregarding these formal aspects:

C'est non seulement la structure linguistique qu'on efface en traduisant la Bible dans le style dit écrit ... c'est aussi cette littérature orale qu'on efface, ce qui est une forme de traduction culturelle et non

⁴⁹ Walter Benjamin also dismisses the importance attached to the readers of any literary work; in the translation of a literary work, he feels, the content and intended readers are not as important as the literary qualities: "In the appreciation of a work of art or an art form, consideration of the receiver never proves fruitful... No poem is intended for the reader, no picture for the beholder, no symphony for the listener." "The Task of the Translator", in *Illuminations*, ed. by Hannah Arendt (London: Jonathan Cape Ltd, 1970), pp. 69-82 (p. 69).

⁵⁰ "Semantic Theory and Translation Theory", in *Theories of Translation. An Anthology of Essays from Dryden to Derrida*, ed. by Rainer Schulte and John Biguenet (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), pp. 193-203 (p. 202).

seulement linguistique.⁵¹

Thus for Meschonnic, the predominant function of language is literary expression, while for Nida the information is most important; translation fulfils different functions for them, hence the differences in their perspectives.⁵² Nevertheless, however valid Meschonnic's criticisms may be, the view of Basil Hatim and Ian Mason is worth noting:

Since total re-creation of any language transaction is impossible, translators will always be subject to a conflict of interests as to what are their communicative priorities, a conflict which they resolve as best they can. It follows from this that, in assessing translations, the first thing to consider is the translator's own purpose, so that performance can be judged against objectives.⁵³

In another connection, Meschonnic further feels that by translating the Bible in such a way that the receptors think it was originally written in their own language, translation is being used as an ideological tool to introduce Western beliefs and value system to peoples in other parts of the world.

Such fluent or facilitating translations aim at converting receptors and obtaining a specific response, rather than applying a "new science of translation" as Nida claims (p. 329). Meschonnic would prefer a translation which tries to recreate ST forms, since "un texte est le sens de ses formes autant que le sens de ses mots." (p. 420)

⁵¹ *Pour la poétique II* (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), pp. 345-346. Further references to this work will be indicated in brackets within the text.

⁵² Moreover, Nida's approach to translation is mainly TT-oriented while Meschonnic insists on ST-oriented translation.

⁵³ *Discourse and the Translator* (London and New York: Longman, 1990), p. 15.

Expressing his views on literary translation, he notes that retranslations are done for many works mainly because existing translations are not creative, unlike the original texts which are creative works of art and stand the test of time without any changes. For him therefore:

un traducteur qui n'est que traducteur n'est pas traducteur, il est introducteur; seul un écrivain est un traducteur, et soit que traduire est tout son écrire, soit que traduire est intégré à une oeuvre, il est ce "créateur" qu'une idéalisation de la "création" ne pouvait pas voir. Si la traduction d'un texte est texte, elle est l'écriture d'une lecture-écriture, aventure personnelle et non transparence, constitution d'un langage-système dans la langue-système tout comme ce qu'on appelle oeuvre originale. (p. 354)

The translator needs to be creative for his or her translation to have a long lifespan. He quotes examples of great writers who were good translators, stressing that literary translation involves writing or rewriting ("ré-énonciation") which results in "décentrement", a textual relationship with the ST:

Si le découpage du réel n'est pas le même d'une langue à l'autre, la traduction, suivant l'évolution même de l'anthropologie, n'a plus à être *annexion* mais *rapport* entre deux cultures-langues: non la disparition fictive de l'altérité, mais la relation dans laquelle on est, ici et aujourd'hui, situé, par rapport au traduit. La traduction alors n'est plus la "belle infidèle" mais la production et le produit d'un contacte culturel au niveau des structures mêmes de la langue. (p. 413)

Indeed the TL is changed by its relationship with the SL in the translation.

Research and case studies on the cultural aspects of literary translations have also been carried out by scholars at the Center for the Study of Literary Translations, Georg August University in Göttingen (Germany). Sometimes referred to as the Göttingen Group, these scholars (foremost among whom are Armin

Paul Frank and Harald Kittel) have concentrated their research work on analyzing the historical and socio-cultural contexts of American and English literary works translated into German, examining various translations and comparing the source and target texts in order to determine how changes in cultural values are portrayed. For example, Harald Kittel and Geneviève Roche have studied the cultural relationships between nations and the importance of cultural norms as reflected in indirect translations from English into German through French.⁵⁴ Moreover, Armin Paul Frank and Birgit Bödeker have developed a framework for describing changes or deviations undergone by cultural references in translation; arguing that neither ST-oriented nor TT-oriented approaches taken individually are adequate in the historical-descriptive study of translations, they suggest that a transfer-oriented approach is more appropriate:

And if - as our findings indicate - the results of a given translational procedure depend, in part, upon the literature, language, and culture pair involved, is not then a transfer-oriented approach the more appropriate one - an approach that is squarely based on the literary, linguistic, and cultural differences between source and target sides that need to be mediated by an act of translational transfer?⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Harald Kittel, "Vicissitudes of Mediation: The Case of Benjamin Franklin's *Autobiography*", (pp. 25-35) and Geneviève Roche, "The Persistence of French Mediation in Nonfiction Prose", (pp. 17-24) in *Interculturality and the Historical Study of Literary Translations*, ed. by Harald Kittel and Armin Paul Frank (Berlin: Erich Schmidt Verlag, 1991).

⁵⁵ Armin Paul Frank and Birgit Bödeker, "Trans-culturality and Inter-culturality in French and German Translations of T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*", in *Interculturality and the Historical Study of Literary Translations*, pp. 41-63 (p. 61). Several other historical case studies on how translators have rendered American-German cultural differences have been carried out by the group. Furthermore, Brigitte Schultze has focused on cultural

They further stress that "a comprehensive theory of translation must take into account discontinuities between Scripture, literature, and technical writing." (p. 61) Thus, unlike the scholars of the Manipulation Group who focus on what happens to a translated text in the TL culture, members of the Göttingen Group study transfer procedures in the translation of cultural aspects, comparing original texts with their translations. Adopting lines similar to those of the polysystems approach, the Göttingen Group conclude from their studies that translated literature forms an integral part of the literature of any country and contributes to its literary and cultural heritage.

3.1.4 Philosophical reflection on literary translation

In addition to the historical and socio-cultural approaches to literary translation in case studies carried out by scholars of the Manipulation and Göttingen groups, reflection on translation in the twentieth century has also been philosophical in perspective. Scholars and critics like Walter Benjamin, Jacques Derrida, and Paul de Man have broken away from the traditional way of looking at the relationship between the original text and its translation, questioning the concepts of originality and authorship that confer on the TT a status lower than that of the ST.

identity and cultural transfer in her study of the translation of proper names and titles in drama; "Problems of Cultural Transfer and Cultural Identity: Personal Names and Titles in Drama", in *Interculturality and the Historical Study of Literary Translations*, pp. 91-110.

3.1.4.1 **Walter Benjamin:** His views on translation are, to a large extent, expressed in his essay, "The Task of the Translator", which appeared as an introduction to his translation of Charles Baudelaire's *Tableaux Parisiens* into German in 1923. Benjamin considers the relationship between the original text and its translation in terms of translatability:

by virtue of its translatability the original is closely connected with the translation... Just as the manifestations of life are intimately connected with the phenomenon of life without being of importance to it, a translation issues from the original - not so much from its life as from its afterlife.⁵⁶

Translation is thus situated within the time-frame of the original's "afterlife". Rather than consider the importance of translation in terms of the transfer of meaning from one language to another, he feels that translation serves to express "the central relationship between languages." For him:

It is the task of the translator to release in his own language that pure language which is under the spell of another, to liberate the language imprisoned in a work in his re-creation of that work. (p. 80)

He further argues that despite the surface differences between languages, they are interconnected and form a whole because of "the totality of their intentions supplementing each other" (p. 74); it is the sum total of these intentions which he refers to as the "pure language". The translator is advised to strive for this pure language; to do so, he or she:

must lovingly and in detail incorporate the original's mode of signification, thus making both the original and the translation recognizable as fragments of a greater language." (p. 78)

⁵⁶ "The Task of the Translator" trans. by Harry Zohn, in *Illuminations*, p. 71. Further references to this work will be indicated in brackets within the text.

He also recommends that the differences between languages should be maintained in translation, arguing that such differences account for a translation's survival. Thus translation is neither a copy nor an interpretation of the original, but its complement.

Benjamin further explains that transfer in translation can never be total, mainly because the relationship between content and form in the original is quite different from that in the translation. Consequently, he believes that the ideal translation also renders the form of the ST:

For sense in its poetic significance is not limited to meaning, but derives from the connotations conveyed by the word chosen to express it. (p. 78)

For him, an interlinear translation of the Bible is the ideal. Vladimir Nabokov's extremely literal translation of Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin* which relies on copious commentary for understanding could be considered as satisfying this requirement.

On the other hand, Benjamin notes that translation could be a means of increasing the potential of the TL; that is why the translator "must expand and deepen his language by means of the foreign language". (p. 81) As John Johnston has rightly pointed out, Ezra Pound attempts to do just that in his translations:

Pound's translations are really reconstructions or re-inscriptions, intended to expand the expressive possibilities of the English language.⁵⁷

Benjamin therefore seems to advocate the two types of translation mentioned above - literal translation and one that strives to improve the TL. Through literal translation, the difference of the SL is taken into account, and foreign cultural elements and

⁵⁷ "Translation as Simulacrum" in *Rethinking Translation*, ed. by Lawrence Venuti (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 42-56 (p. 45).

images help to improve the TL and make it grow.

3.1.4.2 Jacques Derrida: Derrida's views on translation have been expressed in a wide variety of scholarly articles and publications.⁵⁸In "Des Tours de Babel",⁵⁹ he notes that because of the multiplicity of languages imposed by God as punishment for man's attempt to build the Tower of Babel, people have to resort to translation in their effort to communicate with one another. Furthermore, mankind will continue to strive for a single language (like the pure language of Benjamin), although it will be impossible to attain it. He believes that translation involves:

a hymen or marriage contract with the promise to produce a child whose seed will give rise to history and growth. (p. 191)

He considers a translation as a complement to the original text, "a moment in the growth of the original, which will complete itself in enlarging itself." (p. 188); indeed, both the ST author and the translator need each other, and neither can repay their mutual debt. The "fault" in the original (which makes it require translation) is due to the fact that its meaning depends on the overall relations and differences between chains of words within the language, and is therefore never present in the text as a

⁵⁸ Derrida's publications on translation include "Border Lines", the text printed at the bottom of the pages of his essay "Living On", trans. by James Hulbert in *Deconstruction and Criticism* (New York: Continuum, 1979), "Des Tours de Babel" in *Difference in Translation*, ed. by Joseph Graham (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1985).

⁵⁹ Translated by Joseph F. Graham. In *Difference in Translation*. Further references to this article will be indicated in brackets within the text.

complete unit; the meaning is always differential and deferred - hence Derrida refers to the fault as "différance". Besides, he argues that the original itself is a translation in which the author has not succeeded in creating a unified meaning in the text; for him, therefore, there can be no translation within or across languages, only transformation:

We will never have, and in fact have never had, to do with some 'transport' of pure signifieds from one language to another, or within one and the same language, that the signifying instrument would leave virgin and untouched.⁶⁰

Thus there is inevitably loss or gain in translation, since there is scarcely any complete correspondence of meaning between the ST and TT. The translator needs to understand the lexical and syntactic relations within the ST in order to use the TL in carrying out the "transformation".

Derrida also uses the term "translation" in "Des tours de Babel" to refer to the transformation of the materials (bricks and tar into stones and cement) used to build the tower. Moreover, he points out that whenever we interpret, we are in effect translating, although misinterpretation and confusion can sometimes occur. Indeed, the Hebrew word "Babal" means confusion and can be used as a synonym for translation.

In order to stress the lack of correspondence of meaning between languages and highlight the translator's dilemma, Derrida discusses the translation of the Greek term "pharmakon" in Plato's *Phaedrus*. Plato refers to writing as "pharmakon", which

⁶⁰ *Positions*, trans. by Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), p. 24. In fact, both the ST and TT are not semantic entities; they depend on chains of signification outside the text for their complete meaning.

can mean both "remedy" and "poison". Translators have variously rendered the word by "poison" and by "remedy" (since there is no word in English with the double meaning of "remedy" and "poison"), thereby choosing a specific meaning for a word which was ambivalent in Plato's text. For Derrida:

Its translation by "remedy" [though not inaccurate] nonetheless erases, in going outside the Greek language, the other pole reserved in the word "pharmakon". It cancels out the resources of ambiguity and makes more difficult, if not impossible, an understanding of the context.⁶¹

The choices of the translator are therefore sometimes not as easy (or as unassailable) as we would want them to be.

3.1.4.3 **Paul de Man:** His reflection on translation is contained in his comments on the translations of Walter Benjamin's "The Task of the Translator" into English by Harry Zohn and into French by Maurice de Gandillac, and in other publications. Like Derrida, he notes the lack of complete correspondence between languages. For example, he shows that the title of Benjamin's essay could be interpreted differently from what is conveyed by the English and French versions, since "aufgabe" in German means both "task" and "give up"; the task of the translator can therefore be construed to be impossible, and so is given up even before translation begins: "The translator has to give up in relation to the task of refinding what was there in the original." (p. 80)

After pointing out a number of mistranslations in the two versions, he posits that the focal idea of the essay is the

⁶¹ "Plato's Pharmacy", in *Dissemination* trans. by Barbara Johnson (London: The Athlone Press, 1981), pp. 61-171 (p. 97).

impossibility of translation, rather than translation uniting languages as suggested by its translations; for him therefore:

The text is untranslatable: it was untranslatable for the translators who tried it, it is untranslatable for the commentators who talk about it, it is an example of what it states, it is a *mise en abyme* in the technical sense. A story within the story of what is its own statement.⁶²

Furthermore, as regards the relationship between the source and target texts, he feels that the original depends on its translation for its fame and continued existence:

That the original was not purely canonical is clear from the fact that it demands translation; it cannot be definitive since it can be translated... The translation canonizes, freezes, an original and shows in the original a mobility, an instability, which at first one did not notice. (p. 82)

De Man and Derrida therefore hold similar views as regards the relationship between the ST and TT, a relationship which Lawrence Venuti aptly summarizes as follows:

A translation is never quite 'faithful', always somewhat 'free', it never establishes an identity, always a lack and a supplement, and it can never be a transparent representation, only an interpretive transformation that exposes multiple and divided meanings in the foreign text and displaces it with another set of meanings, equally multiple and divided.⁶³

This, of course, rejects the traditional mimetic relationship that has often been seen to exist between a text and its translation; many contemporary scholars have even defined translation in terms of equivalence, a trend that has continued

⁶² "Conclusions: Walter Benjamin's The Task of the Translator", in *The Resistance to Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), pp. 73-105 (p. 86).

⁶³ "Introduction" to *Rethinking Translation*, p. 8.

for centuries.⁶⁴ Here, however, the translated text also ceases to be measured against the original; it is no longer subordinate to its original⁶⁵, and becomes a text in its own right, "a weave of connotations, allusions, and discourses specific to the target language." (p. 8)

Thus Benjamin, Derrida, and De Man have attempted to reconsider the traditional relationship between the original text and its translation; the one does not serve as a yardstick for the other. For them, the originality of the foreign text lies in

⁶⁴ The relationship between a text and its translation has often been considered in terms of equivalence (Catford, Nida and Taber, Toury, etc.) Gideon Toury has examined equivalence from three perspectives: potential equivalence (all possible relationships), realized equivalence (actual relationship), and required equivalence (predetermined relationships imposed by a prescriptive theory, employer, etc.) *In Search of a Theory of Translation* (Tel Aviv: The Porter Institute for Poetics and Semiotics, 1980), p. 65. Furthermore, he notes that equivalence can be viewed both at the level of the entire text and of its constituent parts (p. 110). Anton Popovic ("The Concept 'Shift of Expression' in Translation Analysis", in *The Nature of Translation*, pp. 78-87) and Eugene Nida (*Toward a Science of Translating*, pp. 159 and 225) have also attempted to differentiate between types of equivalence. Indeed, Mona Baker's work, *In Other Words* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992) centres around types of equivalence which she classifies according to various levels: word, above word, grammatical, textual and pragmatic.

Although many theorists tend to confuse required relationships with potential and realized equivalence, identity or sameness is impossible in translation mainly because the communication situations and textual systems are different; moreover, translation equivalence is not a static or uniform type of correspondence that can be established once and for all, but a dynamic criterion that varies according to textual, situational and norm-related factors (*In Search of a Theory of Translation*, p. 141).

⁶⁵ Gregory Rabassa underscores the inferior status of a translation with regard to its original when he points out that many translations can be made of a text while it remains unchanged; this is mainly because "the choices made in translation are never as secure as those made by the author." "No Two Snowflakes are Alike: Translation as Metaphor" in *The Craft of Translation*, ed. by John Biguenet and Rainer Schulte (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), p. 7.

the fact that it is worth translating; the translation complements the original, canonizing it and giving it an "afterlife".

The literary translation theories examined so far are therefore an indication of the attempts that have been made by theorists and practising translators to understand and explain the phenomenon of translation. Some of the trends have continued to the present day, although contemporary thought and practice reveal changes in certain aspects. However, while opinions on the nature of and approach to literary translation have somehow differed from time to time, the primary objectives seem to have remained the same - to justify certain translation strategies and choices or make translators aware of translation options and the implications of decisions ultimately made.

Most of the theories considered are either written in or translated into English or French, since my knowledge of other languages (in particular, Russian, German, Czech, etc.) with substantial theoretical studies is inadequate for any fruitful analysis. As would be expected, the theories and research are based on the languages and literatures concerned; they are also designed for application mainly to the same languages and literatures.

In the next section, I will attempt to examine if, and in what respects, the theories could be of relevance to the translation of African literature between European languages. The major concern will therefore consist in trying to find out ways in which a knowledge of past and present theories of literary translation developed mainly in the West could be useful to the

theory and practice of translating African literature. In other words, to what extent has the translator been able to or can apply the theories and how could such theories influence research and debate by scholars and practitioners interested in the translation of African literature?

3.2 Relevance of literary translation theories to the translation of African literature

Since I have already outlined some of the major characteristics of African literature in European languages in Chapter 1, the relationship between western literary translation theories and existing African literary translation practice will be discussed with particular emphasis on some of the intended functions of literary translation in Africa, as well as in the light of the significant features of the literature, and the target audience(s) of the translation.

3.2.1 Intended functions of translated African literary texts

As certain western translation theorists have pointed out, the intended function of a translation often constitutes one of the important factors that influence the strategies to be adopted by the translator. According to Nida and Taber, the translation method "will depend in a very large measure upon the purpose to be accomplished by the translation in question."⁶⁶ Similarly, Katharina Reiss and Hans Vermeer press home the same point:

As the highest rule of a theory of translation, we propose the "rule of skopos": An action is determined

⁶⁶ *The Theory and Practice of Translation*, p. 33

by its purpose (is a function of its purpose).⁶⁷

It therefore follows that any given ST could have a range of translations which would vary according to the functions they might fulfil. The translator may establish a principle of purpose, and then make a decision "on how to express [such] purpose through the available content or ... through a different content."⁶⁸

A translation may be determined by the person who orders it (for example, a publisher) or by the status of the text itself (text by an innovative or famous writer). Where the translator carries out a translation to another person's instructions:

the choices which the translator will make will no longer depend on internal (or in fact personal) criteria but on a whole series of parameters which will be more or less clearly expressed by the translation order.⁶⁹

In some cases, publishers impose the type of translation they want and even "edit" the finished product in order to meet the needs of their reading public. Furthermore, if the text is innovative, the translator may want to make the innovations available to the target audience or produce a translation for academic purposes (study and research).

When applied to the translation of African literature, the above perspectives from western translation theories shed light on the reasons for which the literature can be translated and how

⁶⁷ Translation quoted in Ernst Gutt, *Translation and Relevance* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991), p. 16.

⁶⁸ Roger Bell, *Translation and Translating: Theory and Practice*, p. 58.

⁶⁹ Lance Hewson and Jacky Martin, *Rethinking Translation*, p. 14.

such reasons can influence translation strategies and decisions. African literature could be translated for a variety of reasons: to make an author's work available in another context, to portray the special use of a European language, to introduce foreign readers to the cultural setting of a literary work, to convey special literary qualities of a work especially for academic purposes, etc.

In practice, some of these intended goals have been stated by translators of African literary works in the introduction to their translations: some translators state their intentions of introducing English-speaking readers to African literature as well as providing interesting reading material. For example, John Reed and Clive Wake intend their English translation of a selection of Léopold Sédar Senghor's prose writings and poems to fulfil a specific function:

This book is intended to present to English-speaking readers something of the work of Léopold Sédar Senghor. It consists of a selection passages translated from Senghor's scattered prose writings and speeches and from his book, *Nation et Voie Africaine du Socialisme*, arranged so as to show in outline his thinking on cultural, political and artistic matters, together with translations of some of his poems.⁷⁰

Of more significant relevance, many of the English translations of francophone African literary works have so far been requested by publishers; very often, these publishers make changes to translations so as to reflect their own taste or what they believe would meet the expectations of their intended audience. Talking about changes made to his English version of Mongo Beti's

⁷⁰ "Introduction" to *Léopold Sédar Senghor: Prose and Poetry*, selected and trans. by John Reed and Clive Wake (London: Heinemann, 1976), pp. 1-26 (p. 1).

La Ruine presque cocasse d'un polichinelle, Richard Bjornson writes:

For example, I worked hard on the title of Beti's novel and finally settled upon "The Fairly Farcical Fall of a Pompous Puppet." I was more or less satisfied that I had captured the alliterative and parodic qualities of the original; however, when I delivered the manuscript to Herdeck, he balked, calling the title too long. He had wanted to change a few usages in the text, and after having argued long and hard with him, I finally agreed to accept his title, "Lament for an African Pol", if he would print the rest of the text the way I had written it. I still sometimes regret this compromise, but it did show me that translators are not always free to determine the way in which their work will appear.⁷¹

This implies that although literary works may often be translated with a view to conveying their literary qualities to the target system as claimed in the case of some translations published by university presses mainly in the United States,⁷² in practice there are a wide range of other potential functions which ultimately may compel translators to prioritize other factors than the aesthetic.

Unfortunately, practically no commercial or university printing presses in Africa publish quality literary translations. What obtains on the continent today is that works translated and published mainly for European and American readership are frequently used in colleges and universities, as well as by

⁷¹ Letter in Appendix 3, p. 3. As Bjornson pointed out in this letter, he translated this novel and another of Mongo Beti's novels *Chemin d'Europe* at the request or with the approval of the editor of Three Continents Press, Donald Herdeck.

⁷² The University Press of Virginia has published a number of English translations of francophone African literary works in the CARAF Series in order to make available literary translations for use primarily in education and research; these translations include Bhely-Quénum's *Snares Without End*, Alioum Fantouré's *Tropical Circle*, Tchikaya U Tamsi's *The Madman and the Medusa*, etc.

critics in studies of the original authors.⁷³ That is probably why these translations are often criticized in academic circles, where the conception of nature and function of translation is apparently different from that of most publishers.

Since most publishers of African literary works in European languages and a vast majority of the potential readers are in Europe and North America, translations are usually tailored to meet their needs, even where the authors and translators may wish to highlight certain aspects of the works. Thus for the translator of African literature, the potential wide range of functions for translated literature offers a broad view of possible options; however, given that universities and individual translators cannot on their own publish translated African literary works, European and American publishers often seem to "dictate the rules", and alternatives are virtually unavailable. The view that translation is a manipulatory process therefore takes on added significance here as African literature is translated to reflect certain ideologies and values.

On the one hand, the translated text published in Europe seems to give priority to the tastes and values of the European readership, making changes to or altering certain perspectives of the original text in order to accommodate expectations. For example, certain translations contain clues indicative of the intended readership: James Kirkup's European perspective in his English translation (*A Dream of Africa*) of Camara Laye's *Dramouss*

⁷³ For example, Adele King has relied on the translations of Camara Laye's works into English in her study of the author: *The Writings of Camara Laye*. The translations were published in London and New York for British and American readers.

is evident where he makes Fatoman, after his return to Guinea, say "school teachers are still on holiday there in the month of September" (p. 101), "there" being an addition not found in the original text which adopts a Guinean perspective. On the other hand, some writers and other Africans would like to stress the social, cultural, and political dimensions of the ST, carrying out translation

for the sake of the re-affirmation, re-appropriation, and re-examination of the national cultural identity, and as a means of differentiating one's self from the other.⁷⁴

Such conflict of interests and perspectives is evident today in the debate and practice of the translation of African literature. Thus English translations or parts of translations of francophone African literary works which try to adapt or smooth over the African setting and culture have often been criticized by African scholars: for instance, Charles Nama has attempted to show that some translators "have ignored several fundamental principles about African writers and their societies, and as a result have produced translations which are flawed with serious errors."⁷⁵ What African literary translation studies and practice needs to consider, in the final analysis, is the relevance of not regarding differences in translations as deficiencies, because as Elizabeth Neild reminds us:

the translation should be evaluated in terms of its own purpose, assuming the purpose is valid, and not in

⁷⁴ Richard Jacquemond, "Translation and Cultural Hegemony: the Case of French-Arabic Translation", in *Rethinking Translation*, pp. 139-158 (p. 146).

⁷⁵ "A Critical Analysis of the Translation of African Literature", p. 79.

terms of some purpose the translator never had.⁷⁶

Furthermore, from the polysystems approach the translator of African literature could learn to relate translation practice to political and social history. The theorist and practising translator could apply the approach in studying why certain literary works are translated at given times, and thereby examine and understand how literary translations could be linked to changes in cultural history. For example, why were very few African literary works translated into English before the independence of most African states in the 1960s whereas a good number have been translated since independence? Why was Amos Tutuola's *The Palm-wine Drinkard* translated into French as early as 1953 despite the author's apparent poor command of English whereas other well written works in English were ignored?

3.2.2 The translation process: As concerns the translation process, literary translation theories in the West have presented models, methods, case studies, and discussions of specific translation problems that could be useful for the translation of African literature. The models and methods provide insights into what happens during translation. From Jiří Levý, the translator learns that the process is like a game for which an overall strategy has to be developed, and decisions as well as choices made with reference to such strategy; from James Holmes' model, he or she might learn that:

While we are translating sentences, we have a map of the original text we want to produce in the target

⁷⁶ "Kenneth Burke, Discourse Analysis and Translation", *Meta*, 31.3 (1986), 253-257 (p. 256).

language. Even as we translate serially, we have this structural concept so that each sentence in our translation is determined not only by the sentence in the original but by the two maps of the original text and of the translated text which we are carrying along as we translate.⁷⁷

From the various approaches proposed and applied to literary translation, the translator might learn that although preferences have varied from one historical period to another, the degree of appropriateness of translation methods could best be considered in terms of factors such as the intended function of the TT, the nature and function of the ST, the target readers, etc. More specifically, the relevance of literary translation theories could be assessed in the light of the implications of the major features of African literature for translation.

3.2.2.1 The content of African literary works: In order to understand an African literary work, its content needs to be adequately analyzed and interpreted. A number of theorists have proposed ways of carrying out such analysis. For example, Edmond Cary proposes that the text be situated within its immediate and wider contexts:

Le contexte linguistique ne forme que la matière brute de l'opération [traduisante]: c'est le contexte bien plus complexe, des rapports entre deux cultures, deux modes de pensée et de sensibilité, qui caractérise vraiment la traduction.⁷⁸

Georges Mounin further specifies the levels of contexts that could be useful in deciphering the content of a literary text:

⁷⁷ James Holmes, *Translated! Papers on Literary Translation and Translation Studies*, p. 96.

⁷⁸ "Comment faut-il traduire?", quoted in Georges Mounin *Linguistique et traduction* (Bruxelles: Dessart et Mardaga, 1976), p. 114.

Le contexte d'une page de roman, c'est le roman. Mais il existe un contexte de ce roman, qui est la totalité de l'oeuvre du romancier. Mais il existe un contexte de ce romancier, c'est la totalité des oeuvres des romanciers, mettons, français, ses contemporains. Puis un contexte de ces romans français contemporains; c'est l'ensemble international des romans contemporains, dans lequel a baigné l'auteur...⁷⁹

A literary text would therefore need to be analyzed within its geographical, historical, political, social, literary, and cultural contexts. Furthermore, as Elizabeth Neild has pointed out in her attempt to demonstrate the relevance of Kenneth Burke's theory of discourse to translation theory, the author's biography could be useful in analyzing the content of a literary work; the translator will consider the author's "ideas, other works, life, and so on" and "how the particular author affects the nature of the text."⁸⁰

The methods of analyzing ST content as presented above could be relevant to the translation of African literature. Indeed, for a translator of African literature not familiar with the setting of the work, a linguistic analysis of the text alone will not suffice for adequate understanding of the content. The translator could apply from Western literary translation theories the idea that he or she will need to place the African literary text within its extralinguistic context (historical, geographical, social, cultural, etc.) as well as against the background of the author's life and works. For instance, as will be indicated in my attempt to analyze translation strategies in the translation of African literary works in the next chapter, some translators

⁷⁹ *Linguistique et traduction*, pp. 113-114.

⁸⁰ "Kenneth Burke, Discourse Analysis and Translation", p. 254.

like Richard Bjornson, Hausmann Smith and William Jay Smith as well as translations in the CARAF Series of the University Press of Virginia situate literary works within their extralinguistic context (life and works of author, setting, themes, style, position of work within author's works and African literary system, etc.) in the introduction to their translations. Thus an interpretation of the text is not based solely on the translator's background and experience (which in certain cases could be different from the setting of the text); the African literary work is viewed as belonging to a specific environment and culture, and efforts are made to analyze and interpret it accordingly. Given that the content of an African literary text in a European language is often different from that of a corresponding European literary text as noted earlier in Chapter 1, such analysis and interpretation will constitute an important preliminary step towards the translation of African literature.

Depending on whether content materials are new or already existing in the TL culture, and whether the translator intends to maintain or adapt them, procedures have been suggested by western translation theorists for conveying them at the lexical, syntactic, and textual levels. At the lexical level, since words and their meaning components vary according to language and complete correspondence is often impossible, many solutions have sought to achieve maximum transfer. As Louis Kelly has suggested:

There are three ways of seeking lexical equivalence: one can attempt to translate completely literally; one can attempt complete consistent dynamic equivalence; or one can mix the two at need.⁸¹

⁸¹ *The True Interpreter* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1979), p. 134.

Other techniques have also been proposed: borrowing, glossing, descriptive phrases, etc. Generally speaking, where a word denotes an item or concept not specific to a given community or culture, it would be easier to find TL equivalents, while culture-specific terms often need borrowing, glossing, contextual conditioning, etc. as the case may be. At the textual level, western literary theories have suggested that the message can either be transmitted as in the ST or a dynamic equivalence or adaptation sought for the target readers. Georges Mounin has proposed that the translator can either convey new ideas as they are expressed in the ST or modify them in order not to shock readers, but give the impression that the ideas have been expressed by an author aware of their tastes and values:

Ou bien "franciser" le texte, en décidant de le transmettre au lecteur comme si c'était un texte écrit directement en français, par un Français, pour des Français contemporains: ce qui peut impliquer de "décolorer" toutes les étrangetés de la langue étrangère, du siècle différent, de la civilisation lointaine (les transposer, les moduler, en chercher des équivalences ou des adaptations)
Ou bien "dépayser" le lecteur français, décidant de lui faire lire le texte sans qu'il puisse oublier un seul instant qu'il est devant une autre langue, un autre siècle, une autre civilisation que les nôtres.⁸²

For the translator of African literature, being aware of such options, which will have to be selected on the basis of the intended function of the translation, can be very useful. Where an African literary work is viewed as conveying ideas new to the target readers, the translator will have to grapple with how to transmit such ideas. The techniques of borrowing and glossing can thus be useful in rendering lexical items peculiar to the African

⁸² *Linguistique et traduction*, pp. 119-120.

setting. For instance, as indicated in my review of some existing English translations in Chapter 2, many translators retain African culture-bound terms, with or without footnotes or glossary; on the other hand, some translators have substituted African terms with what they consider as English functional equivalents: thus Peter Green rendered "noix de cola" in *Mission to Kala* as "chewing gum". At the level of the entire text, Georges Mounin's options (faithful transfer or adaptation) offer alternatives for source- or target-text oriented translations. For instance, while most English translations of francophone African literary works try to convey the ST message, Dorothy Blair has "adapted" Alioum Fantouré's *Le Cercle des Tropiques* into English, changing its setting, anglicising proper names and adapting institutions. Again, the range of possible solutions gives the translator the room to be either "a slave, collaborator or master"⁸³ with respect to the ST. Nevertheless, despite all these strategies, it will be relevant to the translator of African literature to remember that the notion of equivalence in translation is relative (not absolute) and that loss and gain in the transfer of content between cultures is inevitable.

3.2.2.2 Frequent references to African culture

Some of the techniques proposed by western literary translation theorists for rendering culture-specific terms could prove relevant to the translator of African literature. The Sapir/Whorf hypothesis points to the difficulty of achieving perfect cross-cultural communication on account of the non-

⁸³ Louis Kelly, *The True Interpreter*, p. 207.

correspondence of lexical and grammatical categories between languages. Some of the solutions suggested by Western theories including the borrowing of the SL term, contextual conditioning, the use of a descriptive phrase, etc. have been used in rendering the names of local objects, dishes, drinks, dress, etc. The choice has, of course, usually depended on the overall cultural translation strategy adopted by the translator. Where the translator decides to opt for dynamic equivalence translation as proposed by Nida and Taber, cultural adjustments are made in terms of the target culture, using a descriptive phrase or a functional equivalent. On the other hand, where the translator wishes to emphasize the differences in culture, the SL term may be retained along with a classifier within the text or explanatory notes provided outside the text in footnotes, endnotes, glossary, introduction, etc. if necessary.

3.2.2.3 The special use of the European language

As has already been indicated, the use of a European language to express an African setting and culture often results in a "double text" in which the African world view and language influence the way the European language is used. While approaches in discourse analysis and text linguistics developed by theorists in the West can be relevant in determining aspects of language use in African literature in European languages, only persons familiar with both the African and European languages will be likely to be in a position to analyze and understand the text adequately. Thus an Ijo speaker who knows English or anyone who is familiar with Ijo and English is most likely to understand the

use of English in Gabriel Okara's *The Voice*, just as Léopold Sédar Senghor's works in French require acquaintance with both French and Wolof. An analysis of the SL will enable the translator to understand the culture-bound proverbs, metaphors, imagery, etc. Moreover, other varieties of language such as Pidgin English, "français petit nègre", and Krio often pose serious problems to persons not acquainted with them; the translator needs to know what these languages signify in the literary work. Thus it is not surprising that Elizabeth Janvier, a French translator, finds it difficult to understand Pidgin English as used by Wole Soyinka in *The Trials of Brother Jero*; she renders "Perhaps na my wife dey give am chop." (p. 171) as "Peut-être qu'elle lui donne des côtelettes." (*Les Tribulations du frère Jéroboam*, p. 147), failing to realize that "chop" in Pidgin English means "food" rather than "lamb chops".

With respect to the rendition of peculiar language use, proposals by certain western translation theorists to cope with rhetorical devices can be applied to the translation of African literature. For example, suggestions by scholars such Nida, and others for rendering proverbs, metaphors, imagery, etc. have been used in the translation of francophone African literary texts into English. Depending on whether the translator's strategy is ST-oriented or TT-oriented, ST idiophones, exclamations, proverbs, imagery, etc. have been retained in the translation or functional or near equivalents sought in English.

As concerns the use of Pidgin English, "français petit nègre", or Krio by certain characters in dialogue in some African literary works, western literary translation theorists have

suggested very little on the translation of *linguae francae* in linguistic situations similar to that in many African literary works, though case studies have been undertaken on the translation of registers and dialects.⁸⁴ It is worth noting that although the *linguae francae* contain elements of English and French, they are not dialects, but distinct languages. Switches from a European language to any of them are therefore important in literary texts and need to be accounted for in any translation that accords importance to the literary forms of the original text.

Awareness of the author's stylistic features is crucial to the translator, especially as African writers' language usage is likely to be different from their European counterparts. Unfortunately, some of the rhetorical devices frequently used in oral literary genres such as folktales, riddles, praise songs, etc. have not been adequately discussed by western translation theorists and more research is required. This could be a task to be undertaken by the new generation of African translation scholars as it develops.

3.2.2.4 The target audience

Given the importance of the reader in literary and translation theory, views on ways of taking the readership of translations into account are relevant also in the African context. Although some insist that translation should be geared mainly toward the needs of readers, ensuring that the target

⁸⁴ For example, Henry Schogt in *Linguistics, Literary Analysis and Literary Translation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), pp. 112-119.

audience understand and accept the ideas or style of the literary work without making too much effort, others argue that the reader need not be passive but should make some effort in order to understand the text.

Since the readership of an English translation of an African literary work is often heterogeneous, translators have usually decided on a type of audience targeted in the translation and made the consequent choices. Acquaintance with reader response theories as applied to translation could help in distinguishing types of audience for translated African literature: an African audience familiar with the specific culture and indigenous language against which the original work was written, any African reader, non-Africans deemed not to be acquainted with the setting of the work, all speakers of the European language in various parts of the world, etc. This, of course, entails knowledge of the background of the readers - knowledge which will help the translator decide what implied information may already be available to the audience and how to provide extra information that may be necessary for understanding. That is why some translators of African literature variously decide to provide explanations of words and expressions which they believe their target readers require either in introductions, footnotes, endnotes, glossaries, etc. while others feel that readers have to make an effort to understand the work and so provide no explanations or definitions. What remains problematic, and has not been adequately discussed, however, is whether it is possible to do a translation that can be accessible to both Africans and non-Africans alike, and, if so, how this could be achieved. In

other respects, the product-oriented studies and philosophical discussions by western theorists might be useful to African scholars in their research and debate.

In the next chapter an attempt will be made to map out analysis and transfer strategies in the translation of African literature, laying emphasis on the distinctive features of the literature and elaborating on aspects that have not been adequately addressed by Western theories. Examples from English translations of some francophone African literary works to illustrate and offer explanations for transfer strategies and choices will attempt to further relate some aspects of western translation theories to the actual practice of literary translation in Africa.

CHAPTER 4

MAPPING TRANSFERENCE IN THE TRANSLATION OF AFRICAN LITERATURE FROM FRENCH INTO ENGLISH

In the previous chapters, I have attempted to portray the current situation of the translation of African literature between European languages, underscoring the dearth of translations and the absence of systematic theoretical research and debate among scholars and practitioners. Moreover, literary translation theories in the West have been examined with a view to exploring ways in which they might be relevant to the translation of African literature.

The present chapter seeks to outline transfer patterns in the translation of African literature from French into English, describing and analyzing transference strategies in the light of examples from existing translations as well as insights from literary translation theories and criticism of African literature. Rather than attempt to consider all aspects in such translation, my primary interest will be to concentrate on those distinctive features of African literature already outlined in Chapter 1, and to elaborate on certain aspects that have not been adequately addressed by Western theories.

4.1 Relevance of a mapping of the translation of African literature

Generally speaking, it is worth noting that much more

translation work has been done in African literature between European languages than reflection on translation issues.¹ Most translators seem to be working in isolation, solving translation problems as best they can without expressing their views on translation or getting to know how other translators have coped with similar difficulties.² In fact, there seems to be little or no contact between practice and theory, with most translators preferring to rely on their intuition while scholars pay little or no attention to practice.

This situation of isolation could, to some extent, be remedied if researchers carry out empirical studies which look at existing translations and try to use the results of descriptive analyses in their work. Moreover, research and debate by Western literary translation theorists could contribute to a systematic study of literary translation in Africa, especially as concerns attempts to gain more understanding of transfer strategies and choices that could be reconstructed from existing translations. Consequently, translation scholars in Africa could examine various facets of translation, focusing on aspects such as available options as well as on possible reasons for, and implications of, the choices eventually made. It is precisely this goal to which this thesis seeks to contribute by attempting

¹ Louis Kelly has painted a similar view of Western translation theory; he points out that translation practice existed long before the advent of theory, adding: "Had translation depended for its survival on theory, it would have died out long before Cicero." *The True Interpreter*, p. 219.

² That is perhaps why, for example, the same culture-bound terms continue to be rendered differently by different translators; terms like "le griot", "la concession", "la dot", etc. fall in this category as will be shown later in the analyses.

to describe and analyze translation strategies and choices made, or likely to be made, within a broad and coherent framework based on various stages of the translation process. Literary translation studies in Africa might therefore stand to gain by going beyond the present stage of sketchy commentaries and empirical studies to systematic reflection on a much wider spectrum of texts.

A descriptive study of the translation of African literature could, as has been suggested by Gideon Toury with regard to descriptive translation studies in general, also be

actually the best means of testing, refuting, and especially modifying and amending the underlying theory, on the basis of which [translations] are executed. The reciprocal relation between the theoretical and descriptive branches of the same discipline makes it possible to produce ever better, more refined and more significant descriptive studies and thus advances the understanding of that section of 'reality' to which the science in question refers.³

James Holmes, for his part, has stressed that descriptive translation studies would also provide data that could be used "in combination with the information available in related fields and disciplines, to evolve principles, theories and models which will serve to explain and predict what translating and translations are and will be"⁴; thus my analysis will provide information that might be used for such purposes as far as translation studies in Africa is concerned. Other translation

³ "A Rationale for Descriptive Translation Studies", p. 16.

⁴ "The Name and Nature of Translation Studies", in *Translated! Papers on Literary Translation and Translation Studies*, pp. 67-80 (p. 73). In addition to describing the translation process, descriptive translation studies deals with product-oriented research and with the function of translations in receptor cultures and literatures.

scholars like José Lambert and Hendrik van Gorp, have also argued for a descriptive approach to translation so that its scope may not be as limited as that of normative rules and guidelines.⁵

4.2 Definition of strategy in translation

The translator usually has to make a number of decisions as he or she attempts to render a text from one language to another. These decisions may be made with regard to the entire text or when solving individual problems within the text. Decisions are made because the translator has to choose from various possible options or alternatives.

Sandor Hervey and Ian Higgins have referred to decisions which concern the entire text as **strategic decisions**:

These are decisions which the translator makes before actually starting the translation, in response to such questions as 'what are the salient linguistic characteristics of this text?'; 'what are its principal effects?'; 'what genre does it belong to and what audience is it aimed at?'; 'what are the functions and intended audience of my translation?'; 'what are the implications of these factors?'; and 'which, among all such factors, are the ones that most need to be respected in translating this particular text?'⁶

As for decisions made to solve specific problems within the text, they refer to them as **decisions of detail**:

These are, of course, arrived at in the light of the strategic decisions, but they concern the specific problems of grammar, lexis, and so on, encountered in translating particular expressions in their particular context.⁷

⁵ José Lambert and Hendrik van Gorp, "On Describing Translations" in *The Manipulation of Literature*, pp. 42- 53.

⁶ *Thinking Translation. A Course in Translation Method: French to English*, p. 14.

⁷ *Thinking Translation*, p. 14.

This ties in, as we saw in Chapter 3, with Jiří Levý's perception of translation as a game in which the translator develops an overall strategy for the entire text or literary work, and has tactics for solving problems at the lexical, sentence, paragraph or chapter levels.⁸

Gideon Toury, for his part, looks at the decisions made by the translator in terms of translation norms. In his study of several translations of the same original text in Hebrew prose fiction at different times in history, he refers to the overall translation strategy or the decision of the translator to either convey the ST with its textual relations and conventions or to respect the target culture's linguistic and literary norms or a combination of the two as initial norms. As for the decisions made during the translation process, Toury calls them operational norms.⁹

Again, Christiane Nord defines translation strategies as "the sum total of transfer procedures and techniques that have to be applied in order to produce a functional target text".¹⁰ Unlike the aforementioned scholars, she makes no attempt to distinguish between various types of strategies, preferring to consider all of them as forming one group. As for Wolfgang

⁸ "Translation as a decision process", p. 1171-1182.

⁹ "The Nature and Role of Norms in Literary Translations", in *Literature and Translation*. Norms within this context are requirements as they are set in translation practice, and not rules.

¹⁰ "Text Analysis in Translator Training", in *Teaching Translation and Interpreting: Training, Talent and Experience*, ed. by Cay Dollerup and Anne Loddegaard (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1992), pp. 39-48 (p. 42).

Lörscher, he seems to consider strategies only in terms of solving particular problems: "a translation strategy is a potentially conscious procedure for the solution of a problem which an individual is faced with when translating a text segment from one language to another."¹¹

What seems to be significant in the above attempts at defining translation strategies, despite differences in classification, is the idea that the translator develops an overall approach to the entire text and makes subsequent specific decisions as he or she translates. For the purposes of my analysis in this chapter, I will refer to the translator's decisions which affect the entire text as strategies, and to those which are made at specific points of the translation as choices. Furthermore, in order to facilitate analysis, strategies will be grouped under ST analysis and interpretation strategies, and transfer strategies. ST analysis and interpretation strategies will relate to questions such as 'what are the linguistic characteristics of the text?', 'are words and sentences analyzed in isolation or in relation with other parts of the text as a whole?', etc. as well to aspects such as the role of linguistic and extralinguistic information in interpreting the text: political, cultural, geographical, and other contexts, information about author, and so on. Transfer strategies will focus on the translator's approach to rendering ST content, style, cultural setting, etc. and how the target audience influences transfer decisions. Of course, not all

¹¹ *Translation Performance, Translation Process, and Translation Strategies* (Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 1991), p. 76.

strategies can be so neatly categorized; some of them are likely to belong to more than one category or even defy any categorization.

4.3 Nature and scope of analysis

The analysis will, as much as possible, operate within the categories of strategies suggested above. Moreover, it will rely on close observation of English translations of francophone African literary works; that is why examples will be taken from a variety of translated works and supplemented with other possible options and choices that could be made by a translator. In doing this, it will, rather than prescribe a specific way of translating or tell the translator what to do or not to do, look at possible options and leave room for initiative and judgment in making choices. As Susan Bassnett has rightly observed, the dogmatic and prescriptive trend is gradually disappearing nowadays in translation studies:

We no longer talk about translation in terms of what a translator "should" or "should not" do. That kind of evaluative terminology has its place only in the language-learning classroom, where translation has a very precise, narrowly defined pedagogical role.¹²

Although the analysis will be based primarily on the description of existing translations, it will be reconstructed through inferences from a comparison of the ST and its translation so as to underscore the various strategies and options available to the translator.¹³ Through a comparison of

¹² *Translation Studies*, p. xviii.

¹³ Roger Bell has noted that "such an approach would constitute no more than a special instance of the classic engineering problem of the 'black box' which contains a mechanism

the two texts, translation shifts could be established between them and used in attempting to describe and explain the possible underlying analysis and transfer strategies and decisions. This approach follows what Gideon Toury has suggested:

It is only reasonable to assume that any research into translation should start with observational facts, i.e. the translated utterances themselves (and their constitutive elements, on various levels), proceeding from there towards the reconstruction of non-observational facts, and not the other way around.¹⁴

Toury has also proposed a flow chart which can "be read as an indication of the actual (reconstructed) process of consideration and decision-making on the semanto-syntactic level, that is, not only in the context of discovery, but in the context of justification and explanation as well." (p. 30).

Although the "reconstruction" approach cannot claim to have any direct access to the mental translation process, it provides

which converts input into output but is otherwise totally inaccessible." Statements are therefore made through induction. *Translation and Translating. Theory and Practice*, p. 29.

Furthermore, José Lambert and Hendrik van Gorp have pointed out that "we often have hardly any other material for our study of translation and literary systems, and even if we do, the different translational strategies evident in the text itself provide the most explicit information about the relations between the source and target systems, and about the translator's position in and between them... [a comparison of ST and TT] gives us a rough idea of the overall translational strategy and the main priorities in it." "On Describing Translations", p. 47-48.

¹⁴ "A Rationale for Descriptive Translation Studies", p. 18. Apart from reconstructing the translation process through a comparison of ST and TT elements as I intend to do in this study, some scholars have adopted "thinking-aloud protocols" (TAPs) described by Toury as follows: "Subjects who are faced with the task of producing a translation are asked to say aloud whatever comes to their minds while they are working on it. The verbalizations are recorded, the recorded protocols transcribed, and the running transcripts are then submitted to analysis." "Experimentation in Translation Studies: Achievements, Prospects and Some Pitfalls", in *Empirical Research in Translation and Intercultural Studies*, ed. by Sonja Tirkkonen (Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 1991), pp. 45-66 (p. 59).

data that could be indicative of what goes on in the mind of the translator as he or she decides on the final version of a translation. That is why explanatory hypotheses can be inferred from a comparison of ST and TT. The translation process in this thesis will be presented as prospective, with the translator having to make certain decisions all along; it is therefore not static, but dynamic, aiming at suggesting insights into what is involved in the translation of African literature from French into English.

Furthermore, the analysis will be limited to the significant features of europhone African literature as outlined in Chapter 1, since several studies have already been carried out on strategies for problems common to all literary translation from French into English. The analysis will also draw on relevant aspects of Western literary translation theories, as well as on other disciplines which can enhance analysis and comprehension of the ST; these include geography, anthropology, linguistics, sociology, literary studies, history, and philosophy among others.

4.4 Objectives of the analysis

Taking into account that my analysis of strategies seeks to treat only some of the significant features of francophone African literature, it does not pretend to complete; indeed, it would need to be supplemented by research that has considered fundamental problems common to all literary translation from French into English. In addition, the analysis need not be perceived as a means of presenting a "success recipe" of

strategies which the translator can apply mechanically to texts of francophone African literature. Indeed, as Canadace Séguinot has, with good reason, emphasized: "It is not automatic that all research even of an applied nature will be of immediate and obvious use to people in the field."¹⁵ Besides, rather than expect the analysis automatically to improve the quality of translations of African literature, it would best be considered primarily as a means of promoting research and debate. As an analysis of strategies that underlie translations of African literature from French into English (and of possible strategies), it seeks to contribute towards better understanding and deeper insight into the translation of the literature. This coincides with what Susan Bassnett believes should be one of the objectives of translation theory:

to reach an understanding of the processes undertaken in the act of translation and, not, as is so commonly misunderstood, to provide a set of norms for effecting the perfect translation.¹⁶

¹⁵ "Where angels fear to tread... in defence of translation theory.", *Language International*, 4.4 (1992), 40-41 (p. 40). She further attacks the emphasis that has often been laid on applied research in translation: "It is precisely because translation as a field has been preoccupied with the applied side that what knowledge translators have about their work and their needs was ignored in early attempts at machine translation. When it came to adapt technology to the needs of translators, where was the basic research that described the way translators worked?" (p. 40)

Kitty van Leuven-Zwart has also stressed the point: "Just as the goal of a discipline such as Linguistics is not the production of better speakers, likewise Translation Studies [hence an analysis like this] do not aim, in the first place, at the production of good or better translators or translations... [indeed such] is not the first and most important goal of the discipline or an end in itself." "The Methodology of Translation Description and its Relevance for the Practice of Translation", *Babel*, 31.2 (1985), 77-85 (p. 77).

¹⁶ *Translation Studies*, p. 37.

Although the analysis does not aim at covering all strategies in translation, it might help to bridge the gap between theorists and practitioners, making them complement each other.

Admittedly, despite the express objective of the analysis to serve as basis for research and debate, rather than improve translation quality, it might happen that it does help to improve the quality of translations of African literary works. If this happens, it would probably be mainly because on reading it, translators might become more aware of the nature of their task, the available translation options, and the factors that could be taken into account when making decisions and choices.

The analysis will therefore attempt to consider a number of translation strategies and choices available to the translator of African literature, suggesting reasons for making decisions, in what circumstances they could be made, and their implications. It need not be considered as presenting ready-made solutions for each problem, since the translator is always expected to weigh translation options carefully before making any decisions.¹⁷ In this way, the analysis might also encourage student and budding translators to reflect on translation options and make reasoned decisions and choices, thereby contributing towards literary translation pedagogy in Africa.

¹⁷ Palma Zlateva has also underscored this aspect of research in translation studies: "translation scholars codify practice and offer it for possible guidance, but the final decision always remains with the translator, who is, after all, a human being capable of making decisions, not a machine that is fed originals, blindly performs some abstract rule-governed operations, and "outputs" a translation." "Introduction" to *Translation as Social Action: Russian and Bulgarian Perspectives* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), pp. 1-4 (p. 3).

4.5 Analysis of strategies

As a preliminary step to an analysis of strategies in the translation of African literature from French into English, it would be necessary to consider the relationship between factors of translation and how they influence translation strategies as well as some of the intended functions of the translated text.

4.5.1 Factors in the translation of African literature

Broadly speaking, as in all translation, these factors are the ST, the translation initiator if other than the translator, the translator, the target audience, and the TT. In addition to examining the relationship between them, emphasis will be laid on how they affect or influence one another in translation strategies and choices.

4.5.1.1 The source text: Our ST will be a text of African literature in French, produced by a writer of one of the French-speaking countries and having some or many of the distinctive features outlined in Chapter 1. Its major peculiarity lies in the fact that it could be regarded as a "translation" of certain African thought patterns and imagery into French. Its language and culture is therefore two-layered and different from the conventional French text. Given the great influence of the setting on the ST, it is not easily accessible to readers familiar with only the French language and culture. That is why Samia Mehrez has emphasized its peculiar nature:

These postcolonial texts, frequently referred to as 'hybrid' or 'métissés' because of the culturo-linguistic layering which exists within them, have succeeded in forging a new language that defies the

very notion of 'foreign' text that can be readily translatable into another language.¹⁸

As concerns its status in translation, the review of some existing translations in Chapter 2 showed that translators have generally regarded the francophone African literary work as the basis for their translations, often maintaining culture-specific elements and resorting to functional equivalents in the target culture where they are deemed necessary. Although cases of omissions, additions, summarizing, and other alterations have been recorded, at least some of them could be attributed to the editing work of some publishers (as Richard Bjornson indicated) and one cannot but conclude with Snell-Hornby that "the more 'literary' a translation, the higher is the status of the source text as a work of art using the medium of language".¹⁹

The ST has therefore either been considered as "sacred" and representing the author's choices, or altered in translation in certain areas in order to meet readers' needs or produce "fluent" translations. Broadly speaking, the degree of intervention by the translator or publisher frequently depends on the function to be fulfilled by the translated text, as well as on the target readers and their expectations. In certain cases, the commercial interests of the publisher overshadow all other considerations.

On the other hand, in pedagogic circumstances, translation students are likely to strive to account for the literary qualities of the ST and to respect the original author's lexical and syntactic choices, unless instructed otherwise.

¹⁸ "Translation and the Postcolonial Experience", p. 121.

¹⁹ *Translation Studies. An Integrated Approach*, p. 114.

4.5.1.2 **The translation initiator:** This term, borrowed from Hewson and Martin, refers to the person or group of persons who request or order a translation. As already indicated in the previous chapter, the initiator can, in the case of African literature, be a publisher, a group or an organization, a translator, two or more translators working together, etc. Nowadays, where the initiator is a publisher, the chances are that he or she will be a European or a North American, mainly because of the publishing houses and large readership in Europe and North America.

Where a publisher knows an experienced literary translator, he or she normally selects a literary work and contacts the literary translator for a translation contract, otherwise the translator contacts the publisher with a translated work. Usually, the publisher's choice will, to a large extent, be influenced by the taste and expectations of potential readers, as well as by their ideology and values. This is probably why Ade Ojo has noted that until the early 1960s, European publishers were reluctant to encourage and promote the translation of African literary works into European languages "because the messages of African creative writers, mostly vitriolic and caustic, were directed primarily at the colonial masters."²⁰ However, after the 1960s, as many Europeans sought to know more about the emerging African nations and their literature, publishers (especially Heinemann in the African Writers Series)

²⁰ "The Role of the Translator of African Written Literature in Inter-cultural Consciousness and Relationships", p. 293.

had many works translated from French into English for their readership. In certain other cases, publishers selected works on the basis of favourable reviews and comments by prominent literary critics, so as to introduce such works to their readers who otherwise would not be able to read them.²¹ Other reasons for selecting certain works also include the publishers' wish to introduce readers to aspects of culture and life in Africa, to produce translations for use in educational institutions, etc. All in all, however, most publishers' choices were, and still are, motivated by financial and economic considerations since profits ultimately determine the success or failure of any publication.

Groups or organizations (cultural, educational, etc) have sometimes requested or ordered the translation of certain African literary works from French into English for specific purposes; for example, UNESCO created the "Collection Unesco d'oeuvres représentatives" in 1948 with "the objective of contributing to the mutual appreciation of the diverse cultures by the translation of literary works by members states of the UNESCO".²² Similarly, some university presses, especially outside Africa, have published translations in an effort to have works for research and education; for example, some of CARAF books published by the University Press of Virginia are English

²¹ For example, Camara Laye's *L'Enfant noir* which won the Prix Charles Veillon in 1954, Amadou Kourouma's *Les Soleils des Indépendances* which won the "Prix littéraire de la francité", etc.

²² Quoted by Ade Ojo, "The Role of the Translator of African Written Literature in Inter-cultural Consciousness and Relationships," p. 296.

translations of francophone Caribbean and African works usually with a "substantial critical introduction in which a scholar who knows the literature well sets each book in its cultural context and makes it accessible to the student and the general reader."²³ The translation strategies and decisions are often dictated by these specific purposes.

Again, a translator can decide to translate a literary work and sell it to a publisher or contact a publisher and convince him or her of the need to translate a given African literary work from French into English. This often happens especially where a translator feels that a given literary work may not have been given the attention it deserves or where a translator is trying to obtain a contract. Dorothy Blair and Richard Bjornson had to convince publishers of the need to translate *Le Chant écarlate* (Mariama Bâ) and *Chemin d'Europe* (Mongo Beti) respectively.²⁴ It could happen that a publisher makes alterations to a translation mainly for commercial reasons or to suit potential readers; in such cases, aesthetic and other literary considerations could well be overshadowed by the publisher's decisions.

The emerging picture is therefore one in which the impact

²³ Tchicaya U Tam'Si, *The Madman and the Medusa*, trans. and intr. by Sonja Haussmann Smith and William Jay Smith (Virginia: The University Press of Virginia, 1990), information at the end of the translation. Furthermore, we are informed that "most of the books selected for the CARAF collection are being published in English for the first time; some are important books that have been out of print in English or were first issued in editions with a limited distribution. In all cases CARAF BOOKS offers the discerning reader new wine in new bottles."

²⁴ Richard Bjornson notes: "I finished the project and having worked on Oyono for an encyclopedia, I asked Herdeck if he would be interested in a translation of *Chemin d'Europe*, which had not, I thought, received nearly the attention it deserved." (See Appendix 3).

of the publisher on the choice of the final translation can be enormous. In addition to underscoring "the preponderant role that the translation initiator can play in the choice of the final text" (p. 160), Hewson and Martin have outlined what that role might consist of:

The TI chooses the ST and sets the general framework in which the Translation operation is to take place. This usually means that a certain type of TT is being asked for, to be produced in certain limiting and predefined conditions. (p. 162)

Consequently, in many cases, the status of the ST in translation is also largely determined by the translation initiator. In such circumstances, the traditional idealized view of a translator attempting to convey all the literary qualities of the original (without any external interference) could be utopian.²⁵ In fact, the publisher or translation initiator nowadays often breaks that direct relationship between the ST, the translator, and the TT. Nevertheless, the translator's personal style is usually evident in certain lexical choices and syntactic forms.

²⁵ John Brewer's advice to the translator seems to reinforce this idealized view; although a translator can stand his or her grounds in certain respects, the final decision ultimately rests with the publisher who has his eye on profits: "... the good translator who has conscientiously consulted the author about the meaning of every doubtful passage and about any analogies, added explanations or any other deviations from the original text he might find advisable to get the meaning across, must remain firm in the face of publishers whose first operating principle is the profit motive rather than artistic integrity." "The Role of 'Culture' in Successful Translation", in *Literature in Translation: From Cultural Transference to Metonymic Displacement*, ed. by Pramod Talgeri and S.B. Verma (Bombay: Popular Parkashan, 1988), pp. 21-26 (p. 26). The advice could, however, be followed in circumstances where a translation is to be published by a university press which lays more emphasis on literary qualities than on prospective sales.

4.5.1.3 **The translator:** A translator of African literature from French into English needs to have a good knowledge of both languages. In addition, since French is used in African literature to express the world view and extralinguistic reality peculiar to parts of Africa, the resulting "double language" requires ideally that the translator be also familiar with the African language which influences the way it is used. This means that a translator who is not acquainted with the African language and culture in question would need to obtain relevant information or, in the case of oral cultures, seek explanations and clarifications from native speakers of the said languages, griots, etc. or from appropriate books and documents where they exist. Although such information might not validly replace first-hand acquaintance, its degree of relevance will vary from one text to another.

Furthermore, besides being familiar with the two cultures of the ST (French and African), the translator would do well to know the cultures of the TT (English and the readers', as the case may be). Thus instead of being bi-cultural as required of translators working with two language-cultures, the translator would have to take into account a range of cultures in the ST and TT as earlier indicated. The translator would also need to be acquainted with the setting of the literary work. Again, as Ade Ojo rightly observes, the translator would need to be a:

critic [especially of African literature] and creative writer... who, because of the enormous work of analysis, exegesis, elaboration and reformation involved in the translation process, has to recreate

the source text.²⁶

It is therefore not surprising that francophone African literary texts have often been translated into English by scholars and critics of African literature. Indeed, for Brenda Packman, the ideal translators here would be those

who have an affinity with the authors and their essentially African experience as well as an integrity in the use of the English language equal to that displayed by the authors themselves in their use of French.²⁷

In another light, works have been translated by one translator, two translators or a group of translators. As the list of translations in Appendix 1 indicates, many translators work individually (Joyce Hutchinson, Francis Price, etc), others sometimes work in pairs (John Reed and Clive Wake), and yet some have worked as a group (Sembène Ousmane's novellas, *Niiwan* and *Taaw* [1987], are translated by a team from the Department of French Language and Literature, University of Cape Town, comprising Gioia Eisman, Catherine Gleen-Lauga, Nadine Pienaar, Anny Wynchank, and Lynn Scholtz).

The relationship between the translator and the other factors of translation will be analyzed later under translation operations.

4.5.1.4 The target audience: The potential readership is an important factor in the translation of African literary texts from French into English. As discussed in Chapter 2, the audience

²⁶ "The Role of the Translator of African Written Literature in Inter-cultural Consciousness and Relationships", p. 292.

²⁷ Brenda Packman, "Some Problems of Translation in African Literature", p. 77.

for English translations of francophone African literary texts can be quite heterogeneous. Such an audience can include English-speakers in Africa, Europe, North America, and possibly other regions of the world. In addition to the fact that many of these readers might not be native speakers of English, their cultural backgrounds and expectations differ greatly from one another. The translator or publisher might have to take such differences into consideration in his or her strategies and choices.

4.5.2 Intended functions of translated texts

Francophone African literature can be translated into English to serve a variety of reasons. As mentioned in Chapter 3, the goals could include: making an African literary work in French available to English-speaking readers, conveying the cultural setting and values portrayed in the work, producing a fluent translation that would make enjoyable reading for a given English-speaking readership, highlighting the literary qualities of a particular work, etc.

Furthermore, at the ideological and political levels, some scholars have viewed translation within the context of postcolonial literature as a means used by some Western publishers "to renew and perpetuate colonial domination."²⁸ The works chosen for translation are therefore those that fall within the ideological and political framework of the colonial masters. For example, with respect to the translation of African literary works from French into English, Ade Ojo has argued that Camara

²⁸ Tejaswini Niranjana, *Siting Translation. History, Post-Structuralism and the Colonial Context* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), p. 3.

Laye's *L'Enfant noir* was the first to be selected in the mid 1950s particularly because of

its thematic perspective which among others shows the European self-arrogated civilizing mission as having an enduring and seductive impact on the impressionistic mind of a young African. (p. 296)

He takes the argument further by pointing out that even though there were many good African literary works in English in the early 1950s, Amos Tutuola's *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* "won European admiration because of its negative qualities - its amorphous generic identity, its ungrammatical and unconventional English, and its macabre pervading fantasy"; it was immediately translated into French in order "to show the francophone world an example of what the blacks were capable of doing or rather not doing well." (p. 296) Some works were therefore translated to confirm certain European conceptions of African society and cultural values.

For many European and American publishers today, the taste and expectations of their target readers are paramount. Heinemann has published many English translations of francophone African literary works primarily for British readers; modifications to the ST often overlook what certain African writers and readers might regard as important in the literary works (e.g. their linguistic, social and cultural identity). These fluent TT-oriented translations have tended to create an Anglo-American readership that looks at the rest of the world essentially from their own perspective:

In general, however, it can be said that Anglo-American publishing has been instrumental in producing readers who are aggressively monolingual and culturally parochial while reaping the economic benefits of successfully imposing Anglo-American

cultural values on a sizeable foreign readership.²⁹

Moreover, such translations frequently tend to reflect the aesthetic values of the target audience more than the individual style of the original author.

The goal intended for a translation will often influence the global strategy and decisions of the translator or translation initiator. In principle, therefore, there could be as many versions of a given work as there are goals they might be intended to achieve. This could result in translations of different lengths for the same literary work. For example, an abridged or simplified version of a work, though it may achieve a specific goal, would ignore certain aspects of the original. Consequently, translations could fall within a continuum ranging from the most ST-oriented to the most TT-oriented versions, depending on the degree of intervention by the translator or translation initiator.

As indicated in Chapter 2, very few translators of francophone African literature into English mention the intended goal(s) of their translations. This, of course, often makes way for diverse and even contradictory reactions and reception by readers, especially as the potential audience is rather diverse; Snell-Hornby emphasizes the same point in the case of European literatures:

Usually, however, the literary translator gives no indication of his intention, and publishers' constraints remain unknown: it is a hallmark of the prototypical literary translation that it is assumed to stand as a valid full-scale representative of the original in a foreign culture; with this awesome function a literary translation is bound to have

²⁹ "Introduction" to *Rethinking Translation*, p. 6.

shortcomings and faultfinders somewhere.³⁰

Admittedly, translation is, to a large extent, a teleological practice; rather than evaluating the potential functions (which are merely indicative here) that could be fulfilled by English translations of francophone African literary works, my major concern has been to present as many potential functions as possible. This is because the functions of these translated texts will likely not remain the same all the time; they could change with changing expectations, tastes, and values. Moreover, certain translated works might have to be retranslated in the future for linguistic, social, political, or cultural reasons.

4.5.3 The translation process

In my attempt to reconstruct the translation process based on a comparison of source and target texts in terms of analysis and transfer strategies, I will draw on past theories and models developed by scholars such as Eugene Nida and Charles Taber, Roger Bell, Gaddis Rose, Lance Hewson and Jacky Martin, Boris Hleboc, Jean Paul Vinay and Jean Darbelnet, among others. References will also be made to previous studies on the translation of African literature by scholars such as Ade Ojo, Brenda Packman, Irène d'Ameilda, Charles Nama, and others. Furthermore, insights from discourse studies, linguistics, African literary criticism, history, anthropology, etc. will be applied to the study of ST analysis and interpretation strategies.

³⁰ *Translation Studies. An Integrated Approach*, p. 114.

Translation strategies will, for convenience, be examined under two broad stages: ST analysis and interpretation, and transfer. Although the process is definitely more complex than this division would suggest, my discussions will focus more on an analysis of options, strategies, and choices since several Western theorists have already carried out studies describing translation stages (that would equally apply to African literature). The strategies are, strictly speaking, not linear and sequential as will be presented, since sometimes the translator has to go back and forth between translation stages depending on the problem to be solved. Besides, there is no clear-cut line between the stages which often shade into one another, but I believe it would be useful to think of them as separate when trying to describe and analyze strategies in translation.

4.5.3.1 ST analysis and interpretation strategies

Given the main typical features of a francophone African literary text, the translator will, in his or her attempt to analyze and interpret the text, decide on strategies to be adopted with regard to the content and cultural setting of the work, as well as the special use of the French language. The translator approaches the text first as a reader, and then as a writer. As a reader, he or she will read, analyze, and interpret the ST; as a writer, he or she will formulate ST interpretation in the TL.

a) **Reading strategies:** Reading the text could be considered the first major step in translating as it provides the translator

with an overall picture of what the text is about and needs to be accounted for in the process. As pointed out by Hewson and Martin, the way in which the translator reads a ST is usually different from that of the ordinary reader:

The whole process of reading and interpreting the ST is a culture-bound activity which, as far as the [translator] is concerned, is carried out in the perspective of the Target Language and of the forthcoming translation. (p. 136)

In fact, unlike the ST reader, the translator considers the various elements not only in terms of the source culture, but also of the target culture, noting their "potential difference, distinction or tension." (p. 137) Thus the translator's approach to the ST will depend on the function to be fulfilled by the translation, the target language and culture, the target readers, and other considerations.

Furthermore, it might be necessary to read the ST several times before understanding the ideas expressed. Gregory Rabassa has stressed how thoroughly the translator needs to read the ST:

I have always maintained that translation is essentially the closest reading one can give a text. The translator cannot ignore "lesser" words, but must consider every jot and tittle.³¹

A thorough reading of the ST will enable the translator to analyze its African setting and manner in which French is used to convey an African vision.

b) **ST analysis strategies:** Michael Stubbs has defined discourse analysis as:

the linguistic analysis of naturally occurring

³¹ "No Two Snowflakes are Alike: Translation as Metaphor" in *The Craft of Translation*, ed. by John Biguenet and Rainer Schulte (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989), pp. 1-12 (p. 6).

connected spoken or written discourse. Roughly speaking, it refers to attempts to study the organization of language above the sentence and above the clause, and therefore to study larger linguistic units, such as conversational exchanges or written texts. It follows that discourse analysis is also concerned with language in use in social contexts and in particular with interaction or dialogue between speakers.³²

Several approaches have usually been used in discourse analysis; these include close inspection of a text so as to determine its surface structure and pattern (literary criticism), the ethnographic approach which pays particular attention to the underlying functions of the surface structure, the linguistic approach which deals with syntax and semantics, and the text linguistic approach which goes beyond the sentence and analyzes the text as a unit. While my analysis of the African literary text will draw on these approaches, it will comprise two levels: the linguistic and the extralinguistic levels.

i) **Linguistic analysis:** The linguistic analysis of a francophone African literary text is carried out bearing in mind the frequent indigenization of French as indicated in Chapter 1. The translator notes the use of African words and expressions (greetings, local objects, institutions, etc.), examining what they mean and why the author has used them instead of equivalent French words. Moreover, the African images, proverbs, and oral literary forms translated into French would need to be analyzed for their meaning and stylistic effects. In certain cases, the structure of French is influenced by an African language; for example, in "Il y avait une semaine qu'avait fini dans la

³² *Discourse Analysis. The Sociolinguistic Analysis of Natural Language* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983), p. 1

capitale Koné Ibrahim, de race malinké, ou disons-le en malinké: il n'avait pas soutenu un petit rhume..." (*Les Soleils des Indépendances*, p. 7, emphasis mine), Ahmadou Kourouma has adapted French to Malinke phraseology; again, in "C'était un court et rond comme une souche, cou, bras, poings et épaules de lutteur, visage dur de pierre." (p. 14), the description as an accumulation of parts is based on the structure of Malinke. An analysis of the foregoing two examples will therefore be viewed in terms of the influence of Malinke on French (which is frequent in the work) rather than incorrect usage of the language.

Where certain characters use "français petit nègre" to express themselves, analysis will take into account their incorrect use of French due mainly to their low level of education in French. For example, in "Non, missié, type là ment sur moi." (*La Carte d'identité*, p. 52), Jean-Marie Adiaffi (Ivory Coast) shows that the character cannot respect French grammatical order in his speech, and this underlines his lack of or inadequate education in French.

Broadly speaking, the use of French and "français petit nègre" in the ST will be analyzed in order to note differences with regard to standard French, since such differences somehow indicate some of the characteristic features of the text and could be useful in translation.

ii) **Extralinguistic analysis:** This analysis, unlike the linguistic which deals with the language use, goes beyond the words and linguistic units to interpret the underlying information. As Michael Stubbs has stressed:

there is no one-to-one correspondence between what is said and what is meant or what is done, and ... no

analysis of linguistic forms alone will permit an analysis of underlying acts and moves.³³

The text will therefore also be analyzed in the light of its setting or environment. This means that the translator will situate the text within its historical, political, social, cultural, and literary contexts. Such contextual approach is essential in the analysis of an African literary text mainly because it helps to reveal aspects of the background depicted in many African literary works. In fact, it would be difficult to adequately understand Seydou Badian's *Sous l'orage* unless one were acquainted with the experience and culture of the Malinke people of Mali, their oral art and traditional beliefs, and customs, as well as how these aspects have shaped or influenced the writer's ideas and expression in the work. The relevant knowledge could be gained by consulting pertinent documents, by direct contact with the Malinke people, or by relying on a native speaker informant. For example, Dorothy Blair relied on Ahmed Sheikh, a Senegalese Wolof speaker, for the explanation of certain Wolof words and expressions in her translation of Mariama Bâ's *Le Chant écarlate* into English, *Scarlet Song*.

Furthermore, since each interpretation of a text is, to a large extent, coloured or influenced by the translator's cultural background, presuppositions, and personal experience, a contextual approach which takes into account relevant clues in the text helps to narrow down acceptable interpretations. As Elizabeth Neild has aptly observed:

every text was written in a context, and knowing the context obviously increases our understanding of the

³³ *Discourse Analysis*, p. 176.

text. Indeed lack of understanding of the context frequently makes it difficult or impossible to interpret a text, and obviously, without such interpretation, translation is impossible. (p. 254)

In addition, certain aspects of Kenneth Burke's theory of discourse analysis could be relevant to the translator of a francophone African literary text, especially a text whose setting draws heavily on historical, political, and cultural factors. According to Burke, every text has five aspects (which he calls the "pentad"): it is an act and therefore dynamic and pragmatic; it has an agent or author; it is expressed through an agency or rhetorical and literary devices; it has a scene or setting in which the act takes place; and it is written for a purpose. Burke further suggests that analysis of a text in the light of some or all of these aspects, as the case may be, is likely to lead to a broad understanding of the text. The importance of the theory for the translator is obvious:

the translator can use the pentad to analyze the source text before he begins his task, so that he understands it thoroughly in all its ramifications. He can then go on to analyse his potential translation before he begins the actual work of translating; this prior analysis will enable him to clarify in his own mind the purpose, scene and so on of his translation, which will affect the kinds of choices he will make when he actually begins to write. (Neild, p. 254)

This seems to be the approach adopted by Richard Bjornson in many of his translations of African literary works; he provides an introductory analysis of the literary work in which he discusses such aspects as the author's life and works, the setting of the work, its themes and style, the work's position in the author's work and the African literary tradition in European languages, etc. Similarly, the introductions in English translations of francophone African literary works by CARAF BOOKS referred to

earlier indicate the importance attached to ST analysis by the translators and publishers.

c) **ST interpretation strategies:** The text will be interpreted taking into account the textual and extra-textual contexts. As Henry Schogt has aptly pointed out:

It is undeniable that different readers do not interpret a given text exactly identically. These individual differences in readings have led, especially in modern text analyses, to the formula that each reader creates his own text.³⁴

These interpretations are influenced by the individual reader's intellectual background and experience as well as by his or her knowledge of the language, author, and setting of the text. Schogt further notes that "different translators may disagree about the relative importance of the various levels on which a text operates: phonic, denotative, associative, connotative, etc. - so that ultimately personal preferences play an important role." (p. 121)

However, although reading may be considered a creative act and a text is open to more than one interpretation, relevant textual clues and extra-textual information could facilitate an informed interpretation of the text. Thus in the interpretation of francophone African literary works, clues in the ST such as footnotes and glossaries to define and explain culture-bound terms and expressions, names of places and characters, as well as knowledge of the author and cultural and social setting are likely to assist the translator in his or her attempt to interpret the text. For example, some of the names of characters

³⁴ *Linguistics, Literary Analysis and Literary Translation*, p. 105.

and places in the text (as mentioned in Chapter 1) could indicate the geographical, and subsequently cultural, context within which the African work needs to be interpreted; furthermore, footnotes, glossaries, etc. provide definitions and explanations in the light of which informed interpretations could be made.

4.5.3.2 Transfer strategies

Based on the analysis and interpretation of the original text, the translator decides on an overall strategy that will orientate the translation. Generally speaking, an overall strategy could be either source- ('adequate') or target-oriented ('acceptable'), that is the translator may decide to base his or her transfer choices paying more attention to the specificities of the ST or adapt the ST to meet the literary conventions of the TL. Of course, as José Lambert and Hendrik van Gorp have pointed out, "from an empirical point of view it can safely be assumed that no translated text will be entirely coherent with regard to the 'adequate' versus 'acceptable' dilemma."³⁵ In fact, translations are likely to turn out within gradations between the opposite extremes of total source-oriented and total target-oriented. With regard to the translation of francophone African literature into English, many translators have opted for retaining the peculiarities of the ST, providing explanatory footnotes or glossaries where they feel would be needed by their target readership. Examples are many in the analysis below. On the other hand, while on the whole maintaining ST specificities some translators have used certain words and expressions familiar

³⁵ "On Describing Translations", p. 44.

to their intended readers: "sent to Coventry" (*African Child*, p. 73) for British readers.

Again, some translators adopt the overall strategy of adapting the francophone African literary work, changing the names of characters, places, etc. This is the approach used by Dorothy Blair in her English version (*Tropical Circle*) of Alioum Fantouré's *Le Cercle des Tropiques* (1972); indeed, the publishers have stated clearly "adapted into English" rather than the usual "translated from the French." Dorothy Blair explains in a foreword to her version why she opted for an adaptation:

It is indisputable that the political machinations and election-rigging on the eve of independence, described by the author, with the wooing of international organizations and multinational monopolies by cynical governments, and ruthless tyrants who rule over newly independent states, are not the prerogative of ex-French colonies alone. That is why, in the course of translating *Le Cercle des Tropiques* into English, I decided, with Alioum Fantouré's approval, to transpose it into an English-speaking setting, anglicising all the proper names of places and people, and adapting all references to French or French-African social and political institutions, in order to enhance the universal applications of the satire. (p. ix)

Overall translation strategies in the translation of African literature from French into English have therefore been varied, although the main tendency has been to recognize and attempt to transfer the peculiarities of the ST.

As Jifí Levý has already noted (Chapter 3), translation choices are usually influenced by initial decisions and the available options at each stage. In the final analysis, decisions for each translation unit would be taken and choices made at the lexical, syntactic, and textual levels. While the linguistic elements of the ST are essential in making final choices, socio-cultural factors also play an important role:

However, the socio-cultural parameters also contribute to qualify and influence the translator's sequence of choices so that the final product of his or her activity is at the same time a selection and referencing process.³⁶

Ultimately, the selection or exclusion of available options will take into account the position and relationship between the various factors: the ST, the ST author, the translator, the TT, the target readers, etc.

My analysis of transfer strategies that have been, or could be, used in the translation of francophone African literary texts into English will focus mainly on the distinctive features outlined earlier, providing examples from existing translations, as well as proposing and attempting to explain other possible options.

a) **Content:** An important aspect of translation relates to how the translator treats the ST content.³⁷ Although there will inevitably be loss or gain during translation (even where a translation attempts to account for every element of the ST content), an analysis of how the transfer of content is handled in the translation of francophone African literary texts into English could be examined in terms of alterations, omissions, additions, expanding or restricting the meaning of words or expressions, toning down or increasing the force of words and expressions, etc.

The content of African literary works has been translated

³⁶ Lance Hewson and Jacky Martin, *Redefining Translation: The Variational Approach*, p. 186.

³⁷ For purposes of analysis, content will be considered separately from the form although the two cannot be completely divorced from each other.

in several ways. Some translators have, in their attempt to transfer the ST content, made additions, deletions, and other types of alterations at certain points for various reasons. The point of debate here, of course, relates to the extent to which a translator may reasonably make alterations to the ST.

As I have already shown in Chapter 2 (with pertinent examples) under a review of some of the existing English translations of francophone African literary works, certain additions seem to have been made in order to clarify or amplify the context (Peter Green in *Mission to Kala*) while others introduce new elements not mentioned or implied in the ST (Oyono Mbia in *Three Suitors, One Husband*). On the other hand, some translators seem to have deleted sentences and even paragraphs; for example, in *The African Child*, James Kirkup has omitted a long passage from Laye's *L'Enfant noir*: "...mais l'angoisse ne se dissipe pas si aisément ...rappelle le visage obscur du rite secret." (p. 144.), a passage in which Laye tries to explain the significance of circumcision of the young boys of his community. Although it may seem that Kirkup felt the lengthy explanation would not be of any interest to his target readers, the omission leaves out certain details that clarify why the rite was taking place. Of course, the omission is a decision taken by the translator; it is very likely that another translator would not omit the very passage.

While it may be difficult to explain some of these alterations, it could be said that those made apparently for stylistic reasons seem to aim at making the translation read fluently. As Venuti has remarked:

A translated text is judged successful - by most editors, publishers, reviewers, readers, by translators themselves - when it reads fluently, when it gives the appearance that it is not translated, that it is the original, transparently reflecting the foreign author's personality or intention or the essential meaning of the foreign text.³⁸

Alterations that make additions to or deletions from the content of the ST for no apparent reasons relating, for example, to the expectations or needs of the target readers, are likely to affect the message conveyed, and sometimes result in illogical and obscure writing. This is what happens when James Kirkup omits certain sentences and paragraphs in his translation of Camara Laye's *L'Enfant noir* into English as indicated above. Although the omissions, additions, and other alterations may seem insignificant when considered individually, taken as a whole they affect the content and the style of the ST author.

There are instances, however, where explanatory additions and expansions are made for the target readers deemed to have a cultural and educational background different from that of the ST readers. As I noted in Chapter 2, at the lexical and sentence levels, these explanations are often provided either within the text, in footnotes or glossaries as in the ST, or added where deemed necessary by the translator. At the level of the entire work, information on the setting, themes, author, etc. is sometimes provided by the translator to facilitate understanding by the readers; Sonja Haussmann Smith and William Jay Smith have presented such information in the introduction to their English translation (*The Madman and the Medusa*) of Tchicaya U Tam'si's *Les Meduses, ou les orties de la mer*.

³⁸ "Introduction" in *Rethinking Translation*, p. 4.

However, many translators seem to feel that readers should make the necessary effort to understand the work, even if that means looking into encyclopaedias and other relevant books.³⁹ Although additional information could be useful to students and scholars, many readers who want to read a translation for entertainment might find background details within or outside the text unnecessary, slowing down reading and, in certain instances, even offensive, especially on account of the translator's paternalistic

assumption of a totally ignorant reader, confronted with a totally new world, unable to come to grips with it unless he is guided step by step by the steady and authoritative hand of the omniscient [translator], trained to decipher the otherwise unfathomable mysteries of [Africa].⁴⁰

As Richard Jacquemond also maintains, by making explicit certain implicit meanings in the ST, the translator runs the risk of "limiting further than necessary its possible readings and sometimes even misleading the reader." (p. 150). However, it could also be argued that a translation always reflects a reading of a text, a reading which depends heavily on what the translator

³⁹ This has been the case with most English translations of francophone African literary works published by Heinemann, for example; usually, no supplementary background information on the setting is given by the translator. It is interesting to note that some recent translations contain introductory information on the author and other works as well as commentary on the translation that attempts to discuss translation problems and solutions; for example, Sembène Ousmane's *Niiwam* and *Taaw* translated in 1991 contains a preface that presents information on Ousmane and his other works (provided by Anny Wynchank) and a commentary on the translation (by Catherine Glenn-Lauga) which discusses translation problems and solutions. This may well be a change in editorial policy by Heinemann.

⁴⁰ Richard Jacquemond, "Translation and Cultural Hegemony" in *Rethinking Translation*, pp. 139-158 (p. 150). Further references to this article will be indicated in brackets within the text.

considers relevant and needs to be transferred. Moreover, when a literature (here francophone African literature) is being introduced to foreign readers, it is often useful to include such information, at least in the early translations; with time, when readers become acquainted with the literature, the information might no longer be necessary and certain culture-bound terms might be accepted in the foreign language. For example, "griot" has been accepted in English and French and recent translations no longer define or explain the word as was usually the case in the 1950s and 1960s.

Be that as it may, explanatory additions in translations are more likely to be useful when limited to aspects peculiar to the ST and which could be partially understood, misunderstood, or not understood at all by the target readers.

b) **Culture-bound terms and expressions:** As already mentioned in Chapter 2, most translators of francophone African literary works retain culture-bound terms in their English translations. Such borrowing of African terms enables them to preserve the setting or local colour of the ST and "permits communication without eliminating the grounds of specificity."⁴¹ Furthermore, borrowing can thus serve stylistic and authenticity purposes since it attempts to respect the choices of the ST author. Where a culture-bound term is used in the ST within a context that provides enough information for the reader to guess its intended meaning or is defined within the text, many translators have retained the word without any further details. For example,

⁴¹ Sherry Simon, "The Language of Cultural Difference: Figures of Alterity in Canadian Translation", in *Rethinking Translation*, pp. 159-176 (p. 159).

Mariama Bâ's "Le "Zem-Zem", eau miraculeuse venue des lieux saints de l'Islam, pieusement conservée dans chaque famille, n'est pas oubliée." (*Une si longue lettre*, p. 10) is rendered by Modupé Bodé-Thomas as "The *Zem-Zem*, the miracle water from the holy places of Islam religiously kept by each family, is not forgotten." (*So Long a Letter*, p. 3). Again, if borrowing is accompanied by definitions and explanations in footnotes or glossaries, the translator can avoid padding the text with lengthy details; for instance, Katherine Woods provides a footnote for "griot" in her English translation (*Ambiguous Adventure*) of Sembène Ousmane's *L'Aventure ambiguë* probably because she does not want to define the word within the translation for her target readers whom she feels do not know the meaning of the word: "On avait remarqué aussi Dialtobé, le maître des pêcheurs, Farba le maître des griots, le chef de la corporation des forgerons, celui des cordonniers, et bien d'autres encore" (p. 103) is rendered as "Also to be noticed among them were Dialtobé, the master of the fishermen, Farba, the teacher of the griots*, the chief of the guild of smiths, that of the guild of shoemakers, and many besides." (p. 83), with the footnote *"The griots are, in certain African countries, a special class of musicians, poets, historians, sorcerers, and the like." Len Ortzen, for his part, provides definitions and explanations he feels his readers need in a glossary at the end of *Tribal Scars and Other Stories*.

On the other hand, some translators ignore footnotes provided by authors in the original texts; Yambo Ouologuem footnotes "Hegiré" (*Le Devoir de violence*, p. 13) which Ralph

Manheim ignores in his translation (*Bound to Violence*) - he merely borrows the term and expects his readers to understand it. Again, whereas Mariama Bâ uses footnotes in *Un si longue lettre* to define or explain certain culture-bound terms, Modupé Bodé-Thomas groups the definitions and explanations in a glossary at the end of *So Long a Letter*. Bodé-Thomas probably feels that footnotes might interfere with reading, and so tries to avoid distracting the reader by placing them at the end.

Other options for rendering culture-bound terms include the use of cultural equivalents, translation couplets, descriptive phrases, textual conditioning, etc. Where an appropriate cultural equivalent can be found, the ensuing acculturation rids the text of its different cultural identity even though the target readers will likely produce a response similar to that of the ST readers. However, a cultural equivalent may sometimes result in distortion of meaning; for example, "vin de palme" in "... l'oeil pétillant de malice comme du vin de palme bien assaisonné dans un verre de cristal" (*Mission terminée*, p. 55) rendered by "vintage wine" in "... His eyes glittered with crystalline malice, like vintage wine in a goblet" (*Mission to Kala*, p. 33). In Africa, "vin de palme" is wine obtained from the palm tree, whereas vintage wine in Europe is obtained from grapes; given this marked difference as well as the cultural significance of the palm wine which is distorted, the use of a cultural equivalent here, while maintaining other clues that point to African culture in the translation (e.g. bamboo beds, etc.), fails to give a uniform picture of the cultural setting. Indeed, the use of a cultural equivalent will often depend largely on the value the translator

attaches to the ST culture-bound terms and the degree of similarity with the concept or object in the TL.

In addition to African words and expressions, there are certain French words that designate objects and concepts peculiar to Africa or used with specific African meanings or connotations. These include "dot", "co-épouse", "concession", etc. The ring of familiarity around these words hide certain considerations pertinent to the African context. For example, one of the definitions of "dot" in *Dictionnaire Petit Robert* is "bien qu'une femme apporte en se mariant"; it means "dowry" and underscores the French or European practice of the bride bringing property into marriage. Although "dot" is used in francophone African literary texts, however, the word refers to the property or money given by the bridegroom and his family to the bride's family, usually in appreciation for their daughter. Consequently, the translator would need to understand the word within the African context before attempting to render it. This is what Modupé Bodé-Thomas fails to do when he renders "Notre mariage se fit sans dot, sans faste..." (*Une si longue lettre*, p. 28) as "Our marriage was celebrated without dowry, without pomp..." (*So Long a Letter*, p. 16). The word "dowry" here or "bridewealth" used by Adrian Adams in "However, since bridewealth had been paid and the marriage duly celebrated, Salimata..." (*The Suns of Independence*, p. 26) is likely to have the European meaning for many European readers instead of the African practice intended. In anglophone African countries, the money or property is usually referred to as "bride price", and the word is used by writers such as Chinua Achebe, Elechi Amadi, and particularly Buchi Emecheta (Nigeria)

the title of one of whose works is *The Bride Price* (1976).

Furthermore, although "co-épouse" is a French word, it has been coined to designate one of the wives of a polygamist, a concept common in Africa and other areas where polygamy is permitted. Unfortunately, since polygamy is not practised in Britain, the English language has no word for the concept. Anglophone countries in Africa have therefore coined the word "co-wife" which has been used by several writers. Certain translators have taken this into account; "La présence à mes côtés de ma co-épouse m'énerve" (*Une si longue lettre*, p. 10) is rendered as "The presence of my co-wife beside me irritates me" (*So Long a Letter*, p. 3) and a descriptive phrase is used when Len Ortzen renders "Volontairement elle avait fait dévier la conversation sur un autre thème, afin d'éviter un long palabre sur les 'veudieux' co-épouses." (*Voltaïque*, p. 49) as "She deliberately changed the conversation in order to avoid a long discussion about the other three wives." (*Tribal Scars and Other Stories*, p. 42)

c) Language use

As I have already illustrated in Chapter 2, many francophone African writers attempt to portray their cultural specificity in the way they use French. Such use is evident in the African-based imagery, proverbs, oral literary genres, and "français petit nègre"; in certain cases, the structure of the indigenous language is imposed on French. Although an analysis and interpretation of the various dimensions of language use is crucial to translation, the resulting understanding does not necessarily guarantee satisfactory solutions in translation; the

expressive possibilities of the TL and the translator's knowledge of the language could greatly influence the type of solutions adopted. Transfer strategies with regard to language use in francophone African literature could be examined in terms of the rendition of imagery and proverbs, oral literary genres, "français petit nègre", etc.

i) **Imagery and proverbs:** As indicated in Chapter 2, most translators of African literature from French into English retain the African-based imagery and proverbs in translation. Where the image or proverb is not preserved, other options could be envisaged; these include looking for a TL proverb or image accepted as equivalent in meaning even if different in expression, conveying the sense of the proverb or image, and so on. The choice of strategies has been, or could be, dictated or influenced by various considerations. Where the translation is intended to underscore the cultural aspects of the ST, the ST proverb or image could be retained with the hope that the context will help to suggest its meaning, or else an explanatory footnote could also be provided. On the other hand, if a TL equivalent already exists and the translator does not want to highlight the image or thought pattern of the SL, the equivalent may be used. For example, James Kirkup has translated "Mais la phrase l'irrita et elle 'sortit de son fourreau'." (*Dramouss*, p. 23) as "But the phrase irritated her and she flew off the handle." (*A Dream of Africa*, p. 18); 'sortir de son fourreau', as Camara Laye footnotes, is translated from a Malinke idiom meaning literally 'to fly out of its sheath' (of a sword), and Kirkup renders it by the TL figurative equivalent instead of maintaining the ST

image which is different from the standard French expression 'sortir de ses gonds'. Significantly, Kirkup draws attention to the Malinke image in a footnote, thereby pointing to the peculiar use of French. Again, in the absence of a TL equivalent, the translator may consider conveying just the underlying meaning of the proverb or image. Even if the ST meaning is eventually conveyed by each of the foregoing options, their stylistic effects would be different: in retaining the ST proverb or image, the translation would also convey the local colour and thought pattern; a TL equivalent would conform to the TL norms and usage; communicating only the meaning would ignore the stylistic role of the proverb or image in the ST.

Generally speaking, the translator's choices for each text will depend on his or her attitude toward the ST on the one hand, and the intended function of the translated text or target readers, on the other. Since most of the proverbs in literary works are drawn from oral African literature, their role and significance in the works might also affect the translator's strategies and choices.

ii) **Oral literary genres:** One of the basic problems in the translation of oral literary genres lies in the fact that they have to be written before they are translated. As Ruth Finnegan has noted:

Oral literature is by definition dependent on a performer who formulates it in words on a specific occasion - there is no other way in which it can be realized as a literary product.⁴²

When written, oral literature is given a fixed form, which is

⁴² *Oral Literature in Africa* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), p. 2.

contrary to the fact that each performance contains some improvisation and requires interaction with the audience. Furthermore, some of the tonal features, gestures, and other aspects of live performance are scarcely transcribed, thereby giving only a polished sketchy version of oral literary genres in written literary works.

Given the scope of this thesis, I do not intend to look into how oral literature is, or should be, transcribed from an indigenous language and subsequently translated into French; irrespective of the inadequacies of the written form with respect to the oral performance, my analysis of transfer strategies will focus on oral forms that have been incorporated into or produced as written literary works in French. In most cases, African writers whose literary creations have been based on traditional oral genres (folktales, epics, legends, etc.) have indicated that their works are faithful translations of what they were told by griots, their parents, or other competent persons. For example, in the "Foreword" to *Soundjata ou l'épopée mandingue*, Niane points out that his work is a translation of the words of griots:

Je ne suis qu'un traducteur, je dois tout aux Maîtres de Fadama, de Djeliba Koro et de Keyla et plus particulièrement à Djeli Mamadou Kouyaté, du village de Djeliba Koro (Siguiri), en Guinée. (p. 9)

Most of these translations are, however, not based on exact transcriptions of performances; they are well written literary versions of what were originally oral tales (e.g. Birago Diop's *Les Contes d'Amadou Koumba*). Besides the fact that performance of the same tale can vary from one teller to another (and even from one occasion to another with the same teller) and that no written version can adequately capture the atmosphere of a live

performance,

There is the added point that when none of the original texts is provided it is not possible even for someone who knows the language to check the basic trustworthiness of the translation in the most literal terms. It is often quite impossible to assess how close these translations are to the original texts or whether, as perhaps happens rather often, they are only paraphrases or even touched-up and rewritten versions.⁴³

Nevertheless, writers like René Philombe (*Histoires queue-de-chat*) and Birago Diop (*Les Contes d'Amadou Koumba*) have tried to write folktales in a lively style to reflect performance, though not with pauses, false starts, etc. In Philombe's stories, he engages his readers by often addressing them directly through the use of the second person plural ("vous") or by the use of imperative; he also seeks the readers' active participation through the frequent use of rhetorical questions and half statements, supposed to be answered or completed by the readers. Like many other story tellers, Philombe uses idiophones for vivid descriptions. These and other traditional oral forms and styles are also frequently used by many novelists: repetitions, songs, proverbs, etc.

The literary conventions need to be placed within the context of oral African literature for analysis and translation. Taking for instance Dorothy Blair's attempt to convey African story-telling techniques as depicted in *Les Contes d'Amadou Koumba*, the direct conversational style in "Khary était bossue. Oh! une toute petite bosse de rien de tout, une bosse qu'une camisole empesée ou un boubou ample aux larges plis pouvait aisément cacher" is rendered as "Khary was a hunchback. Mind you,

⁴³ Ruth Finnegan, *Oral Literature in Africa*, p. 336.

it was quite a small insignificant little hump, a hump that could easily be hidden under a well-starched camisole or a full, pleated boubou." Sometimes, such oral style of story telling is also found in novels; Adrian Adams tries to convey Kourouma's direct conversational style as he addresses the reader in "Vous paraissez sceptique! Eh bien, moi, je vous le jure, et j'ajoute: si le défunt était de caste forgeron, si l'on n'était pas dans l'ère des Indépendances (les soleils des Indépendances, disent les Malinkés), je vous le jure, on n'aurait jamais osé l'inhumer dans une terre lointaine et étrangère." (*Les Soleils des Indépendances*, pp. 7-8) as follows: "You seem sceptical! Well, I swear it's true, and what's more, I swear that if the deceased were of blacksmith caste, and if we weren't living the era of Independence (the suns of Independence, the Malinke say), no one would have dared bury him far away in foreign soil." (*The Suns of Independence*, p. 8).

Another important feature of African oral literature is repetition of words and phrases. As Brenda Packman points out "this is not always straightforward repetition, but frequently the elaboration of an idea by a series of words or phrases almost, but not quite synonymous." (p. 71.) Again, Dorothy Blair renders the repetition in "il fut décidé que la reine Fari et des courtisanes s'en iraient à la recherche de terres moins désolées, de régions plus hospitalières, de pays plus nourriciers" by "Queen Fari should set out with her court ladies in search of less desolate lands, more hospitable regions, more nutritive areas." Although Blair's intensifying repetition of lands, regions and areas does not seem to be as clear as in Diop's text

("de terres...de régions...de pays") since "areas" is vague (perhaps "countries" would have brought out the idea of increasing expanse), the repetition in "Un soir, Samba ne rentra pas, ni le lendemain, ni le surlendemain, ni plus jamais" is reflected in "One evening Samba did not return home; nor the next day, nor the day after, nor ever." Certain translators, however, do not always convey the repetitions in the ST; repetitions in francophone African literary texts are sometimes viewed as stylistic flaws which need to be edited in English (examples given in Chapter 2). This means that the oral dimension of the style is eliminated in favour of more grammatical constructions.

iii) **"Français petit nègre"**: In literary works where the author uses "français petit nègre", translators have often found it difficult to indicate the use of this African uneducated variety of French in the English translation. The problem consists mainly in finding a similar variety of English or another language that fulfils a similar role in anglophone African countries. As I have shown in Chapter 2, John Reed solves the problem by creating an ungrammatical English: "Y en a vérité, sep." (*Une Vie de boy*, p. 39) is rendered as "It is truth, sah." (*Houseboy*, p. 29). Given the colonial situation in the novel, it is likely that an uneducated African domestic servant would have addressed a white man in ungrammatical English.

On the other hand, although the ungrammaticality of the French may well be reflected in the English translation, an uneducated person in an English-speaking African country today (especially in West Africa) would sooner use Pidgin English than ungrammatical English, even when speaking to a superior since the

language is also understood by educated persons. Ungrammatical English would more likely be used by someone who is pretending to be educated and is making grammatical mistakes because he or she is not familiar with standard English. That is perhaps why the uneducated characters in the works of Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka are made to use Pidgin English. It would therefore be possible to render "français petit nègre" using Pidgin English to reflect the speech of uneducated characters in literary works; in this case, the function of the language might be reflected.

Another important aspect of the use of French which presents problems to the translator is when the structure of an African language is imposed on French: would this new structure be reflected in translation, or would the normal grammatical structure of English be used? Adrian Adams has tried to cope with the problem when he renders "C'était un court et rond comme une souche, cou, bras, poings et épaules de lutteur, visage de pierre" (*Les Soleils des Indépendances*, p. 14) as "The man who had spoken was short and squat as the stump of a tree, with a stony face and neck, arms, fists, and shoulders of a wrestler." (*The Suns of Independence*, p. 8). He has chosen to rearrange the attributes and conform to English grammar and expression in order to make the sentence readable, since an accumulation of words as in the ST would make no sense in English. The difficulty of understanding the structure, faced by the ST readers (those who are not Malinke), is spared the English readers. This compromise solution gives the impression that the use of French in the ST is fluent and grammatical; it ignores one of the concerns of the ST author - that of writing French to reflect his language.

Although Adrian Adams has reflected various aspects of the way Kourouma has used French in the novel, the structure seems difficult to convey; perhaps a translator's note could be useful here.

d) The target audience

Translation strategies and choices are usually made with the target audience in mind. This is often because the communication situation that existed between the ST author and his or her intended readers changes in translation. The ST author's choice of words and presentation were, to a certain extent, influenced by the intended readers; in translation, the translator is dealing with a different linguistic and cultural audience. The knowledge or experience assumed by the author on the part of the ST readers is most likely to be lacking among the translator's target readers. In order to enable readers to understand as much of the ST as the initial readers, the translator might have to make certain adjustments in the translation. As Mildred Larson has rightly noted:

One of the challenges facing the translator is knowing when to supply the information which is implicit in the text... It will sometimes need to be made explicit because the source language writer and his audience shared information which is not shared by the receptor language audience.⁴⁴

Since many francophone African authors also intend their works for an international audience, they frequently provide footnotes and glossaries for cultural definitions and explanations they assume are needed by their readers for comprehension. This, to some extent, facilitates the translator's task given that the

⁴⁴ *Meaning-based Translation: A Guide to Cross-Language Equivalence* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1984), p. 42.

footnotes and glossaries are usually translated and there is practically little need, if any, for further information.

What presents problems for the translator, however, is when no information is provided in the ST for readers of a different cultural background. In such circumstances, it could be said that the ST author expects readers to possess or look for the relevant information. The translator then could either work with the same assumption with respect to his or her target readers or provide supplementary information in order to help them understand the work. Most English translations in the African Writers Series (Heinemann) which provide no such supplementary details seem to imply that readers need to look for relevant information where necessary.

In many cases, however, the translator might need to provide supplementary information either within or outside the translation. Caught between the desire to capture the ST local colour and the need to be understood by an audience outside the specific African cultural and linguistic situation, the translator of African literature often realizes that cultural transference involves much more linguistic expression; it also depends on the relationship between the translator and his or her target readership. The attempt to recontextualize ST setting and culture in the TT might require extra information. As already noted in Chapter 2, some of the existing English translations of francophone African literary works have introductions, footnotes, or glossaries to facilitate comprehension for readers presumed to be unfamiliar with the cultural setting. For example, in *The Madman and the Medusa*, an English translation of Tchicaya U

Tam'Si's *Les meduses, ou les orties de la mer*, Sonja Haussmann Smith and William Jay Smith have provided a glossary, and a detailed introduction which places the work within its cultural context, gives pertinent biographical information about the author, and discusses some of the themes of the novel; such information would be useful to the general reader, students, and researchers. Where the target audience are Africans rather than non-Africans, the supplementary information might be limited to aspects that distinguish one African ethnic group or culture from the others; features common to, or that can be understood in, most African cultures (e.g. polygamy, extended family, sacrifice to ancestors, etc.) might not need to be explained.

In certain cases, especially in poetry anthologies where original texts are sometimes provided along with their translations, the audience is distinguished in terms of knowledge of either or both French and English as indicated by John Reed and Clive Wake in the introduction to their English translation of a selection of African poetry in French:

We hope the English translations will present the variety and development of African poetry in French if not its power to those who do not know the language; to those who know a little we hope they will serve as useful guides and give encouragement to tackle the French texts; to those at home in French and English we submit ourselves in the translator's most searching ordeal - that of appearing in public side by side with his original.⁴⁵

Given the international status of English today and the search for wider readership, the translator would have to develop strategies for coping with the heterogeneous English-speaking

⁴⁵ *French African Verse with English Translations* (London: Heinemann, 1972), p. xi.

audience. In order to produce a translation accessible to both African and non-African readers, the translator would need to have a clear idea of the horizons of expectation of the target audience - which is not always possible. In any case, since readers within the same country or culture do not all have the same intellectual and cultural background (hence not all SL readers understand the ST, even though it is often assumed that they do), not all the TL readers would understand every translation no matter how copious the amount of information provided. Thus the international readership targeted by the translator could be deemed to be of a certain intellectual and cultural background, given that the translator cannot possibly comment on every aspect of the work. He or she could provide a brief introduction that presents relevant information on the author and setting of the work, and footnotes or a glossary that define or explain certain elements not included in the introduction. In this way, readers familiar with the setting of the work could ignore such supplementary information which is not included within the text.

4.6 The translation as a literary work

As proponents of the polysystems approach have pointed out, a translation of a literary work may not automatically achieve literary excellence in the receiving literary system. So also there is no guarantee that every francophone African literary work will continue to enjoy the same status when translated into English. Some English translations have maintained their prominent literary status in the anglophone African literary

polysystem; these include *Houseboy*, *The Old Man and the Medal*, *The African Child*, *Mission to Kala*, *God's Bits of Wood*, *Ambiguous Adventure*, etc. which are studied as set books in schools and colleges (mainly in Cameroon and Nigeria) and used for research in universities.⁴⁶ This is probably because the translations have somehow succeeded in conveying features that the anglophone literary "canon" considers as important, for example, the African setting, the subject matter, the peculiar use of English to reflect African thought patterns and environment, etc., aspects which African writers and critics feel are crucial in the definition of African literature. That is also why in my analysis and suggestions of transfer strategies I have often tried to take into account words and expressions used by renowned anglophone African writers in their works.

On the other hand, translations which contain alterations and adaptations for non-African readers as illustrated earlier are likely not to be considered as literary works in the anglophone African literary polysystem; in fact, the alterations will be taken as deficiencies and faults. For non-African anglophone literary polysystems, such translations which smooth away African features and peculiar language use in an attempt to conform to existing TL literary polysystem could be described as "secondary" while those which retain ST features could be innovative or "primary". These primary translations which preserve the foreign identity of African literary texts are

⁴⁶ Anthony Kwame Appiah has indicated that these and other English translations of francophone African literary works in the African Writers Series form part of "the pedagogical canon of anglophone Africa." "Out of Africa: Topologies of Nativism", *Yale Journal of Criticism*, 2.1 (1988), 153-178 (p. 156).

likely to be treated as foreign in Britain; hence appellations such as "commonwealth literature in English", "Overseas Anglophone literature", "African literature in English", etc.

The mapping of transference in the translation of francophone African literature into English in this chapter has been based on a comparison of translations with their originals and conceived within the perspective of the translation process in an attempt to present a systematic and coherent overall picture. This description and analysis might be more meaningful if a case study is presented, with commentary on a translation showing how analysis and transfer strategies and decisions lead to choices that are finally made in the translation process. Such an attempt to apply the analysis is necessary, as Theo Hermans has rightly suggested:

Practical fieldwork and case studies are therefore a necessity, since ultimately the theory [or here the analysis] remains a construct which stands or falls with the success of its applications. Ideally, the process works both ways: case studies are guided by the theoretical framework, and the feedback from practical research then results in corroboration or modification of the theoretical apparatus.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ *The Manipulation of Literature*, p. 12.

CHAPTER 5

A CASE STUDY OF ANALYSIS AND TRANSFER STRATEGIES

This chapter seeks to apply the analysis and transfer strategies in the translation of African literature as outlined within the perspective of the translation process in the last chapter. A text will be selected and translated; strategies will subsequently be examined with respect to the analysis and transfer of aspects that could be considered as being characteristic of francophone African literature.

5.1 Choice of corpus

A corpus for the demonstration will be chosen from the body of francophone sub-Saharan literature whose major features have already been outlined in Chapter 1. I have decided to choose an excerpt from a novel that has not yet been translated into English, *Princesse Mandapu*, written in 1972 by Pierre Makombo Bamboté, a writer from the Central African Republic. The text portrays some aspects of the special use of French while maintaining clues that point to the peculiar setting and cultural environment. In addition to presenting cultural elements, the work is written in a language that requires extra-textual knowledge for ample understanding and appreciation. Consequently, problems of analysis, interpretation, and translation could be raised especially by frequent cultural references and allusions, presumption of familiarity with the setting and historical period

of the work, elliptical constructions as evident in incomplete sentences, etc. Jonathan Ngate observes that *Princesse Mandapu*, in the final analysis, foregrounds one of the typical features of francophone literary works:

the highlighting of the complicity between narrator and narratee, and through them, author and presumed African reader or quite simply, informed reader.¹

By and large, the ideal approach would be to work on the entire novel, giving the translation the unity and coherence of a complete work of art. However, in a limited study like the present one, *Princesse Mandapu* is too long for any reasonable account of a description and analysis of translation strategies and choices. I have therefore chosen an excerpt from the novel; the excerpt presents some of the major features of the novel as a whole and is of acceptable length.

5.2. Factors of translation

Features of the ST and its intended audience will be discussed in order to highlight some possible translation options as well as analyze my translation strategies and choices with regard to the target readership.

5.2.1 Analysis and interpretation of ST

Drawing on my horizon of expectation as an African as well as on my knowledge of African literature and the history and people of the Central African Republic, I will first of all attempt to provide relevant information that could enable the

¹ *Francophone African Literature: Reading a Literary Tradition* (Trenton, New Jersey: African World Press, 1988), p. 107.

translator to analyze and then translate the excerpt. This information is part of the extra-textual material needed by the translator to fill in the gaps and work out an informed interpretation of the novel.

The translator, first as reader, needs to possess or acquire the prior knowledge that the author or narrator assumes on the part of the reader. The translator of *Princesse Mandapu* would therefore do well to be familiar with the geography, history, and culture of the Central African Republic; this will place the text within a given context and provide extra-textual information that might contribute to deeper understanding of the text.

5.2.1.1 Spatial and temporal setting of the novel

The novel is set in a small fictitious town, Uandja, located in the Central African Republic. This country is not mentioned in the novel, but we can infer the fact from the several references made to Bangui, the capital of the Central African Republic, and to the neighbouring countries - Chad, Cameroon, Congo and Sudan: "Cette région est attachante bien que située à plus de sept cents kilomètres de Bangui, bien qu'elle apparaisse un peu aux yeux des gens de la capitale comme "un trou perdu dans l'Est"" (p. 23)², "Il faut marcher trois ou quatre jours pour rejoindre une autre petite ville plus au nord, un peu désertique, presque au Tchad..." (p. 3), "En ce moment dans tout le pays, même au Tchad, au Cameroun, au Congo, on a entendu son nom." (p. 103). References to other towns and districts, the river Ubangi,

². All subsequent references to the novel will be taken from its 1987 edition by *Présence Africaine*.

local drinks, and indigenous languages further strengthen the impression that Bamboté's novel is set in the Central African Republic: "La lettre arrive de Bambari à l'instant... même." (p. 68), "L'Ubangi pour me noyer. La corde pour me pendre." (p. 160), "... la musique dans toutes ces langues, et bien entendu en lingala et en sango." (p. 24). All these clues which tie in with the facts on the Central African Republic as presented by G. M. Grellet and others³ can help the reader identify the spatial setting of the novel and provide the significant perspectives from which the novel could be interpreted.

With respect to the time frame, events of the precolonial and colonial history of the Central African Republic are mentioned through references to King Bangasu and his descendants, foremost among whom is Alphonse Batila, nicknamed Monsieur Boy by a French colonialist. Again, Jonathan Ngate gives a synopsis of the history:

The European conquest, followed by the creation, within arbitrary borders, of the French territory of the Ubangi-Shari, brought to an end the real exercise of power by indigenous aristocrats such as Bangassou. From a simple colonial territory created at the beginning of this century, the Ubangi-Shari became the Central African Republic on December 1, 1958, and gained independence on August 13, 1960.⁴

The story in the novel takes place after the country has gained independence from the French colonial power. The country has a President and is divided into administrative units. The administrative head of Uandja is Monsieur Boy ("le commandant")

³ G. M. Grellet and others, *La République Centrafricaine*, (Paris: P.U.F., 1982).

⁴ *Francophone African Literature: Reading a Literary Tradition*, p. 110.

and there is constant reference to the authorities in Bangui who determine and ensure the implementation of Government policy. Monsieur Boy is supposed to receive orders from Bangui although he seems to ignore them; he refuses to issue a mining permit for diamond to Mokta, a prominent trader, even though it is evident that the authorities in Bangui want him to do so: "Je suis allé à Bangui. On me dit que l'autorisation c'est sous tes doigts dans ta signature" (p. 28). In order to underscore the period during which the events in the novel are taking place, allusions are made to Monsieur Boy's past: "Monsieur Boy boit du thé depuis 1930. A cette époque, ses affaires, qui étaient celles surtout de l'administration coloniale, l'amenaient une ou deux fois, parfois trois fois dans l'année, en "territoire anglais", c'est-à-dire au Soudan..." (p. 14), "Il y serait reçu comme un roi bien qu'il soit parti à l'âge de quatorze ans et cela fait vingt-cinq ans qu'il est loin de son "pays natal"." (p. 17). Again, these references to the time frame of the events in the novel help situate the story and facilitate an informed interpretation of the excerpt, and ultimately the work.

5.2.1.2 Life and works of Makombo Bamboté

Even though the above information can be gathered and analyzed directly from *Princesse Mandapu*, evidence that the setting is in the Central African Republic is further corroborated when we consider the author's biography and how his life and experiences are reflected in the novel. Relevant information on Bamboté's life would help the translator understand some of the references made in the novel.

Pierre Makombo Bamboté⁵ was born on 1 April 1932 in Wadda, Haute Kotto district, Central African Republic. He received his primary and part of secondary education in Bambari until 1949 when he left for France. While in France, he continued his studies at the "Collège de Die" in Drôme and various colleges in Nérac, Le Havre, and Saint Germain-en-Laye. He later studied at the "Université de la Sorbonne", the "Ecole Supérieure de Journalisme", and the "Ecole des Hautes Etudes Internationales" in Paris.

After his studies, Bamboté returned to his country where he held several positions in the administration, including Director of Information and Director of the National Museum in Bangui. In 1970, he was appointed Professor of African Literature at Université Laval, Quebec, Canada, a position he held for only a short time until April that same year when he became his country's delegate to UNESCO in Paris.

Despite Bamboté's varied career in the civil service of the Central African Republic, however, our interest in this work will revolve around his literary achievements. He has written short stories, novels, and poems. His poetry collections include *La Poésie dans l'histoire* (1960), *Le dur avenir* (1965), *Technique pour rien* (1973), etc. With regard to prose fiction, his short stories include *Les Deux Oiseaux de l'Oubangui* (1968), *Civilisation des autres* (1973), and *Nouvelles de Bangui* (1981),

⁵ Biographical details on Bamboté have been culled from Janheinz Jahn and others, *Who's Who in African Literature* (Tübingen: Horst Erdmann Verlag, 1972); Ambroise Kom, *Dictionnaire des oeuvres littéraires négro-africaines de langue française* (Paris: Editions NAAMAN & ACCT, 1983) and Hans M. Zell, Carol Bundy, and Virginia Coulon, eds., *A New Reader's Guide to African Literature* (London: Heinemann, 1983).

a collection of fourteen short stories that won the 1980 prize of the journal "Etudes Françaises"; *Les Randonnées de Daba (de Ouadda à Bangui)* (1966) - a novel for children - and *Princesse Mandapu* (1972) are among his major novels.

Bamboté's familiarity with his country has enabled him to depict the spatial setting of *Princesse Mandapu*; in this respect, he is like many other African novelists who often reflect some aspects of their environment and experiences in their literary creations. However, as Ngate is quick to point out, the author does not give a totally factual portrayal of his environment in the novel. Even though references are made to several towns and other facts that imply familiarity with the Central African Republic, certain features have been transformed in the novel:

Beginning with the fact that Uandja in this novel does not have as its referent a river - since a river of this name does actually flow in the part of the Central African Republic where Bamboté situates his little town - but a fictitious town...⁶

This shows that although the story of *Princesse Mandapu* is fictional, its setting hinges on reality in certain respects; hence the relevance to an interpretation of the novel of certain facts about the Central African Republic and the author.

Furthermore, like several other African writers, Bamboté is concerned with the problem of language in African literature. He alludes to this problem when Monsieur Boy, after escaping from a buffalo he has shot but not killed, climbs up into a tree and is reflecting as he waits for the vengeful beast to die. The questions reveal the African writer's predicament: "Il écrit en

⁶ *Francophone African Literature: Reading a Literary Tradition*, p. 112.

français. Pourquoi n'écrit-il pas en sango?"... "Qui te lirait ici si tu écrivais en sango?"... "Si j'écrivais en sango quelle imprimerie me publierait?" (p. 49). The author is here trying to justify why he has to write in French even though he would have preferred to write in his mother tongue, Sango, so that his countrymen can read his books. Unfortunately, the majority of the population is illiterate; only a very low percentage of the people are educated in French, and even a lower rate can read and write Sango. Bamboté also hints at his stay in Canada: "Son propre fils vit au Canada plutôt à côté de Québec... Vit à Courville dans le froid." (p. 49).

As can be seen, I have tried to limit myself only to aspects of the author's life that I believe have a bearing on the novel. In doing this, my major concern has been to provide relevant biographical information that might widen the translator's horizon of expectation and increase his or her chances of making an informed interpretation of the novel. However, a knowledge of the author would at best only supplement the translator's understanding of the novel; a close reading of the novel still remains an indispensable approach towards ample comprehension and appreciation.

5.2.1.3 Situation of the excerpt in relation to the novel

Princesse Mandapu, a novel of 160 pages, depicts the lives of people living in a small town called Uandja. Life seems to revolve around the main market-place which is surrounded by the forest. The administrative authority of the town, Alphonse Batila (Monsieur Boy), is a descendant of King Bangasu. He is a long-

serving civil servant who, after fighting in the First World War, returns home and works his way up in the colonial administration and eventually attains the position of "commandant" when his country gains independence. Monsieur Boy has three wives and many children; he has initiated most of the development projects in the town and is fondly addressed as "papa" by the people, despite his rather high-handed exercise of authority. His main rival in the town is a renowned trader, Mokta, who seems to be quite influential among the central authorities in the capital town, Bangui. Mokta is seeking a mining permit for diamond in Uandja but Monsieur Boy, the competent authority for such matters, refuses to issue him the permit despite bribes and threats from the trader. In anger, and even frustration, Mokta attacks Monsieur Boy and is imprisoned by the latter. After his release, Mokta bribes the authorities in Bangui to transfer Monsieur Boy to the capital. The "commandant" leaves Uandja a subdued and ruined man, unable to take along his herd of goats and sheep which constitute the bulk of his wealth. The village chief and his subjects contribute money to assist the outgoing administrator.

In another connection, Mokta intends to marry the baby of one of Monsieur Boy's wives if she gives birth to a girl; however, a boy is born and he has to wait for the other pregnant wife to have her baby. Fortunately, a baby girl is born and is named after Monsieur Boy's first wife, Mandapu. She is called Princess Mandapu because her father is a direct descendant of King Bangasu. Although the baby is nearly killed at birth by the attendant midwife who has been bribed by Mokta to carry out the

revenge, she finally dies quite young on the operating table after she is scalded by hot water.

A look at the title of the novel, however, makes one wonder why the author chose it; the plot dwells on the conflict between Mokta and Monsieur Boy, while Princess Mandapu appears only towards the end of the story and dies not long after. On closer scrutiny, the significance of the title becomes evident as the reader is constantly reminded of the deal between Monsieur Boy and Mokta; moreover, the name "Mandapu" means "the price of the deal". All the same, the title seems ironic when one considers the fact that Mandapu is the "princess" of a future king who will have only moral authority in a part of the country under presidential rule.

The excerpt I have chosen for translation covers the first 52 pages of the novel. It introduces the main characters and the conflict that will sustain the plot. Mokta's intention to marry Monsieur Boy's daughter is announced, and the excerpt could be considered as forming a sub-unit on its own in relation to the rest of the novel. Nonetheless, the excerpt has been chosen mainly because of its suitability for demonstrating the analysis and transfer strategies involved in translation. It presents many features that are likely to be encountered in most francophone African literary works: African setting, frequent references to African cultural objects and expressions, a style which presupposes the reader's familiarity with the historical, political, and social background of Africa, etc. Admittedly, the excerpt does not contain all the significant features of the novel; consequently, examples will be taken from the rest of the

novel, where necessary, to illustrate translation problems and how they could be solved. In addition to the socio-cultural and thematic aspects of the novel, the excerpt also presents salient aspects of the author's style. Some of these aspects will be examined as part of a linguistic analysis of the text.

5.2.1.4 Bamboté's style in *Princesse Mandapu*

Like most African writers using foreign languages to depict their culture and society, Bamboté has had to adapt the French language to the needs of the African setting. In his attempt to provide a spatio-temporal setting for *Princesse Mandapu*, his characters have African (or more precisely, Centrafrican) names: Batila, Mandapu, Ya, Za, etc. Even where the name is not African, it is either a nickname (for example Monsieur Boy) that underscores the relationship between the colonialists and the Africans, or a descriptive name in French (for example Briseur d'O's and Grosses Couilles). Although the name of the small town in which the story unfolds is fictitious (Uandja), it is in fact the name of a river in the Central African Republic as we saw earlier. Bamboté also refers to existing towns (Bangui, Bambari, etc.), countries (Chad, Cameroon, Congo, Sudan), rivers (the Ubangi), cultural objects (kundi, etc.), local drinks (hargui, ngbako, etc.), and clothing (chéchia, pagne, etc). Moreover, forms of interjections have also been africanized; for example, "Elle faisait: "Hou! houou!." (p. 36). These features, as well as other cultural references, will be discussed in more detail when examining attempts to translate them into English.

Bamboté's style in the novel is further marked by the

frequent use of the demonstrative adjective. As Maurice Grevisse points out, in French:

Les adjectifs démonstratifs marquent, en général, que l'on montre (réellement ou par figure) les êtres ou les objets désignés par les noms auxquels ils sont joints...

L'adjectif démonstratif possède, à côté de sa valeur proprement démonstrative, diverses valeurs figurées:

1. Il s'emploie fréquemment pour indiquer que le nom désigne un être ou une chose qu'on vient de nommer ou dont on va parler...

3. Il s'emploie au lieu de l'article pour mieux attirer l'attention en désignant le nom, tantôt avec une certaine emphase ou un certain respect, tantôt avec une nuance péjorative.⁷

In the novel, Bamboté uses the demonstrative adjective as part of his narrative technique at certain points to make his descriptions real, to convince the reader that what is being described really exists. For example, in "L'important dans cette petite ville, c'est la place centrale." (p. 3, emphasis mine), the attempt is to convince the reader of the existence of a specific town. The same attempt at identification is also evident in "Cette lumière qui s'en va ennuie beaucoup Monsieur Boy." (p. 19). The use of the demonstrative adjective instead of any other deictic in these examples is significant, and the narrator seems to be pointing to or showing the reader what is being described. At other points in the narrative, Bamboté also uses the demonstrative adjective to refer to what has been mentioned earlier or when referring to a noun in a derogatory manner: "La femme fait entendre un étrange bruit de gorge... Cet étrange bruit de gorge signifiait aussi bien..." (pp. 19-20) and "Demain, j'irai voir ce fils de chien." (p. 41).

⁷ Maurice Grevisse, *Le Bon Usage* (Gembloux: Duculot, 1975), p. 403.

Another significant aspect of Bamboté's style in the novel is his use of the present tense to narrate the story. Again, Maurice Grevisse has identified several uses of the present tense in French among which is that to denote:

Un fait qui a lieu dans un passé plus ou moins éloigné, mais que l'on présente comme s'il était en train de se produire au moment où on parle: c'est le "présent historique" ou "narratif", fréquemment employé pour donner au récit une vivacité particulière...

Ce présent historique peut se trouver associé à un temps passé, mais alors le présent doit exprimer les faits essentiels, et le passé, les faits accessoires, les explications.⁸

Bamboté uses the present tense, instead of the past, in his narrative in order to portray the action as unfolding in front of the reader at the time of reading. For example, in "Il regarde de travers le domestique dont on peut dire qu'il est en guenilles et s'assied sur une chaise. S'agenouillant sans bruit, le domestique ôte les chaussures de toile blanche des pieds de Monsieur Boy, les pose au loin pour ne pas les mouiller, et, ces pieds, là posés dans la cuvette, il les lave soigneusement un à un, et un à un sur ses genoux les essuie." (pp. 9-10), the reader sees the action as if happening at the time of reading even though the narrator is relating the story of what has already taken place. Moreover, the use of the present highlights the orality of the text. Again, most of the dialogue among the characters is introduced or portrayed as taking place in the present: "Salut grand Mokta, salut", murmure-t-elle." (p. 14).

When other tenses are used, this is done in relation to the narrative present of the story. For example, the perfect tense

⁸ *Le Bon Usage*, p. 721.

(passé composé) is used in certain instances to denote actions that took place in the recent past or in the past with consequences in the present: "Je suis allé à Bangui..." (p. 14) and "Papa a trouvé une fourmi dans l'eau. Il n'est pas content." (p. 9). The other tenses used include the imperfect, the pluperfect, the conditional, etc. The variation in use of tenses is significant especially in descriptive passages as well as flashbacks and internal monologues by Monsieur Boy.

Furthermore, the narrative and dialogue do not always follow the structure of normal complete sentences; the use of elliptical or telegraphic sentences and rejoinders implies that the reader has an active role to play in understanding the novel. For example, in "Dimanche, jour de grâce et de repos. Paix dans le coeur de Monsieur Boy." (p. 31) and "L'alcool, le hargui, est fort. De qualité supérieure. On pourrait allumer la lampe avec." (p. 33), the sentences are incomplete, followed by rejoinders, and the reader has to reconstruct the meaning from the half sentences. Even the use of suspension points, which indicate incomplete sentences or that certain ideas have been left out, requires that the reader fills the gaps; for example, "Cet "Arabe"-là passe pour être "fakir" et s'il veut briser la carrière d'un fonctionnaire..." (p. 39) and "Le campement des soldats avec ses cases en demi-cercle avec la maison carrée du sergent au bout..." (p. 7). Although the "jerky half-sentences, exclamations, hermetic allusions, like thoughts half-formulated, as though moved by the desire to economize his expression"⁹ and

⁹. Dorothy Blair, *African Literature in French* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), p. 316.

the rather implicit mode of narrative give room for misinterpretation or even lack of understanding on the part of the uninformed reader, the narrative is thus significantly oral and forceful, giving the impression that the narrator is in front of the reader and talking to him directly, not requiring complete sentences.

Despite the prevalence of short elliptical sentences and rejoinders, however, some of the sentences in the novel, especially those used for descriptions, are quite long and complex. For example, "Sa journée de fonctionnaire terminée, jugeant que pour son honorabilité, il se doit aujourd'hui de rentrer tout droit chez lui au lieu de poursuivre quelque aventure laquelle peut toujours attendre, Monsieur Boy pose un pied puis un autre sur les marches de l'escalier de son "bureau", une maison qui en fait fonction." (p. 7) is a very long and complex sentence, difficult to analyze and understand, and requires of the reader more attention and participation in the comprehension process. In *Princesse Mandapu*, Bamboté uses several long and complex sentences, especially in his description of Uandja where he wants to present as many features as possible while avoiding too many short sentences and repetitions.

In many instances, the reader shares the main character's emotions or state of mind through monologues which reveal his innermost thoughts. For example, when Monsieur Boy climbs up into the "Bangasu tree" after shooting the buffalo, his thoughts are revealed to the reader through a long internal monologue: "Subitement, Monsieur Boy, le front appuyé contre le tronc de l'arbre, solitaire, commence à philosopher sur la vie et la mort,

le regard en bas, fixe... "La ville? Que devient-elle?" se demande-t-il. En révolution. On a dû se rendre compte de l'absence du "commandant". L'organisation comme toujours commence lentement. Bientôt on va se mettre à sa recherche." (p. 46). Some of the thoughts of Monsieur Boy are flashbacks to previous events; for instance, while still on the "Bangasu tree", he takes the reader back to the events of the First World War and his son's last visit. (pp. 47-51) The mixture of thoughts on the present and flashbacks calls for much attention from the reader who has to distinguish them in order to avoid confusion.

All in all, Jonathan Ngate sums up Bamboté's style in *Princesse Mandapu* in the following words:

... a form of writing (écriture) characterized by its oral quality: dialogues, with generally short rejoinders, are commonplace. And the combined use of the direct and the free indirect discourse allows us to follow the formulation of the characters' ideas with the attendant hesitations, flashbacks and elliptical constructions. As for syntax, it is characterized by a generalized tendency toward the suppression of grammatical function-words. In brief, regular, "bookish", syntax is upset in this way. Even the narration is often reduced to a series of telegraphic notations.¹⁰

Given the theme, setting, and style of *Princesse Mandapu*, Bamboté's primary audience would likely be readers who are familiar with the Central African Republic or are ready to find out the relevant presupposed background material.

5.2.1.5 The audience of *Princesse Mandapu*

Bamboté's decision to use French and make geographical, historical, political, and cultural references which he fails to

¹⁰ *Francophone African Literature: Reading a Literary Tradition*, p. 121.

explain give the impression that he is writing for French-speaking readers whom he feels are already familiar with the setting of the novel, or will look for the relevant background information. As we have seen, the references all point to the Central African Republic as the probable setting. The reader therefore needs to be acquainted with the history (especially the period under French colonial rule and after independence), geography, and culture of the Central African Republic so as to construct an informed interpretation of *Princesse Mandapu*. In view of the above considerations, one can with good reason postulate that the novel is intended primarily for Centrafricans who are educated in French, this on the assumption that these Centrafricans are also well acquainted with the geography, history, and culture of their country.

Furthermore, the novel could also be intended for other French-speaking Africans with a similar culture and colonial experience, who are familiar with Centraffrican geography and history; these other Africans could include Cameroonians, Chadians, Senegalese, Gabonese, etc. Again, the novel could well be intended for non-Africans all over the world who can read and understand French and possess the implicit or prior knowledge required of the reader.

In reality, however, the novel was published in France where the majority of the readers are French and a few Africans, much less Central Africans. Even in the Central African Republic and Africa as a whole, the readership would be quite limited due mainly to the low literacy rate and poor reading habits. Many non-African readers and educational institutions seem to be

interested in the African point of view on the colonization and post-colonial period and so are prepared to acquire the presumed knowledge on the novel's setting. Hence, despite Bamboté's failure to provide any information on the setting of his novel, thereby making it difficult for readers not familiar with the Central African Republic to understand the narrative, the work is read mainly by the French and, to a certain extent, by educated French-speaking Africans and other non-Africans.

5.2.2 Translation options for *Princesse Mandapu*

In the translation of *Princesse Mandapu* into English, as in any translation, a translator can choose from a range of strategies available. Depending on the option chosen, a translation will be expected to fulfil a given function for the target readers. As translator, I can decide to make my translation of *Princesse Mandapu* easily understood mainly by persons who possess the extra-textual knowledge assumed by Bamboté. In such a case, I will, like Bamboté, make no effort to shed light on the geographical, historical and cultural presuppositions of the setting of the novel. Readers will therefore be required to be familiar with the Central African Republic or look for the relevant background information. Since many non-African English-speaking readers might not be acquainted with the Central African setting, it is very likely that they will not be in a position to understand and enjoy the translation.

On the other hand, I can opt to adapt the novel to the needs of a specific group of readers with similar cultural and literary

backgrounds, for example a British audience. In such a translation, the names of persons and places might be anglicized and English functional equivalents sought for cultural referents. Indeed, every effort could also be made to ensure that British readers did not realize that the original text was written by a Centrafrican in French. This strategy may of course result in a translation that has very little in common with the ST.

Again, if I want non-Africans and those who do not have the relevant background information to read and understand Bamboté's novel, I can adopt another strategy. Such a strategy presupposes that an understanding of the language in which the text is written cannot alone enable the reader to grasp the message of the text. In an excerpt like the one I have chosen to translate which relies heavily on extra-textual information for adequate understanding, the said information is required not only on the part of the translator, but also on that of some readers.

In the translation below, I have opted to try and make it accessible to English-speaking readers, including those not familiar with the setting of Bamboté's novel; moreover, I will attempt, as best I can, to convey the local colour and cohesion of the ST, as well as reflect its stylistic features.

5.2.3 The audience for the translation of *Princesse Mandapu*

The excerpt will be translated into English in order to make it available to English-speakers who cannot read and understand French. These English-speakers may live in many parts of the world (Africa, Europe, North America, etc.) and have diverse horizons of expectation; although they can all read and

understand English, not all of them would have the background knowledge that might further enhance understanding of the novel.

I therefore have to decide on how to provide relevant background information in my translation without holding up the flow of the story or making clumsy sentences. There is a limit as to the kinds and length of explanatory additions and/or expansions that I can make within the translation itself. Consequently, I would prefer to communicate the supplementary information required by the uninformed reader, not within the translation but outside the body of the text, in an introduction and in explanatory endnotes for certain terms and expressions not covered in the introduction. In this way, any reader who does not need the information would read the text directly, and would not therefore be inconvenienced by cumbersome additions or comments within the text or at the bottom of the page. Thus the background information provided above will serve as an introduction to the translation.

5.2.4 Discussion of translation choices

As Edna Aphek and Beth Uval have noted, a literary translation will not always capture all the facets of the ST:

Every translation is the result of a selection process: any single translation, much like the blind man's perception of the elephant, will convey only a fraction of the whole, only a few of the text's multiple levels at the expense of others. The translator must therefore choose what to incorporate and what to sacrifice.¹¹

A literary work would therefore be interpreted in various ways

¹¹ "On the translation of "Talit aharet", a short story by S.Y. Agnon-1", *Babel*, 35.2 (1989), 87-97 (p. 89).

depending on what the reader considers as significant and the relevant extra-textual information at his or her disposal. The translation of the excerpt that follows should thus be viewed as the result of one interpretation among several possible readings, an attempt to convey as many of the ST levels as possible. The translation choices will be discussed as the result of analysis and transfer strategies at the lexical, syntactic, stylistic, and literary levels. Despite the fact that this approach is somehow abstract since all the levels are related to one another and cut across each other, I feel it is a convenient and systematic way of trying to show how strategies and decisions have led to certain choices. Emphasis will be laid on problems peculiar to the translation of African literature, the treatment of problems common¹² to all literary translations between English and French being discussed only superficially where necessary. Furthermore, instead of a linear or sentence-by-sentence discussion of the problems encountered, which would probably result in unnecessary repetition and monotony in certain cases, the problems will be grouped into categories and examined with a few significant examples.

¹² The common problems have already been extensively discussed by researchers such as Jean-Paul Vinay and Jean Darbelnet in *Stylistique comparée du français et de l'anglais* (Paris: Didier, 1958), J. Guillemin-Flescher in *Syntaxe comparée du français et de l'anglais* (Gap: Ophrys, 1981), G. Garnier in *Linguistique et traduction: éléments de systématique verbale comparée du français et de l'anglais* (Caen: Paradigme, 1985) and Hélène Chuquet and Michel Paillard in *Approche linguistique des problèmes de traduction* (Gap: Ophrys, 1989).

5.2.4.1 The translation of names

Proper names in the excerpt have been preserved in the translation since they contribute towards identifying the setting. Names of characters (e.g. Mandapu, Batila, Ya, Za, etc.), of rivers (the river Ubangi) and of places (Bangui, Uandja, Bambari, etc.) have accordingly been maintained.

Difficulties arise, however, when dealing with nicknames, for instance "Monsieur Boy", "Briseur d'O's" and "Grosses Couilles". These names, which are used in addition to the characters' real names, often describe or indicate significant aspects of the said characters. For example, Alphonse Batila has been given the nickname "Monsieur Boy" by his French colonial master. In the name, "Monsieur" could be considered as a title and "Boy" portrays the relationship of master and servant between the French colonialist and Alphonse Batila; the title is, of course, rather pompous for a servant. It should be noted that nicknames for Africans was a common practice among the colonialists who found African names difficult to remember and pronounce.

Some of Mongo Beti's characters are also referred to by their nicknames in *Mission terminée*: "Yohannès le Palmipède" (p. 54), "Pétrus Fils-de-Dieu" (p. 55), and "Abraham le Désossé" (p. 56) rendered as "Duckfoot Johnny" (p. 32), "Petrus Son-of-God" (p. 33), and "Abraham the Boneless Wonder" (p. 35) respectively. In these renditions, Peter Green has translated the idea conveyed by the names which describe certain significant features of the characters. John Reed has also rendered "Gosier d'Oiseau" (*Une Vie de boy*, p. 38) as "Gullet" (*Houseboy*, p. 28).

In the excerpt, I have maintained the nickname as it is, "Monsieur Boy", instead of translating it into English as "Mr Boy" so as to preserve his identity, since the name does not describe an aspect of him but appears as his real name in official documents and is still being used even after the departure of the colonialists.

On the other hand, I have decided to translate "Briseur d'Os" which describes the gendarme's prominent feature and underscores the fact that he is very powerful and can easily crush the bones of any person who dares to stand against him. Curiously enough, we are not given his real name and his nickname seems to have overshadowed his real name. I have attempted to convey the idea behind the nickname by rendering it as "Bone Crusher". The word "Crusher" seems more appropriate than "Breaker" to stress the fact, as in the French, that he does not only break the bones of opponents, he crushes them to pieces. The other nickname "Grosses Couilles", not within the excerpt but in the rest of the novel, could also be translated following the above method as "Big Balls".

The names of places which already have accepted English spellings have been written as in English; for instance, Cameroun becomes Cameroon and Tchad, Chad.

5.2.4.2 The translation of culture-bound terms

In the excerpt, culture-bound terms comprise names of objects, food, drinks, clothing, etc. that are peculiar to the Centrafrican setting. The author has alluded to these items in such a way that only readers familiar with the Central African

Republic would easily understand or know them; he makes very little attempt to define or explain the words and does not provide a glossary at the end of the story for those who may need further information. Since I would like my translation to be read by a wide and diverse audience of English-speakers, I have decided to maintain the terms that have no suitable equivalents in English and provide further information or explanations such that both the informed and uninformed readers will be able to understand the culture-bound references. Hence I have preserved terms such as "kundi", "hargui", "ngbako", "chechia" etc. and provided endnotes to define or explain them. In this way, I can avoid padding out the translation with lengthy information, thereby making it cumbersome and even holding up the story at certain points.

However, some of the culture-bound words have been translated since possible equivalents already exist in English; these include "chef de village", "notable", "commandant", "arbre à Bangasu", "feuilles de manioc", "lit de bambou", "pagne", "concession", "amande de noix de palme", etc. For example, in the sentence "On a dû se rendre compte de l'absence du "commandant"." (p. 46), the word "commandant" in French generally denotes a rank in the armed forces. However, as pointed out by Brenda Packman, "commandant" was "the French colonial administrator with a military background and considerable powers over his own district. In the English system, however, this type of administrator did not exist."¹³ In *Princesse Mandapu*, Monsieur

¹³ "Some Problems of Translation in African Literature", p. 74.

Boy is "commandant" of Uandja after the departure of the French colonialists; the country is already independent with a President and a central administration in Bangui, the capital. Although the administrative head of the small town is still the "commandant", the emphasis after independence is on administration rather than military background. Thus while in texts depicting colonial rule (e.g. *Une Vie de boy* by Ferdinand Oyono) it would be necessary in translation to take into account the military background of the administrator and borrow "commandant" into English since no such administrator exists in the English system (as John Reed does in his translation of *Une Vie de boy*), the situation in the former French colonies after independence is different: the administrator does not necessarily have a military background. In the novel, we are told that Monsieur Boy had fought in the First World War but there is no indication that he acquired any commanding rank in the army. Rather, we are constantly reminded that he is a civil servant who has worked his way up the ranks in the civil service; he is the administrator of Uandja. In the administrative set-up after independence, the administrator of a small town like Uandja would be a sub-prefect (a prefect being in charge of a big town). I have therefore rendered "commandant" as "sub-prefect", taking into account the context. In other countries like Cameroon with a similar administrative structure, the official title would be "subdivisional officer" who is in charge of a subdivision. All the same, the title "sub-prefect" would apply to all former French colonies, and English-speakers are familiar with the term. It should be noted, however, that the terms "préfet" and "sous-préfet" are currently used with

reference to administrators in France and several former French colonies instead of "commandant".

Furthermore, "arbre à Bangasu" has been rendered as "Bangasu tree". As indicated by Jonathan Ngate, "King Bangassou who died in 1907, has a grave marked by a tree."¹⁴ In the novel, we are neither told the Uandjaian nor French name of the tree. In fact, we are only informed that the tree belongs to the Bangasu family and is inhabited by a green snake, the totem of the family. It is common practice among traditional African families to have totems (usually animals) that protect the families against any danger or disease. The translation thus attempts to reflect the fact that the tree belongs to the Bangasu family.

As concerns "lit de bambou", I have translated it in terms of the context. In the sentence "Et quand le dispensaire rejette un cadavre dans le grand soleil, avant que des parents éplorés n'emportent le corps sur un lit de bambou, la place de la petite ville a eu sa part secrète du repas." (p. 3), "lit de bambou" is translated as "bamboo stretcher" even though in other contexts where a bed is intended "bamboo bed" would be appropriate; for instance, John Reed has rendered "Elle éclaira le bord du lit de bambou où gisait l'agonisant." (*Une Vie de boy*, p. 13) by "It lit up the side of the bamboo bed on which the dying man lay." (*Houseboy*, p. 8). It is also worth noting that anglophone African writers use the term "bamboo bed": "Emenike waved his hands and slumped onto his bamboo bed." (*The Concubine*, p. 2) In the present context, however, the weeping relatives carry away the

¹⁴ *Francophone African Literature: Reading a Literary Tradition*, p. 110.

corpse on a stretcher rather than on a bed.

"Chef de village" and "notable" are rendered by "village chief" and "notable" respectively in the sentences: "Papa", dit le chef de village..." (p. 146) and "La deuxième ou troisième personne à avoir dicté en partie cette lettre est un notable." (p. 42). Although the two terms are peculiar to the setting of the novel, their equivalents exist in English and are widely used in the African context. For instance, "chef de village" in "Le chef du village lui-même n'avait pas dédaigné de venir..." (*Mission terminée*, p. 113) has been rendered by Peter Green as "The village chief had actually condescended to appear in person..." (*Mission to Kala*, p. 77).

The term "concession" is used in several francophone African literary works with the meaning of "terrain, le plus souvent clos, regroupant autour d'une cour un ensemble d'habitations occupées par une famille."¹⁵ Some translators have rendered the term in English as "concession" while others have used "compound". For example, James Kirkup has translated "concession" in "C'est en riant que nous gagnâmes notre concession." (*Dramouss*, pp. 52-53) as "concession": "We were still laughing when we reached our concession." (*A Dream of Africa*, p. 41) On the other hand, Modupé Bodé-Thomas preferred "compound" when he rendered "Nos grand'mères dont les concessions étaient séparées par une tapade..." (*Une si longue lettre*, p. 7) by "Our grandmothers in their compounds were separated by a fence..." (*So Long a Letter*, p. 1). Taking into consideration the meaning of

¹⁵ *Le Petit Larousse Illustré* (Paris: Larousse, 1993), p. 254.

the word in French, none of the meanings of "concession" in English seems to convey a similar or equivalent idea, whereas "compound" reflects the intended French meaning and is even widely used by anglophone African writers and people: "His compound was small with only two houses in it." (*The Concubine*, p. 4).

As seen from the examples above, I have tried to convey, as much as possible, the ST culture by preserving cultural terms which have no suitable English equivalents and translating them where such equivalents exist.

5.2.4.3 The translation of exclamations

Generally speaking, people use different sounds or words in different cultures to express emotions such as surprise, fear, pain, etc. Some of the exclamations in *Princesse Mandapu* are peculiar to the Centrafriicans and have been faithfully transcribed by Bamboté instead of explaining or adapting them to the French language. In any attempt to convey the culture of a people therefore, these features are often taken into consideration by the translator. In my effort to preserve what is African or Centrafriican in the text and so show the English-speaking readers an aspect of the culture, I have maintained such exclamations as they are, hoping that the context in which they occur would help the reader understand. For example, in "Elle faisait: Hou! houou!" (p. 36.), the exclamation has been maintained in the translation in order to preserve the local colour: "She was shouting: Hou! houou!" This approach has also been adopted by several other translators; for instance, Ralph

Manheim has rendered "Elle reprit: "Yééé rêti! Fait chaud!" (*Le Devoir de violence*, p. 50) by "Yééé rêti," she said. "It's hot." (*Bound to Violence*, p. 37).

Where the exclamation is normal or common in French and is in no way peculiar to the Central African Republic, I have used an exclamation that would be accepted in English in similar circumstances. For instance, in "Hein?", s'étonne le gendarme..." (p. 34), the surprise is also conveyed in English by the translation: "Eh? What?" asked the gendarme in surprise..."

5.2.4.4 Syntactic choices in the translation

As already mentioned, Bamboté frequently uses elliptical sentences which leave out certain grammatically functional words. Some of the sentences are therefore not well-formed and appear to be incomplete. In my translation, I have maintained the elliptical nature of the sentences and rejoinders in order to convey Bamboté's omission of certain grammatical words. This structure of sentences seems to reflect the fact that thoughts are expressed as they come to the narrator's or main character's mind, even in bits, and so needs to be conveyed in the translation. Thus "Dimanche, jour de grâce et de repos. Paix dans le coeur de Monsieur Boy." (p. 31) is rendered as "Sunday, a day of grace and rest. Monsieur Boy's heart at peace." in an effort to convey the author's use of elliptical constructions and rejoinders.

5.2.4.5 Stylistic considerations in the translation

The use of the present narrative in *Princesse Mandapu* poses problems of translation into English. In French, this tense is extensively used in literary narrative and readers accept it as normal and quite readable. In English, on the other hand, although the present tense can be used in oral narrative especially by the working class, it is very rare in literary works; it sounds rather strange and makes for difficult reading. Thus while French narrative permits the use of the present even in written literature, in English such use highlights the orality of the text. Taking into account the difference in the frequency of use of the narrative present in the two languages therefore, I believe that it would be inappropriate to use the narrative present in the English translation. H el ene Chuquet and Michel Paillard have drawn attention to this problem:

Il est significatif de noter que des anglophones confront es   ce type de narration ont tendance naturellement   passer au pr t rit en anglais. Mais on ne peut pas pour autant affirmer que le pr sent soit impossible, et il ne faut pas  riger en principe ce qui est, peut- tre, une des limites de la traduction,   savoir une certaine neutralisation stylistique dans la langue d'arriv e par crainte du traducteur d'aller   l'encontre des tendances habituelles de la langue.¹⁶

While it may be possible to translate the French narrative present by the present tense in English as suggested above in certain cases, I feel, however, that the use of the narrative present in the English translation of the excerpt would foreground the tense and make for tedious reading, whereas the narrative present in *Princesse Mandapu* is normal and easy to read. Furthermore, since the narrative present is often

¹⁶ *Approche linguistique des probl mes de traduction*, p. 86.

associated with oral literacy, it would be inappropriate in this novel which could be considered as a piece of good written literature. I have therefore rendered the French narrative present by the conventional English narrative past tense which is generally accepted as normal in such writing and makes for easy reading. The present tense is used only in dialogues and in comments made by the narrator which are considered as general truths. Other tenses are used in relation to the narrative past tense and appropriate adjustments in adverbs of time, place, etc. are made.

Bamboté's use of imagery in his writing has also raised some difficulties in translation. For example, in "Les petites bouches doivent manger tout de suite du pain sinon les avions ne s'envoleront plus de la soirée. Il serait l'aéroport et le météorologiste." (p. 13) rendered as "The little mouths would have to eat bread immediately, or else the planes wouldn't take off again the whole evening. He'd become the airport and control tower.", an effort is being made to convey the image to English. In other instances, Bamboté uses similes in his descriptions; for instance, "... il fait du chemin sans en avoir l'air, comme un éléphant." (p. 31) describes the gendarme's movement by comparing it to that of an elephant. This comparison is preserved in the translation: "... and walked, without making it obvious, like an elephant."

5.3 The excerpt and its translation into English

The discussion of translation choices so far has attempted to justify the strategies and choices that I have made as

translator in analyzing and translating the excerpt. Of course, I have not been able to discuss every single choice; rather, the examples are meant to shed light on the translation as a whole. Following these discussions are the excerpt from *Princesse Mandapu* and its English translation.

1

L'important dans cette petite ville, c'est la place centrale. Un vrai bedon nu sans nom qui a tout mangé. Le bureau de l'administration, le dispensaire, chacun de son côté se réfugie le dos à la "brousse" immense. Il faut marcher trois ou quatre jours pour rejoindre une autre petite ville plus au nord, un peu désertique, presque au Tchad, "au pays des éléphants", ajoute-t-on toujours le regard gourmand quand on parle de ce nord-là, car de la viande boucanée cette place en a dévorée avec plus de satisfaction que le manioc par centaines de milliers de paniers ou de patates douces des samedis et

1

The important feature of that small town was the main market-place. A really large, bare and nameless area which had eaten up all available space. The sub-prefect's office and the dispensary were each tucked away at the sides, backing onto the vast "bushland". It took three or four days on foot to reach another small town further north, a barren area virtually in Chad, which was always fondly referred to as "the land of elephants" because the market-place had enjoyed smoked meat much more than the thousands of baskets of cassava or sweet potatoes brought every Saturday and other market

autres jours de marché. Et quand le dispensaire rejette un cadavre dans le grand soleil, avant que des parents éplorés n'emportent le corps sur un lit de bambou, la place de la petite ville a eu sa part secrète du repas. De même quand, à l'appel du clairon de cinq heures où l'on répartit dans la nuit les divers travaux à la population, un homme ou une femme est battu à mort. Non, il ne faut pas mentir, on meurt au dispensaire rougi de mercurochrome. Le mercurochrome laisse autant de traces sur la peau que la lanière d'hippopotame. Et souvent sans crier gare de petits diables en uniforme kaki jaillissent de la "brousse" de tous côtés envahissent cette place importante tandis que des

days. Moreover, whenever a corpse was left in the hot sun by the dispensary, the market-place always had its own discreet share of the meal before weeping relatives carried it away on its bamboo stretcher. Similarly, whenever the horn was blown at five o'clock in the morning to assign people various communal tasks¹, either a man or a woman was beaten to death. No, the truth must be told, patients died in the dispensary with red marks of mercurochrome on their bodies. Mercurochrome left as many marks on bodies as a hippopotamus-skin whip. And often, without any warning, fiendish men in khaki uniform would spring out of the bush and sweep into the market-place as women abandoned their sweet

femmes laissant là leurs patates douces, leurs tas d'arachides, se ruent vers les portes de quelques habitations lointaines. Les soldats de la ville sont en manoeuvres et les manoeuvres sont la guerre. En un tour de main, les marchandises sont mises à sac ou piétinées, éparpillées. Puis soudain, les soldats rejoignent les bois d'où ils ont jailli, par un petit chemin, en rangs, le fusil à l'épaule, la baïonnette rengainée, ils la traversent, cette place, le mouvement de leur bras gauche aussi rythmé que celui de leurs jambes bandées de laine verte. Ils ne connaissent plus personne. Ils ont les yeux aussi rouges que la flamme de leur coiffure, la chéchia. Ils rentrent dans

potatoes and heaps of groundnuts and dashed towards the doors of distant houses. The soldiers from town were out on manoeuvres and, as usual, manoeuvres took the form of war. In the twinkling of an eye, goods were ransacked or trampled underfoot and scattered. Then abruptly, with their guns on their shoulders and their bayonets sheathed, the soldiers would march in ranks along a small path back to the bush from where they had emerged. They marched across the market-place, moving their left arms in rhythm with their legs encased in green woollen bands. They no longer recognized anyone. Their eyes were as red as their headgear, the chechia. They were returning to camp,

leur campement et retrouvent leurs femmes, leurs enfants. Les marmots et leurs mères, quand ils descendent à la rivière, chercher de l'eau dans des seaux qu'on pose sur la tête, ne se distinguent pas des autres marmots et des autres mères qui vont se baigner et chercher de l'eau.

L'eau est pure et si sombre qu'on ne la dirait pas si pure, si fraîche, donc si bonne à boire et à s'y baigner si sans doute "quelqu'un" ne se chargeait de la rafraîchir. Qui? En tout cas "merci". Qui? Au plus haut des cieux.

De l'autre côté de la rivière un rocher sombre de la couleur de l'eau, l'eau ayant la couleur du ciel. Sur ce rocher un jeune homme nu comme un serpent, par suite du départ honteux de

back to their wives and children. When the little kids and their mothers went to the river to fetch water in buckets which they carried on their heads, they were no different from any other kids and their mothers going to bathe and fetch water.

The water was pure, but so dark that it was hard to say it was pure and cool, and therefore good to drink and bathe in, if "someone" had not kept it like that. Who? Well, thanks anyway. Who? Up there in the skies.

On the other side of the river was a rock, dark as the water which reflected the sky. On the rock, was a young man as naked as a serpent, a reminder of the shameful departure of the colonial administration; he was as dark as the rock itself of

l'administration des colonies, noir comme le rocher soi-même dont il constituerait une partie vivante, le jeune homme continuait seul à se donner en spectacle aux femmes et aux enfants. Du haut de ce rocher, interminablement il plongeait. Immanquablement on se bouchait tant bien que mal les yeux ou bien l'on poussait des cris. Le jeune homme entré dans l'eau en sortait la tête la première, nageait la brasse ou le papillon et, revenu sur la berge, enfilait sa culotte.

Les femmes et les enfants propres comme des sous traversent la place en une démarche tranquille, foulant aux pieds les grains de mil, de maïs ou de sésame tombés d'un panier. Cette importante place n'est pas

which he seemed to form a living part. He was showing off in front of the women and children. From the top of the rock, he would dive into the river again and again. And the onlookers would put their hands over their eyes or shriek. The young man would dive into the water, then his head would come out first and he would swim back breast-stroke or butterfly. Once on the bank, he slipped on his shorts.

The women and children, clean as new pins, walked silently across the market-place, stepping on grains of millet, maize or sesame which had fallen from baskets. The large market-place wasn't only carnivorous, it also consumed grain. Except grains of sand. Grains of sand controlled it.

seulement carnivore. Elle mange aussi des grains. Sauf les grains de sable. Ils la dominent, eux les grains de sable.

2

Sa journée de fonctionnaire terminée, jugeant que pour son honorabilité, il se doit aujourd'hui de rentrer tout droit chez lui au lieu de poursuivre quelque aventure laquelle peut toujours attendre, Monsieur Boy pose un pied puis un autre sur les marches de l'escalier de son "bureau", une maison qui en fait fonction.

"Tiens, le voilà!" disent ses femmes étonnées. Assises sur des nattes, la tête baissée, elles se tressent les cheveux. Elles sont derrière la maison, ces trois femmes de

2

After his day's work at the office, and feeling that it would be decent for him to go straight home that day instead of seeking any love affairs that could well be pursued later, Monsieur Boy stepped meticulously onto the steps of his "office" staircase. His office was in fact a house.

"Ah, here he comes!" shouted his wives, astonished. They were sitting on mats with their heads down, plaiting their hair. These three wives of a civil servant were behind the house, away from the gaze of the people in the marketplace and the nurse. "Is

fonctionnaire, à l'abri des regards de la place autant que de ceux de l'infirmier. "Tout est-il en ordre?" demande la première femme "afin qu'il ne hurle pas?" "Tout", dit une jeune femme dont le ventre montre qu'elle est enceinte de quatre ou cinq mois. "Le thé est sur le feu." "Bien", dit fraternellement la première femme, et toutes les trois continuent de se tresser les cheveux.

Comme chaque fois que Monsieur Boy rentre chez lui, il traverse dans toute sa longueur cette place qui lui appartient un peu. N'a-t-il pas, en partie, bâti la petite ville? "Le bureau", il en a lui-même dressé les plans, disons le plan sommaire. Le campement des soldats avec ses cases en

everything alright?" asked the first wife, "so that he doesn't start yelling at us?" "Everything," answered a young woman whose stomach showed that she was four or five months pregnant. "The water for tea is on the fire." "That's good," replied the first wife amicably, and they all continued plaiting their hair.

As was the case whenever Monsieur Boy went home, he walked right across the market-place which somehow belonged to him. After all, hadn't he, in some way, contributed towards building that small town? He was even the one who had drawn the plan, or rather the sketch, of the "office". The army camp with its semi-circular huts and the sergeant's square hut at the end...

demi-cercle avec la maison carrée du sergent au bout...

Sortant un à un des bois, la sueur aux joues, bien que harassés, en voyant Monsieur Boy, les enfants se mettent à courir dans sa direction. Monsieur Boy marche à leur rencontre, les dépasse, prend son dernier-né qui tient à peine debout, le projette en l'air. Le gosse rit. Projeté de nouveau en l'air tout nu, il ne rit plus et commence à pleurer.

"Tu vas lui décrocher le coeur." L'une des femmes de Monsieur Boy, pas forcément la mère, enlève l'enfant des mains de Monsieur Boy et le console. L'enfant consolé pleure plus tranquillement, bientôt jette des regards en direction de son père et ne le voyant pas il veut le rejoindre, il se démène,

Seeing Monsieur Boy, the children came out of the bush one after the other and, although tired out and with sweat-streaked faces, started to run towards him. Monsieur Boy walked to meet them, went past them, picked up his last born who could barely stand, and threw him up in the air. The kid laughed. When thrown up again completely naked, he stopped laughing and started to cry.

"You're going to frighten him to death." One of Monsieur Boy's wives, not necessarily his mother, took him and tried to console him. Once consoled, the child then cried more silently; however, he soon looked towards where his father had stood and, not finding him there, wanted to catch up with him. He then threw himself about and cried

pleure plus fort.

"Vas-y. Qu'il te tue!" dit la première femme qui n'est pas non plus la mère. La mère est la seconde femme de Monsieur Boy. Elle ne dit jamais rien, comme si elle rêvait toujours. On laisse donc le petit bout d'homme faire l'effort nécessaire. Il évite soigneusement le petit fossé creusé en carré autour de la maison et destiné à recueillir les eaux de pluie et à les conduire autant que possible dans la brousse, il contourne la maison, disparaît vers la grande place.

"Où allez-vous?" crient unanimement les trois femmes à une petite fille aux yeux éveillés comme les deux perles bleues qu'elle a aux oreilles, et à une autre fille un peu plus grande d'un

even more noisily.

"Go on then. Let him kill you!" said the first wife who wasn't his mother either. His mother was Monsieur Boy's second wife. She never spoke, and acted as though she were always in a dream. The scrap of a man was therefore able to get through. He carefully avoided the small gutter dug in the form of a square around the house to collect rain-water and convey as much of it as possible to the bush, went round the house and disappeared into the market-place.

"Where are you two going?" screamed the three women together to a small girl with eyes as bright as the two blue pearls on her ears, and to another girl an inch or so taller. They

ou deux doigts. Elles s'arrêtent, reviennent et reprennent leurs jeux de futures dames et futures mamans dans la cour où le soleil disparu du côté de la place projette la grande ombre du toit de la maison familiale.

La première femme, petite de taille et mince, sauf des hanches se lève péniblement, et comme si elle s'était assise dans la poussière, elle dénoue son pagne, le secoue paisiblement, et s'en entoure les hanches.

"Monsieur Boy prétend, dit-elle, qu'il faut chasser la peur chez le garçon dans le ventre même de sa mère."

La première femme attend une réponse qui ne tarde pas.

"Mais comment savoir que l'enfant est fille ou garçon

stopped, and went back to their games of being ladies and mothers in the courtyard on which the sun was projecting the shadow of the family home's roof as it disappeared in the direction of the market-place.

The first wife, who was short and slim except for her hips, stood up with difficulty and, as if she had been sitting in dust, untied her loincloth, shook it silently, and tied it around her hips again.

"Monsieur Boy," she said, "claims that a boy should be past fear when he's still in his mother's womb."

The first wife waited for a reply, which came almost immediately.

"But how can you know the sex of a baby in its mother's womb?" asked the

dans le ventre de sa mère?", dit la femme enceinte.

De la place, un garçon d'environ cinq ans arrive en courant.

"Papa a trouvé une fourmi dans l'eau. Il n'est pas content."

Le garçon repart en courant.

"Une fourmi dans l'eau?" demande la femme enceinte en regardant la première femme de Monsieur Boy qui baisse les yeux ennuyée. "J'ai pourtant posé la cuvette sur un banc." La femme enceinte est sur le point de fondre en larmes. "Ne t'en fais pas", dit brusquement la première femme. "Il a des domestiques et c'est leur travail. Tu vas voir comment il en boxera un s'il l'attrape."

"Es-tu sûre que la serviette soit encore là?",

pregnant woman.

From the market-place, a boy of about five came running.

"Papa has found an ant in the water. He's not happy."

The boy ran back.

"An ant in the water?" asked the pregnant woman, looking at Monsieur Boy's first wife who in turn looked down, worried. "But I put the basin on a bench." The pregnant woman was on the verge of tears. "Don't worry," said the first wife sharply. "He has servants and that's their job. He'll punch any of them he gets hold of, you'll see."

"Are you sure the towel is still there?" asked the second wife calmly, and fell back into her dreamy mood.

The first wife put her

dit posément la seconde femme qui repart dans ses songes.

La première femme porte la main à son coeur.

"Je vais voir", dit-elle. Elle rase le mur en y allant puis tend le cou: Monsieur Boy, le torse nu, est en train de se laver bruyamment sous la véranda. Les chèvres n'ont pas mangé la serviette-éponge. Un domestique, debout, la tient prête à servir Monsieur Boy. Après s'être essuyé, celui-ci fait les commentaires d'usage.

"Un tas de gens se nourrissent sur mon dos. Je ne suis pas servi. Aujourd'hui encore, j'ai trouvé cette fourmi dans mon eau. Si elle m'avait piqué la figure... Dieu est grand. Je me vengerai."

Il regarde de travers le

hand on her heart.

"I'll go and see," she said. She went quite close to the wall and craned her neck: Monsieur Boy, stripped to his waist, was washing noisily on the veranda. The goats hadn't eaten the towel. A servant was standing with it in his hand, ready to pass it to Monsieur Boy. After drying himself, Monsieur Boy made his usual remarks.

"I'm saddled with feeding a bunch of people. None of them bothers to look after me. I've found an ant in my water again today. What if it had bitten me on the face?... God is great! I'll get even."

He scowled at the servant, who could have been described as dressed in rags, and sat down on a chair. Kneeling silently, the

domestique dont on peut dire qu'il est en guenilles et s'assied sur une chaise. S'agenouillant sans bruit, le domestique ôte les chaussures de toile blanche des pieds de Monsieur Boy, les pose au loin pour ne pas les mouiller, et, ces pieds, là posés dans la cuvette, il les lave soigneusement un à un, et un à un sur ses genoux les essuie. Seulement ces sacrées sandales il les a encore oubliées. Une bonne partie de l'après-midi les mains autour du cou, il est resté là à surveiller la serviette, l'eau et la porte ouverte sur la place de Monsieur Boy.

Monsieur Boy lève la main, mais pourquoi salir la main qu'il vient de laver? Il lève le pied, mais, en dehors de ses cors douloureux, salirait-il le pied que le

servant took off Monsieur Boy's white canvas shoes and put them away so as not to wet them. He then put Monsieur Boy's feet in the basin, washed them carefully one after the other, and dried them on his knees. But he had forgotten those blessed sandals again! Most of that afternoon, he sat there with his hands around his neck, watching the towel, the water, and the door which opened onto Monsieur Boy's market-place.

Monsieur Boy raised his hand, but why should he dirty it after he had just washed it? He raised his foot, but, apart from his corns being painful, why should he dirty a foot that had just been washed with so much care by the servant? Monsieur Boy calmed down, slipped on his

domestique vient de laver si soigneusement? Monsieur Boy se calme, enfile les sandales que le domestique vient d'apporter, fait quelques pas, s'allonge dans sa chaise longue face à la grande place. Un moment il reste sans penser à rien comme s'il s'était oublié dans la satisfaction de se dire: "A des centaines de kilomètres à la ronde, c'est moi le maître. Euh!... enfin." Il est le maître malgré tout, Monsieur Boy. Il n'a pas besoin de se tâter pour savoir que son pistolet se trouve là chargé dans la poche de sa robe de chambre, car il a une robe de chambre, Monsieur Boy. Il tourne légèrement la tête: le domestique est assis près de la porte et la porte de Monsieur Boy est ouverte.

sandals which the servant had just brought, took a few steps, then lay back on his chaise longue facing the market-place. He lay there a moment, without thinking of anything as though he were lost in the satisfaction of telling himself: "I am master of hundreds of kilometres round here. Yes... oh yes, I am." Despite everything, Monsieur Boy was really the master. He didn't need to touch himself to know that his loaded pistol was in the pocket of his dressing gown, because he, Monsieur Boy, had a dressing gown. He turned his head slightly: the servant was sitting near the door, which was open. Night fell abruptly, totally. The moon appeared. Although Monsieur Boy was willing to wait for hours in complete

La nuit peut venir brusquement pleine et entière. La lune se montre. Si Monsieur Boy reste volontiers des heures à guetter dans l'obscurité totale quelque chose qui se déroulerait au coin de cette place, et toujours allongé dans sa chaise longue tirée sous la véranda, Monsieur Boy n'en attend pas moins que ce quelque chose puisse se réaliser sous la lune, mais il faut que nécessairement Monsieur Boy soit dans l'ombre pour assister au spectacle.

3

Monsieur Boy tient à l'honorabilité de sa famille, et la famille pour Monsieur Boy, c'est d'abord Monsieur Boy en personne, ensuite les femmes, d'abord la première,

darkness for something to happen in a corner of the market-place, stretched out on his chaise longue on the veranda, he nevertheless expected it to happen in the moonlight. But Monsieur Boy needed to be under cover of darkness to watch what happened.

3

Monsieur Boy valued his family's honour; for him, family was first of all himself, then his wives, starting with his first wife, then perhaps the boys, and

peut-être les garçons, enfin les enfants ou les femmes. Celles-ci, si elles font des bêtises, malgré le prix qu'il peut en coûter sur le plan affectif, on s'en sépare, non? Deux soirs de suite, Monsieur Boy ne sort pas. On a dû menacer de le tuer dans le noir ou de le jeter du haut pont enjambant l'étroite rivière un peu au sud de la ville. Mais comme Monsieur Boy a été soldat, qu'il a fait la guerre là-bas, qu'il a sans doute tué à la baïonnette ou par balle, qui pourrait menacer impunément de le tuer? On ne menace Monsieur Boy que d'un scandale susceptible d'éclater au grand jour. A propos d'un seul sujet: la "femme", telle ou telle femme mariée dont le mari de guerre lasse viendrait se plaindre

finally the other children and wives. If his wives did anything stupid, he would have no choice but to send them away despite the emotional consequences; people do separate, don't they? For two consecutive evenings, Monsieur Boy didn't go out. He would have to have been threatened with being killed in the dark or thrown off the high bridge over the narrow river a bit to the south of the town. However, since Monsieur Boy had been a soldier and had fought in the war, he must have killed people with his bayonet or bullets, so who would have the temerity to threaten to kill him? Monsieur Boy could be threatened only with a scandal that was likely to be made public. He was scared of only one thing: women.

bruyamment au bureau de Monsieur Boy soi-même, menaçant d'écrire au gouvernement une lettre déjà écrite d'ailleurs. Monsieur Boy tient à l'honorabilité de sa famille. Allongé dans sa chaise longue face à la grande place, il est le témoin de lui-même en cette fin d'après-midi. Les passants le saluent, il salue les passants. Tous voient bien qu'il est là, tranquille, public, et que ses enfants courent d'un bout à l'autre de la grande place, se roulent dans le sable en criant, faisant des sauts, des cabrioles, les petits fous et mimant les avions, bras tendus, en passant devant la chaise longue où repose le père. Un bon papa public.

"Tiens, prends ça et

He was afraid that the husband of some woman or other might come and complain noisily in Monsieur Boy's own office, threatening to send the authorities a letter he had already written. Monsieur Boy valued his family's honour. Lying in his chaise longue facing the market-place, he was his own witness that late afternoon. Passers-by greeted him, and he greeted them. They could all see him there, calm and unmistakable, while his children were running from one end of the market-place to the other, rolling in the sand and screaming. The crazy little kids capered about, flew like aeroplanes with their arms stretched out, passing the chaise longue on which their father was lying. A good public father.

mets-le dans la bouche de l'enfant", dit soudain Monsieur Boy, d'une voix assez haute pour être entendu par la jeune femme qui passe au large, son bébé au sein. Le domestique derrière lui crie, répète. La jeune femme, belle, encore à son premier enfant, arrive en se courbant jusqu'au sol et met un genou à terre. Monsieur Boy est ému par ce corps, ce sein gâché par le bébé qui tète, cette peau si lisse sous la poussière rouge des champs. Il plaisante: "Qu'as-tu dans ton petit panier? Tu ne penses jamais à moi. Tu ne me rapportes jamais rien."

Il fouille le panier. Une houe, un tubercule, un paquet de feuilles de manioc. Il la regarde bizarrement après avoir mis un bout de pain dans sa main.

"Here, take this and give it to the child," said Monsieur Boy abruptly, loud enough to be heard by the young woman passing at some distance from him, her baby at her breast. The servant behind her shouted, then shouted again. The young woman, who was beautiful and had had only one child, bent down on one knee. Monsieur Boy was moved by her body, her breast spoiled by the baby sucking it, her smooth skin reddened with dust from the fields. He said jokingly: "What's in your little basket? You never think of me. You never bring me anything."

He went through the basket. A hoe, a tuber and a bundle of cassava leaves². Then he looked at her strangely and put a piece of

"O... père! fait-elle, merci. Dieu te garde. Dieu garde tes enfants, tes femmes, ta famille entière."

Elle se confond, bien que déçue, en toutes sortes de paroles, et Monsieur Boy, voyant que la chose la plus importante pour elle en ce moment est de mettre entre lui et elle le plus de distance possible, rompt son pain dur et lui en donne un autre bout. La jeune femme s'éloigne après avoir reçu dans ses deux mains assemblées le don de Monsieur Boy. "Comme une paysanne qu'elle est", se dit Monsieur Boy patient. Il la suit distraitemment des yeux, oubliant d'entourer de nouveau son pain dans une serviette et sachant parfaitement que le domestique ne perd pas un mot

bread in her hand. "Oh... father!" she gasped, "Thank you. God be with you. God be with your children, wives and entire family."

Though disappointed, she was profuse in her words of thanks, and Monsieur Boy, realizing that what she desired most at that moment was to get as far away from him as possible, broke the hard bread and gave her another piece. After receiving Monsieur Boy's gift in both hands put together, the young woman went off. "What a peasant she is!" Monsieur Boy told himself patiently. Absent-mindedly, he followed her with his eyes, forgetting to wrap the bread back in a paper napkin; he knew perfectly well that the servant had noted every single word and gesture.

ni un signe.

Le pain, le pain vient de Bangui. C'est une nourriture de "qualité supérieure" destinée à la bouche d'une minorité. Le pain, Monsieur Boy veut leur en faire cadeau comme d'un gâteau à la fin d'un repas, par petites tranches beurrées, mais les avions arrivent bras tendus de l'autre bout de la place et atterrissent stupéfaits, muets. Monsieur Boy se dit avoir fait une bêtise. Les petites bouches doivent manger tout de suite du pain sinon les avions ne s'envoleront plus de la soirée. Il serait l'aéroport, le météorologiste. Enfin, du pain, les enfants doivent en manger. C'est leur gâteau. Ils partent ces oiseaux-là avec au bout d'une aile un

The bread, the bread was from Bangui. It was "high quality" food for a minority of the population. Monsieur Boy wanted to give them the bread, just as cake would usually be given after a meal, in small buttered slices; however, the planes arrived with outstretched arms from the other end of the market-place and landed, stunned and speechless. Monsieur Boy then realized he had made a foolish mistake. The little mouths would have to eat bread immediately, or else the planes wouldn't take off again the whole evening. He'd become the airport and control tower. After all, the children needed to eat bread. For them, it was cake. In the end, the birds flew off, with pieces of bread and sugar on the edge of their wings.

bout de pain avec du sucre. A des centaines de kilomètres à la ronde personne ne mange peut-être du pain après son repas au manioc.

"Du thé", dit Monsieur Boy.

"Du thé." Le domestique se précipite derrière la maison. Il rapporte sur un plateau d'argent finement ciselé d'arabesques la théière blanche et une tasse presque transparente. La qualité supérieure. "En quel honneur sort-on tout cela?", demande Monsieur Boy méchant, faisant mine d'ébouillanter la figure - la sale figure bien entendu - du domestique.

"Est-ce moi qui... ?"

Monsieur Boy l'imite, mimant par ses grimaces épouvantables d'autres visages que celui du jeune domestique.

For hundreds of kilometres all round, it was unlikely that anyone else had bread to eat after a cassava meal.

"Some tea" said Monsieur Boy.

"Some tea." The servant dashed to the back of the house. He brought the white teapot and an almost transparent cup on a finely chiseled arab-style silver tray. High quality. "What's all this in aid of?" asked Monsieur Boy unpleasantly, threatening to scald the servant's face, which, of course, was dirty.

"Is it me that...?"

Monsieur Boy mimicked him, making frightful grimaces³ that portrayed faces other than that of the young servant.

"Is it me that...? Fon fon fon...?" He repeated

"Est-ce moi qui... ? Fon fon fon fon...?" Il répète sa question: "Fon fon fon fon?" en exagérant davantage ses grimaces, et subitement son visage reprend son expression habituelle, mais tendue intérieurement d'une haine contenue. "Ramène ça et apporte un gobelet, et vite." Sans attendre, il commence à manger du pain, la bouche pleine, front baissé.

"Verse."

Le domestique, Monsieur Boy le voit bien, avale sa salive, le domestique verse le thé chaud que Monsieur Boy sirote avec assez de bruit. Un thé fort. Le gobelet est à moitié plein de sucre. C'est ça du thé. Monsieur Boy boit du thé depuis 1930. A cette époque, ses affaires, qui étaient celles surtout de l'administration coloniale,

the question: "Fon fon fon fon?" exaggerating the grimaces even more. Then abruptly, his face took on its usual expression, though he was inwardly seething with repressed loathing. "Take this back and bring me a mug, and be quick." He didn't wait but started eating the bread, mouth full, head lowered.

"Pour it."

The servant's mouth, as Monsieur Boy could well see, was watering; he poured the hot tea and Monsieur Boy sipped it rather noisily. Strong tea. The mug was half full with sugar. That was how tea ought to be. Monsieur Boy had been drinking tea since 1930. In those days, his job, mainly with the colonial administration, took him once or twice, sometimes three times, every year to the

l'amenaient une ou deux fois, parfois trois fois dans l'année, en "territoire anglaise", c'est-à-dire au Soudan où Monsieur Boy a d'excellents amis à l'amitié fidèle bien que vieillie.

"Appelle une femme."

Le domestique se précipite derrière la maison. C'est la femme enceinte que ses compagnes délèguent. Elle tend le cou avant de sortir de derrière le mur sur la place parce qu'il y a quelqu'un qui cause avec Monsieur Boy, le grand commerçant Mokta, et parce que d'une main derrière la chaise longue, Monsieur Boy lui fait signe de venir, d'avancer! Monsieur Boy et le grand commerçant Mokta n'ont pas fini de se saluer en se touchant la main et la portant à leur coeur. Mokta

"English territory", that is, to Sudan, where he had very good old and true friends.

"Call one of the women."

The servant rushed to the back of the house. The women sent the pregnant wife. She craned her neck before coming out from behind the wall onto the market-place; this was because someone, the great trader Mokta, was chatting with Monsieur Boy and because, from behind the chaise longue, Monsieur Boy was beckoning her to come forward. Monsieur Boy and the great trader, Mokta, hadn't yet finished their greetings, touching each other's hands and then their own chests. Mokta interrupted the bowing and scraping with the following words: "Greetings to you, our wife, greetings."

Despite her large

rompt les salamalecs par ces mots: "Salut notre femme, salut."

La femme en dépit de son ventre se baisse, met un genou à terre, elle baisse les yeux.

"Salut grand Mokta, salut", murmure-t-elle.

"Cela va-t-il bien là-dedans?", demande d'une voix sucrée Mokta.

"Très bien, oui." La femme se baisse davantage, tandis que Mokta enfouit sa main baguée de bagues en argent dans une poche, et malgré ses efforts Monsieur Boy ne voit pas la pièce qu'il donne.

"Une tasse, de l'eau chaude."

Le domestique les apporte après avoir attaché le mulet de Mokta à une poutre de la maison car la

stomach, the woman went down on one knee, her eyes downcast.

"Greetings to you, great Mokta, greetings," she muttered.

"How's the baby in there?" asked Mokta in a sugary voice.

"Fine, thank you, fine." The woman bent lower while Mokta put his hand loaded with silver rings in his pocket; despite Monsieur Boy's efforts, he couldn't see the coin the trader gave her.

"A cup and some hot water."

The servant brought them after tying Mokta's mule to one of the beams supporting the house, for Mokta's car had broken down. The servant then moved away, as required, without turning his back on

voiture de Mokta est en panne. Le domestique s'éloigne sans tourner le dos aux deux hommes comme il se doit.

"L'autorisation", demande Mokta.

"Bangui n'a pas encore répondu", dit Monsieur Boy.

"Je suis allé à Bangui... L'autorisation est au bout de tes doigts", dit Mokta, sans élever le ton de la conversation. Un regard circulaire. Cette grande place publique n'est pas faite pour parler affaires. "Tu demandes trop beau-frère." Monsieur Boy fait la grimace, une grimace quasi invisible qui veut dire: "Je demande quelque chose, moi?" Et aussi: "Beau-père? Quel beau-père? Ah lala!"

"Si c'est une fille, elle s'appellera Yasimina. Je

the two men.

"What about the permit?" asked Mokta.

"Bangui hasn't replied yet," answered Monsieur Boy.

"I went to Bangui... The permit is within your grasp," said Mokta, without raising his voice. He looked around. The market-place wasn't convenient for business talk. "You're asking for too much, brother." Monsieur Boy pulled a face and made an almost imperceptible grimace, as if to say: "I'm not asking for anything, am I?" And then: "Father-in-law? What father-in-law? Oh lala!"

"If the baby is a girl, her name will be Yasimina. I'll marry her."

"Let's wait and see," said Monsieur Boy. "Children nowadays go to school and come out doctors. You and me

l'épouse."

"On verra", dit Monsieur Boy. Les enfants d'aujourd'hui sont à l'école, sortent docteurs ou médecins. Toi et moi nous sommes trop vieux, Mokta. Nous ne pouvons pas les comprendre.

"Si elle m'aime", dit avec ferveur Mokta en portant la main au col de sa robe blanche.

"Laisse-la au moins venir au monde", et Monsieur Boy est sur le point de se scandaliser. Avec toute la mesure qu'il faut en face d'un grand commerçant, très influent de surcroît, Monsieur Boy ne peut s'empêcher d'ajouter: "On verra, frère."

"Pas demain", dit Mokta. "Après-demain, je viendrai au bureau. Nous traiterons l'affaire."

are too old, Mokta. We can't understand them."

"But what if she loves me?" asked Mokta fervently, touching the collar of his white robe.

"Let's wait at least for her to be born," said Monsieur Boy, almost losing his calm. With all the self-control he could muster to deal with such a great, influential trader, he couldn't help adding: "We'll see, brother."

"Not tomorrow," said Mokta, "I'll come and see you in the office the day after. We'll discuss it."

And as the great trader Mokta jumped onto his white mule like a young man, Boy shouted heartily: "Without the permit, what can we do?"

"Papa," implored Mokta as he was taken away by his

Et tandis que le grand commerçant Mokta saute comme le ferait un jeune homme sur son bardot blanc, rapide, Boy, gai, lance: "Sans autorisation comment ferions-nous?"

"Papa", implore Mokta emporté par son mulet, une bête plus belle, plus originale qu'un cheval.

4

Ce soir-là Monsieur Boy se sent irrésistiblement envahi puis soulevé par la nostalgie du pays natal. Il y serait reçu comme un roi bien qu'il soit parti à l'âge de quatorze ans et cela fait vingt-cinq ans qu'il est loin de son "pays natal". Son "pays" est au sud. On y faisait de la pirogue sur l'Ubangi. On allait fréquemment chez les cousins

mule, an animal more beautiful and more original than a horse.

4

That evening, Monsieur Boy felt irresistibly overwhelmed, then uplifted, by homesickness. He would be given a royal welcome in his village even though he had left it at the age of fourteen, which meant that he had been away from his "native land" for twenty-five years. His "village" was in the south. He used to row his dugout canoe on the Ubangui

du Kongo. A en croire Monsieur Boy, là-bas, tout le monde avait la parenté de sang, était frère ou cousin.

"Appelle ta mère et rentre te coucher", murmure Monsieur Boy en bougeant à peine la tête. "Attends! As-tu mangé?"

"Non", répond le domestique.

"Qu'attend-on pour te donner à manger, hein? Que tu meures de faim?" En d'autres temps il aurait ajouté: "Le désordre est dans ma maison mais Dieu est grand..."

"Je m'en vais, papa", murmure le domestique la bouche asséchée par la faim.

"Attends. Rentre les affaires. Mais appelle-moi d'abord la mère."

La mère, la première femme. Elle arrive avec une lampe-tempête qui fait un

there. He often used to go and stay with his cousins in Kongo. If you believed Monsieur Boy, he had blood relations with everyone over there; they were all either brothers or cousins.

"Call the mother, and then go to bed," muttered Monsieur Boy, hardly moving his head. "Wait! Have you eaten?"

"No," answered the servant.

"What are they waiting for to give you food, eh? For you to die of hunger?" In other circumstances, he would have added: "My house is in disorder, but God is great..."

"I'm going, papa," muttered the servant, his mouth dry with hunger.

"Wait! Bring in everything from outside. But, call

petit papillon lumineux au bout de la grande place. Elle en a l'habitude. Il se lève et silencieusement pénètre dans la maison suivi de la lumière jaune qui fume un peu.

"Qu'y a-t-il?", demande la première femme parce qu'elle a quelque chose sur le feu et que le pétrole manque aux magasins pour rallumer le feu. Elle est debout, les mains croisées sur son ventre, les mains enfarinées. Elle pense:

"D'habitude, à cette heure, tu es dehors, même loin d'ici, Alphonse. Cela fait trois soirs de suite que tu ne sors pas. Qu'y a-t-il? Je t'écoute mais fais vite."

"Qui couche à côté de moi ce soir?", demande-t-il doucement. Le lit est-il fait?"

the mother first."

The mother was the first wife. She came with a hurricane lamp shining like a small luminous butterfly at one end of the market-place. She was used to things like that. Monsieur Boy got up and quietly entered the house, followed by the yellow light which was smoking a bit.

"What's the matter?" asked the first wife; she was cooking, and there was no kerosene in the shops to rekindle the fire should it go out. She stood with her hands folded over her stomach; her hands were covered with flour. She thought:

"You're usually out by this time, Alphonse, out of here altogether. You've not gone out three evenings in a row. What's the matter? I'm

La première femme répond, un peu sèche: "J'ai mes règles. Ce n'est pas moi."

Elle se passerait bien de lui et des... hommes.

"C'est Ya...?"

"Demande-lui." (Elle est presque sortie.)

"Je ne t'ai pas appelée pour ça", dit-il.

Elle attend, debout, tendant visiblement l'oreille.

"Comment voulez-vous", se demande-t-il tout haut, "entretenir quelqu'un de quelque chose de vraiment sérieux dans cette maison?"

Il paraît être au désespoir. Elle s'assied brusquement comme si elle s'était écroulée soudain, à même le sol de terre battue. Elle fixe son regard sur la lampe dont la flamme jaune fait des bonds

listening, but be quick."

"Who's sleeping with me tonight?" he asked gently.

"Is the bed made?"

The first wife replied rather curtly: "I'm having my period. It's not me."

She could do without him and... men.

"Is it Ya?"

"Ask her." (She was on her way out.)

"I didn't call you for that," he said.

She waited, standing, visibly pricking up her ears.

"How can you have any serious discussion in this house?" he wondered aloud.

He seemed to be in despair. She sat down abruptly as if she had collapsed onto the mud floor. She stared at the lamp whose yellow flame flickered in a peculiar manner. It would

caractéristiques. Elle va s'éteindre et l'on restera dans l'obscurité à moins de sortir sous la véranda pour profiter de la lumière mouillée de la lune.

Il se tait parce que le domestique rentre la chaise longue, le fidèle domestique; celui-là, les deux autres étant des dilettantes parce que frères de la première femme de Monsieur Boy et de Ya. Celui-là, Monsieur Boy l'a retenu à la porte de la prison. "S'il s'en va d'ici, il tombe entre les mains des gendarmes", a l'habitude de dire le patron.

Cette lumière qui s'en va ennuie beaucoup Monsieur Boy. Un grand fonctionnaire comme lui, sa lumière! Il fait un effort sur lui-même, décroche son trousseau de clefs à sa ceinture sous la

die out and they would be in darkness, unless they went out onto the veranda to take advantage of the pale light of the moon.

He stopped talking because the servant was bringing in the chaise longue. That servant was loyal, the other two didn't take their job seriously since they were the brothers of Monsieur Boy's first wife and Ya. Monsieur Boy had taken him on when he was going to be sent to prison. "If he leaves me, he'll fall into the hands of the gendarmes," the master usually said.

The fading light annoyed Monsieur Boy very much. A senior civil servant like him, his lamp! He had to do something about it. He untied his bunch of keys from the

robe de chambre, tend le trousseau à son épouse. Elle va directement au but, c'est-à-dire qu'elle prend une clef dans le trousseau, ouvre sans effort une malle parmi d'autres que le domestique en transpirant déplace.

La lampe-tempête fournie en bon pétrole pétille d'un feu clair. La première femme remplit les réservoirs des trois lampes, le sien en dernier. Ainsi fait, il semble que quelque chose ait changé dans cette maison, cette grande maison. De longtemps, Monsieur Boy ne tendra plus son trousseau de clefs à aucune de ses femmes.

"Ferme la porte", ordonne-t-il au domestique. Il s'assied et son épouse dédaignant encore la chaise ou le lit s'assied par terre.

Cela veut dire: "Je ne

belt beneath his dressing gown and gave them to his wife. She did exactly what was expected, that is, she took out a key and easily opened one of the trunks which the servant had moved with difficulty.

When kerosene was put in the reservoir of the hurricane lamp, its flame became bright. The first wife filled the reservoirs of all three lamps, hers last. After that, there seemed to be some change in the large house. For a long time after that, Monsieur Boy didn't give his bunch of keys to any of his wives.

"Close the door," he ordered the servant. He sat down but his wife refused the chair or the bed again, and sat on the ground.

The action could be

suis pas chez moi." Monsieur Boy croise ses mains, sa tête s'enfonce dans sa poitrine, droite. Il est assis dans un fauteuil de fabrication locale tout comme les coussins aux couleurs claires et gaies.

"Ce que fait Mokta", dit-il pour commencer. La femme le regarde intéressée. "Il s'agit de l'enfant."

"Tu l'as vu. Il est encore venu", ajoute-t-il.

Elle bouge à peine le menton, ses yeux brillent un peu plus intensément. Elle voit par terre, sur le sol fendillé, un être, une petite fourmi presque invisible. De couleur rougeâtre. La première femme aussi est rougeâtre.

"C'est ma soeur", pense-t-elle. Elle est comme ça, la première femme. Elle tend

interpreted as: "I don't feel at home here." Monsieur Boy folded his arms, buried his head in his chest, and sat upright. He was sitting on a locally made chair with bright light-coloured cushions.

"What Mokta wants," he began. His wife looked at him with interest. "I'm talking about the child."

"You saw him. He came again," he went on.

She moved her chin very slightly, and her eyes shone a little more intensely. On the cracked floor, she saw a creature, an almost invisible small ant. Reddish in colour. The first wife too was reddish in complexion.

"That's my sister," she thought. The first wife was always like that. She pricked up her ears.

l'oreille.

"Cela fait dix ou quinze ans que je n'ai pas pris de congé", continue-t-il.

La femme fait entendre un étrange bruit de gorge. Elle croise ses jambes sous elle. Elle est pauvrement vêtue. Elle ne veut pas salir ses habits neufs. Elle a ses règles vraiment. Cet étrange bruit de gorge signifierait aussi bien: "Alors?" que "Bien, il m'a dérangé pour rien. Son éternelle histoire de départ en congé. On y serait au paradis de Dieu là-bas dans son pays."

"Tu iras avec ta soeur...", dit-il.

Il s'agit de la troisième épouse de Monsieur Boy. "...jusqu'à ce qu'elle accouche. Tu consacreras l'enfant à Bangasu avant de revenir."

"I haven't taken any leave for the past ten or fifteen years," he continued.

His wife made a strange noise in her throat. She crossed her legs beneath her. She was shabbily dressed. She didn't want to dirty her new clothes. She was indeed having her period. That strange noise in her throat might also mean: "So?" or "Well, he has disturbed me for nothing. This endless story about going on leave. You'd think that village were God's own paradise."

"You'll go with your sister...", he said.

He was referring to his third wife. "... and stay with her until she has her baby. You'll dedicate the child to Bangasu before coming back."

She knew about Bangasu,

Bangasu, ce roi défunt, l'esprit de Bangasu, elle en sait quelque chose. Des chansons, non? Alphonse, autrement dit Monsieur Boy, y tient peut-être davantage qu'à son honorabilité. Il y croit à ces vieilleries, pense-t-elle en commençant de se balancer d'avant en arrière. Elle ajoute: "Ce sont les vieilleries de ses ancêtres." Elle lui pardonne bien des choses.

"Dis seulement que Mokta te fait peur", dit-elle clairement. Une voix sans équivoque. Il aime cela.

"Tu connais ma situation", dit-il en hésitant.

"Puis-je me permettre?"

"Et à moi?", fait-elle.

"Bon. A moi la faute?"

Il est au bord de

the dead king, the spirit of Bangasu. There'd be singing, wouldn't there? Perhaps Alphonse, otherwise known as Monsieur Boy, valued it more than his honour. He believes in all these old customs, she thought, starting to rock backwards and forwards. She added: "Those are his ancestors' old customs." She let him get away with many things.

"Just admit that you're afraid of Mokta," she said bluntly. In an unequivocal manner. He liked that.

"You know my situation," he said hesitatingly. "Can I afford to ignore him?"

"What about me?" she asked.

"Well, is it my fault?"

He was about to lose his

l'énervement. Cette petite femme qu'il n'est jamais parvenu... à mater.

"Maintenant nous pouvons parler. Plus de mensonge, tu m'entends?" dit-elle.

"Qui ment?", demande-t-il. Il va encore tout gâcher.

"Mokta se conduit comme une sale bête parce qu'il s' imagine que tu es riche et que le gouvernement te laissera éternellement ici."

Elle sort la tête, appelle brièvement, gaie: "Za! Viens voir un peu, hé!!!" Monsieur Boy ne les comprend pas ces femmes. Elle appelle encore: "Hou! Za, Za. Viens un peu ici avec ton gros ventre."

Un peu plus, elle aurait crié, surprise, croyant subitement avoir en face d'elle une tête d'hyène comme il en traîne la nuit autour

patience. He had never been able to... tame that small woman.

"Right, let's talk now. No more lies, do you hear me?", she said.

"Who's lying?" he asked. He was going to ruin everything again.

"Mokta is behaving like a dirty dog because he thinks you're rich and the Government will let you stay here for ever."

She stuck her head outside and shouted excitedly: "Za! come here for a moment, hé!!!" Monsieur Boy couldn't understand his wives' reaction. She shouted again: "Hou! Za, Za. You with your big stomach, just come and see."

Then, she all but screamed out in shock as she thought she was face to

du bercail: c'est son frère, disons, un peu sourd, bien que jeune, qui attend près de la porte.

"Je vais la chercher, Za." Elle sort sans attendre; Monsieur Boy à qui un Français avait donné ce nom significatif qui figure sur les documents administratifs les plus sérieux profite de cette absence momentanée de sa femme pour armer ses deux fusils, un "calibre 12" et un "mauser", comme il le fait tous les soirs avant de se coucher. Depuis la guerre, il a toujours les fusils près de lui. Et puis ses ancêtres ont inoculé dans son sang l'amour des armes violentes, peut-être avant même sa naissance. C'est cela la fortune de Monsieur Boy, ces deux fusils. Mokta ne sait pas cela. Ce commerçant si grand

face with a hyena's head, since hyenas usually lurked around homesteads at night. It was just her brother who was rather deaf though young, waiting near the door.

"I'll go and fetch Za." She rushed out. Monsieur Boy, to whom a Frenchman had given that revealing name which appeared on his most important official documents, took advantage of his wife's short absence to load his two rifles - a "12 caliber" and a "mauser" - as he did every evening before going to bed. Since the war, he had always had the guns near him. Moreover, his ancestors had filled him with a passion for dangerous weapons, perhaps even before he was born. Monsieur Boy's wealth consisted mainly of those two guns. Mokta didn't know that.

soit-il. Avec le produit de l' autorisation , "l'autorisation", Monsieur Boy s'il le pouvait s'achèterait une de ces carabines à tir rapide pour chasser les petits oiseaux, les écureuils ou même les antilopes.

"Mais pourquoi pas votre soeur... aussi?" demande-t-il d'une voix douce.

"Elle se lave Ya", dit la troisième femme en croisant ses mains sur son gros ventre. Elle s'assied auprès de son "aînée" en mariage, sagement. Elle voit que Ya ne vient pas, elle dit alors: "Si je dois y aller seule dans ton pays, Alphonse, c'est non. J'aimerais mieux que Mokta vienne m'arracher ma fillette au sortir de mon vagin pour l'épouser."

Despite the fact he was such a great trader. With the proceeds from the "permit", Monsieur Boy could buy one of those quick-firing rifles for hunting small birds, squirrels or even antilopes.

"But why haven't you brought your sister... with you?" he asked gently.

"Ya is having a bath," replied the third wife as she folded her arms over her big stomach and sat down quietly next to her "elder" in marriage. She realized that Ya wouldn't come, and then said: "If I have to go alone to your village, Alphonse, then my answer is no. I'd rather Mokta comes and snatches my baby as she comes out of my vagina and marries her."

"The poor baby," said the first wife, rocking in

"Ce pauvre gosse", dit la première femme en reprenant son étrange balancement. "Son sexe comptera beaucoup dans cette affaire. Quels regards il y aura envers ce ventre, ce vagin...!"

Elle se tait. Toutes deux rient de bon coeur. Monsieur Boy présente l'aspect d'un homme scandalisé. Ses femmes rient sans retenu devant lui et même de lui... Il serre les lèvres, ses yeux brillent.

La première femme pense "race d'assassins" puis poursuit son balancement. Qu'elle interrompt: "Quel tribunal!", dit-elle.

"C'est le divorce", dit Za. Les deux femmes fraternellement éclatent de rire de nouveau.

"Qui rend la justice

that odd way of hers, "her sex will be very important in this deal. Imagine how he'll look at your belly and your vagina...!"

She stopped. Both of them laughed heartily. Monsieur Boy looked scandalized. His wives were laughing freely in his presence, and even at him... He tightened his lips, his eyes glittered.

The first wife thought, "a race of assassins", and then went on rocking. She stopped: "Call that justice!" she exclaimed.

"This means divorce," said Za. The two women burst out laughing again like sisters.

"Who looks after justice in this place?" asked Monsieur Boy sternly.

The women were stunned.

dans ce pays?", demande brutalement Monsieur Boy.

Elles sont stupéfaites. Bien sûr c'est le grand Monsieur Boy qui commande au fond les juges qui ne peuvent rien décider sans lui.

"Nous partirons toutes deux?" demande Za, soudain devenue grave.

"Oui. Pourquoi pas toutes trois avec les enfants?" dit la première femme. "Il n'a pas besoin de nous."

"Vous partez vous deux", prononce le féodal fonctionnaire avec autorité. "Vous partirez quand... il faudra!"

Il respire.

"Ya, ajoute-t-il, ira au pays quand elle aura un enfant à mettre au monde."

"Pour aujourd'hui j'ai mes règles", dit Ya pour ne

Of course, it was the great Monsieur Boy who controlled the judges; they couldn't take any decision without consulting him.

"Are both of us going?" asked Za, suddenly becoming serious.

"Yes. Why not all three of us and the children?" said the first wife. "He doesn't need us."

"Both of you are going," announced the feudal civil servant in an authoritative tone. "You'll leave when... necessary."

He took a breath.

"Ya," he added, "will go to the village when she's about to have her baby."

"As for today, I'm having my period," said Ya, to avoid dragging out the discussions.

"During the war, I used

pas prolonger inutilement l'entretien.

"A la guerre je couchais dans le froid sans femme", dit-il de mauvaise humeur.

"Bien", font-elles en sortant.

"Espèce de putains!", crie-t-il en colère.

"J'ai connu des femmes aux fesses soyeuses. Foutues femmes."

5

On a parlé de l'immensité des bois autour de la petite ville de Uandja. En vérité cette région ne manque ni de charme ni de richesses naturelles en tous genres. Cette région est attachante bien que située à plus de sept cents kilomètres de Bangui, bien qu'elle apparaisse un peu aux yeux des gens de la capitale comme

to sleep in the cold, without any woman," he said angrily.

"That's fine," they replied, on their way out.

"You tarts!" he screamed angrily. "I've laid women with soft bottoms. You bloody women!"

5

You've already heard about the vast forest surrounding the small town of Uandja. In fact, that area had a lot of charm and all kinds of natural resources. It was also attractive, though more than seven hundred kilometres away from Bangui, despite the fact that people in the capital used to consider it as "a god-

"un trou perdu dans l'Est". Ces gens-là font une grimace: "Qu'irais-je faire là-bas?" Et l'on hausse l'épaule. Aucun plaisir. Et on ne manque pas d'ajouter d'un air entendu: "Peut-être si un jour je déplaïs à... à... au Gouvernement", avec un geste qui signifie tout.

Cette petite ville de Uandja souffre en réalité, comme le disent si justement les gens de Bangui, cette petite ville éloignée souffre de ce que les colonisateurs partis l'avaient considérée comme une prison dans laquelle ils envoyaient de Bangui les "brutes", les "têtes dures" ou tout simplement les figures qui pour quelque raison ne leur plaisaient pas. La petite ville de Uandja, on le voit, bien des années encore après

forsaken hole in the East." Those people would pull a face and ask: "What would I want to go there for?" And they'd shrug their shoulders. No fun in going there. And they'd often add knowingly: "Perhaps if I annoy the Government one day...", and make a revealing gesture.

Indeed, the small town of Uandja did suffer, as the people of Bangui rightly claimed. That small distant town suffered because the colonists had regarded it as a prison to which they sent "brutes", the "dull-witted" or simply people in Bangui whom they didn't like for one reason or another. Years after the departure of those colonists, the town was still branded with a mark as indelible as if it were a good local tradition of

le départ de ces messieurs les colonisateurs, reste marquée au front d'une estampille aussi tenace que s'il s'agissait de quelque bonne tradition locale d'hospitalité ou de créativité artistique. Ce qui est vrai mais demandez donc aux gens de se déplacer pour connaître les traditions, même le plus originales.

Par suite d'on ne sait quelle intervention, l'homme se trouve plus ou moins rare autour de Uandja et dans Uandja même, malgré de bonnes rivières, de bonnes terres et toutes les bonnes conditions mises à son service par la nature pour que sa semence ne fasse rien d'autre que pousser et se multiplier. Il est bien vrai que durant la moitié de l'année, la bière n'arrive pas par les

hospitality or artistic creativity. What was certain was that you dared not ask people to move there to learn about the traditions, even the most authentic ones.

Nobody quite knew how, but people were rarely transferred to areas around Uandja or even to Uandja itself despite its beautiful rivers, fertile soil and all the favourable conditions which made crops grow and multiply. In fact, for half the year, because of the impassable roads, beer couldn't be brought in, and people could neither come to nor leave the small town. Bangui was left to its own devices.

And when it stopped raining during almost the same period each year, lorries trundled through

routes impraticables, personne ne vient, personne ne part. Bangui reste à Bangui.

Et les eaux de pluie s'étant retirées pour un temps quasi immuable, les camions foncent dans la poussière avec toutes sortes de produits manufacturés.

"On les regarde avec les yeux", disent les gens bien de Uandja. Ceci dit des produits manufacturés. Ces produits-là arrivent d'Europe. Ils coûtent ici le double de leurs prix de Bangui. Néanmoins, leur arrivée ne manque pas de jeter un peu de lumière dans Uandja. On se groupe pour boire de la bière, on s'endette pour boire, les chemises sont blanches, la radio hausse la voix parce que les piles sont arrivées.

the dust with all sorts of manufactured goods.

"All you can do is look at them," said the decent people of Uandja. They were referring to the manufactured goods. The goods came from Europe; in Uandja they cost twice as much as in Bangui. Nevertheless, when they came they brought a little more life to Uandja. People gathered in groups to drink beer, they ran up debts in order to drink beer, shirts were clean again, and radios started blaring because batteries were once more in the shops. All through the day, there was bright music in the market-place or, more rarely, a distant voice made a grand speech to which no one seemed to be listening. The broadcasts were in Arabic, French and English,

A toute heure de la journée il y a de la musique insouciante qui traverse la grande place ou, fait plus rare, une voix lointaine qui tient un grand discours que personne ne fait semblant d'écouter. On parle arabe, français, anglais, mais la musique, c'est la musique que l'on recherche sur les bandes d'ondes courtes, la musique, l'essentiel, la musique dans toutes ces langues, et bien entendu en lingala et en sango.

Assis dans son fauteuil, loin du bureau de bois blanc, Monsieur Boy en attendant quelque chose qui n'arrive pas, se repose aujourd'hui, ses yeux ne quittent pas un pied fendillé, des orteils déformés dans la sandale. Ce pied-là appartient au planton. Il y a deux heures

but people preferred music on the short wave bands. People wanted music in all these languages and, of course, in Lingala and Sango⁴.

Seated in his armchair away from the white wood table, Monsieur Boy, who seemed to be waiting for something that wasn't forthcoming, was taking a rest that day as he stared at a cracked foot with deformed toes in a sandal. The foot belonged to a messenger. Monsieur Boy had been staring at the foot for two hours. The foot hadn't moved during those two hours. For the past hour, Monsieur Boy had been very thirsty. He had been wavering between beer and cool water, nice cool water (with a bit of honey). But could it be that the messenger was dead or was

que les yeux de Monsieur Boy ne quittent pas ce pied. Il y a deux heures que ce pied-là ne bouge pas. Monsieur Boy depuis une heure a bien soif. Il hésite entre la bière et l'eau fraîche (avec un peu de miel), de cette bonne, belle eau fraîche, mais le planton serait-il mort, dort-il assis sur le banc long de deux mètres, la figure dans ses deux mains? Ce planton, Monsieur Boy le voit en kaki comme sous la colonisation, mais...

Il prend son chapeau posé sur une tablette de bois brun sur laquelle depuis un mois le "Journal officiel" attend d'être ouvert et parcouru, le met sur sa tête, il sort. Mû par un ressort, le planton, prénommé Albert, se met au garde-à-vous.

"Il est en blanc",

he sleeping with his face in his hands, as he sat on a bench that was two metres long? Monsieur Boy saw the messenger, in khaki, as he used to be during the colonial administration; however...

He took his hat from a small brown wooden table on which the "Official Gazette" had been lying, waiting to be opened and looked at. He put on his hat and went out. As if on springs, the messenger, whose first name was Albert, stood to attention.

"He's in white," noted Monsieur Boy as he went down the three or four steps of the staircase in his "office".

Dressed in shorts and a short-sleeved shirt, the messenger wouldn't dare to sleep in the middle of the

constate Monsieur Boy en descendant les trois ou quatre marches de l'escalier du "bureau".

Le planton en culotte courte et chemise manches courtes ne se permettrait pas de dormir en plein après-midi. Et le travail! Il fait quotidiennement sa sieste depuis vingt ans. Il a une vie de fonctionnaire bien réglée.

Le planton et Monsieur Boy se connaissent bien. Leurs cheveux ont commencé à blanchir ensemble mais chacun des deux hommes garde son rang, reste dans sa catégorie.

Quand il y a de la bière, on boit ensemble, Albert sur son banc dehors, puis il va porter les verres à la résidence de Monsieur Boy (d'où souvent il rapporte

afternoon. What about his work? He had been taking a siesta for the past twenty years. The life of a civil servant was well ordered.

The messenger and Monsieur Boy knew each other well. Their hair had started turning gray at the same time, but each of them had maintained his rank and stayed in his place.

When there was beer, they drank together. Albert drank on his bench outside and then took the glasses to Monsieur Boy's house (He usually brought back messages from Monsieur Boy's wives).

"Are they the ones?"

"Yes," replied Albert.

They, the tourists. They had left Paris and arrived on the game reserve the same day. A large piece of land had been leased to a company,

des messages, les messages des épouses de Monsieur Boy).

"C'est eux?"

"Eux", répond Albert.

"Eux", les touristes. En une journée ils quittent Paris, ils sont là... là-bas à la lisière de la réserve. Une société a loué - la terre ne manque pas à la Uandja - une immensité de terre. Pour quatre-vingt-dix-neuf ans...

"Quatre-vingt-dix-neuf ans", Monsieur Boy se sent tourbillonner tandis qu'en apprenant ce chiffre de quatre-vingt-dix-neuf Albert avait dit sans peur: "Même nos arrière-petits-fils seront morts, Monsieur Boy."

Eux, les touristes, fuyant la civilisation en quatrième vitesse sinon à tire-d'aile la retrouvent dans le confort, en pleine réserve d'animaux, dans leurs

for there was a lot of land in Uandja. The land had been leased for ninety-nine years...

"Ninety-nine years." The figure made Monsieur Boy's head spin whereas Albert, unperturbed, said: "Even our great grand-children would be dead by then, Monsieur Boy."

For their part, the tourists, who were fleeing from civilization as fast as they could, found it within the game reserve in the comfort of the hotels with air-conditioning, music and fresh ice cubes. Their small plane - perhaps a twelve-seater - was flying over the horizon, close to the trees.

Albert had no cause to be envious of the tourists, who liked to see game, even less so had Monsieur Boy, who knew France a bit because he

hôtels où il y a la climatisation, la musique et la glace fraîche. Le petit avion - peut-être douze places - passe à l'horizon, au ras des arbres.

Eux, les touristes, visionneurs d'animaux, Albert ne les envie pas. Pas le moins du monde, Monsieur Boy qui connaît un peu la France pour y être allé "guerroyer" en 1915, lui a fait apprendre sans trop de détails que là-bas, les gens ne sont pas heureux. Trop de monde déjà.

"Et nous ici?" pense Albert sans aucune expression sur son visage lequel depuis des années n'a pas changé. Un visage qui ne vieillit plus.

"Et nous ici?" Le sens de cette question est le suivant: Que devons-nous faire? Que faisons-nous pour vivre heureux? Nous avons

had gone there for the "war" in 1915 and learned without too many details that people weren't happy over there. Too many people already.

"And what about us here?" thought Albert, his face expressionless, a face that hadn't changed for years. A face that was no longer ageing.

"And what about us here?" This question meant: What must we do? What are we doing to be happy? We have yet to start doing anything. Monsieur Boy sighed, and went back up the staircase. He took out his purse and gave a coin to his messenger: "Orange soda."

Albert looked at him, astonished. The look seemed to say: "And what about me?" Albert never usually begged.

Monsieur Boy ought to

tout à faire avec tout.

Monsieur Boy soupire, remonte l'escalier, il sort son porte-monnaie, tend une pièce: "Soda orange."

Albert le regarde étonné. Ce regard dit: "Et moi?" Albert ne mendie pas.

Monsieur Boy devrait savoir qu'ils ont pris l'habitude: ils boivent de la bière.

"Papa", murmure Albert.

"Oui."

"L'Arabe arrive."

"Je l'ai vu."

Albert comprend que le soda orange c'est pour Mokta mais il y en a tout un litre.

Il en restera quelque chose de ce litre. Il fait chaud à en crever.

"Le commandant est là?"

"Là", dit Albert.

Mokta entre avec de forts parfums, amers, à base

know that they had grown into the habit of only drinking beer.

"Papa," muttered Albert.

"Yes?"

"The Arab is coming."

"I've already seen him."

Albert then realized that the orange soda was for Mokta; but it was a whole litre!

Some of it would be left over. It was baking hot.

"Is the sub-prefect in?"

"Yes," said Albert.

Mokta entered on a wave of quite strong, bitter naphthaline-based scent. He was wearing a pure white robe beautifully embroidered. The robe was really exquisite, with delicate designs. Mokta had a round black head, bright eyes, and marks cut on his cheeks. His skin exuded

de naphtaline, des parfums vraiment forts. Il a une belle robe toute blanche brodée, tout ce qu'il y a de fin et d'admirable, des dessins vraiment très fins. Mokta a une tête ronde, noire, des yeux vifs et des incisions sur les joues. Sa peau sue la santé. Il a le sourire blanc et de bons bras.

A côté de lui, Monsieur Boy paraît malingre, mais Monsieur Boy est persuadé qu'en cas de besoin, il suffirait d'ôter prestement à Monsieur Mokta le couteau qu'il porte dans sa gaine attaché au biceps, d'ailleurs il ne sait pas se battre, Mokta.

"Cela va bien?" salue Mokta.

"Bien."

"Ta femme?"

health. He had a broad smile and good arms.

Compared to him, Monsieur Boy looked sickly; but Monsieur Boy was convinced that in the event of a fight, he only needed to snatch Mokta's knife from its sheath tied to his left arm. After all, Mokta didn't know how to fight.

"How's things?" greeted Mokta.

"Fine."

"And your wife?"

"She's fine."

"And your children?"

"Fine," replied Monsieur Boy, as he waited for his orange soda.

"I went to Bangui," said Mokta.

Monsieur Boy knew that.

Mokta opened his purse, took out a letter, and handed it to Monsieur Boy, saying:

"Bien."

"Tes enfants?"

"Bien", répond Monsieur Boy en attendant son soda orange.

"Je suis allé à Bangui", dit Mokta.

Cela Monsieur Boy le sait.

Ouvrant son porte-monnaie, Mokta tend une lettre. "Lis-la, grand personnage."

Monsieur Boy pose une question, une ou deux questions.

"Ça va Bangui?"

Mokta a une expression bizarre sur la figure, expression faite d'exultation et de gravité.

"Comme ci, comme ça."

Monsieur Boy le regarde avec surprise.

"Quand es-tu revenu?"

"L'avion."

"Read this, great man!"

Monsieur Boy asked one or two questions.

"How's Bangui?"

Mokta's face changed expression, to one of triumph and seriousness.

"So-so."

Monsieur Boy looked at him in surprise.

"When did you come back?"

"By air."

Monsieur Boy looked at him again: not a single speck of dust on the collar of his robe. From the airport - what an airport! - he had come in a saloon car.

Mokta added with a smile, though still serious: "On business... I went right down to Bangasu."

Monsieur Boy asked: "What about my wives?"

"They're fine,"

Monsieur Boy le regarde encore: pas un grain de poussière sur le col de sa robe. De l'aéroport - quel aéroport! - il est venu ici en voiture fermée.

Mokta dit en souriant tout en gardant sa gravité: "Pour mes affaires... je suis descendu jusqu'à Bangasu."

Monsieur Boy demande:

"Mes femmes?"

"Ça va bien", répond Mokta qui ajoute: "Lis la lettre, Grand Personnage."

Le grand personnage avait eu un fils. L'enfant était né deux semaines plus tôt. "Je me disais aussi", pense Monsieur Boy.

Albert entre avec la bouteille de soda orange et trois verres en matière plastique de mauvaise qualité, cassants. Il pose le tout sur la table, se retire.

answered Mokta, but insisted: "Read the letter, great man."

The great man had had a son. The child had been born two weeks earlier. "I had that feeling too," thought Monsieur Boy.

Albert came in with a bottle of orange soda and three cups made of low quality breakable plastic. He put them on the table and went out.

Mokta barely tasted the drink, despite the extreme heat...

"You're not drinking?" asked Monsieur Boy, astonished.

"Whisky... plane."

"Albert."

"Sir."

"Put the bottle in a bucket of water."

"Yes, sir."

Monsieur Boy shook hands

Mokta goûte à peine la boisson, en dépit de la grande chaleur...

"Tu ne bois pas?", s'étonne Monsieur Boy.

"Whisky... avion."

"Albert."

"Oui."

"Mets la bouteille dans un seau d'eau."

"Oui, patron."

Monsieur Boy serre la main de Mokta qui ne comprend rien à cette explosion de joie.

"Un garçon?" demande-t-il...

"Vrai."

"Papa", fit Mokta. "Je l'aime beaucoup. Je lui ai fait des cadeaux, à lui et aussi à sa mère. Beaucoup d'argent."

Un sentiment confus parcourt Monsieur Boy

with Mokta, who was at a loss to understand his outburst of joy.

"A boy?" he asked...

"Yes."

"Papa," said Mokta, "I love him very much. I gave presents to him and his mother. A lot of money."

Monsieur Boy was overwhelmed by a feeling of confusion, a feeling he disliked.

"As for the permit," said Mokta, "I went to Bangui. I was told you could sign it."

After thinking for a while, he took out a wad of new banknotes from his pocket. Monsieur Boy wet his

qui n'aime pas cela les sentiments confus.

"L'autorisation", dit Mokta. "Je suis allé à Bangui. On me dit que l'autorisation c'est sous tes doigts dans ta signature."

Il sort après réflexion une liasse de billets neufs. Monsieur Boy compte soigneusement les billets en se mouillant copieusement les doigts. Il pose la liasse sur la table. Il pense: "Cela c'est le prix d'une winchester", tandis que Mokta le scrute avec anxiété.

"Mais, se dit ce fonctionnaire, on accuse maintenant les gens à tort et à travers de gabegie, de détournements de fonds. Cet "Arabe"-là est malin. Il est de mèche avec les hommes politiques. De toute façon ce n'est pas un Arabe. Je les

fingers thoroughly and then counted the notes carefully. He put the wad on the table. "That would buy me a winchester," he reflected, as Mokta gave him a searching look.

"However," the civil servant told himself, "they accuse people nowadays of fraud and embezzlement. This 'Arab' is crafty; he's in league with politicians. In any case, he isn't an Arab; I know genuine Arabs. Without me, what will become of my little boys?" He pushed the money back to Mokta because it was too much.

Mokta grabbed him by the throat, his knife in his hand. "The permit!" he screamed. "Boy, are you waiting for your friends, the Whites, to dig out everything? For the precious

connais les vrais Arabes. Sans moi que deviendraient mes petits garçons?" Il repousse l'argent parce qu'il y en a trop.

Mokta le tient à la gorge, son couteau dégainé.

"L'autorisation", crie-t-il. "Tu attends... Boy que tes amis les Blancs aient épuisé le sol? Que... les pierres?..."

Monsieur Boy sent la tête lui tourner. Il voit rouge, des éclairs et c'est l'obscurité. Il a à peine vu au dernier instant le pied gauche d'Albert dans sa sandale s'envoler...

Quand il revient à lui, sa femme est en train de lui laver la figure avec l'eau du seau. Il est assis dehors sur le banc d'Albert. Mokta, c'est bien lui, est torse nu, un torse trapu, noir,

stones...?"

Monsieur Boy felt his head swirling. He saw stars, and then everything went dark. He just saw Albert's left foot in his sandal fly off at the last moment...

When he finally regained consciousness, his wife was washing his face with water from the bucket. He was sitting outside on the bench on which Albert usually sat. Mokta - and it was in fact him - was there, stripped to the waist. His sturdy black body was firmly between two gendarmes.

"To the nick!" ordered Monsieur Boy, and then he went into his office. The wad of notes on the table had disappeared. Who had taken it?

"God is great," said Monsieur Boy. "I'll make

solidement encadré entre deux gendarmes.

"Au trou", dit Monsieur Boy et sans attendre, il entre dans son bureau: sur la table la liasse de billets a disparu. Qui l'a prise?

"Dieu est grand", dit Monsieur Boy. "Je ferai fortune demain, sinon après-demain. Peut-être jamais mais qu'importe!"

S'il voulait se faire de l'argent: le diamant ne manque pas dans la région. Il suffirait de se débrouiller, d'engager deux ou trois hommes, de les fournir en pelles, tamis, et d'ouvrir l'oeil sur eux.

"Ya", appelle-t-il en se massant le cou.

"Boy", répond-elle. Elle est sous la véranda assise auprès de son "père", Albert, qui a repris son immobilité

my fortune one day or the other. Perhaps never, but I don't care."

If he wanted to make money, there were lots of diamonds in the region. He only needed to take the initiative and hire two or three men, provide them with shovels and sieves, and keep an eye on them.

"Ya," he called out, rubbing his neck.

"Boy," she answered. She was on the veranda, sitting next to her "father", Albert, who had gone back to his bench.

"Come in. Sit down."

She was pregnant. That was quite obvious. "Za has a son," announced Monsieur Boy.

She clapped her hands, as happy as if it were her own son, her own child.

"If you like, you can go

sur le banc.

"Entre. Assieds-toi."

Elle est enceinte. Cela se voit tout de suite. Za a un fils, dit Monsieur Boy.

Elle bat des mains, heureuse comme s'il s'était agi de son propre fils, son propre enfant.

"Si tu veux, tu iras accoucher là-bas."

Ya hausse les épaules, se lève, dépose silencieusement sur la table la liasse de billets. Monsieur Boy reste ébloui, tandis qu'elle sort avec son ombre puissante.

6

Dimanche, jour de grâce et de repos. Paix dans le coeur de Monsieur Boy. Il a mis l'argent de Mokta en lieu sûr. De nuit, avec seule pour témoin, Ya plus muette que

and have your baby there."

Ya shrugged her shoulders, got up, and silently put the wad of notes on the table. Monsieur Boy looked on in bewilderment as she went out with her powerful shadow.

6

Sunday, a day of grace and rest. Monsieur Boy's heart was at peace. He had put Mokta's money in a safe place. In the night, witnessed only by Ya who was

jamais, il a creusé un trou, lui-même de ses propres mains, un trou, sous la véranda et il n'y a pas à faire autrement qu'à enjamber cet argent quand on entre et qu'on sort par la grande porte sur la grande place. L'argent enfermé dans le sol dans la boîte métallique des bonbons roses, cela porte bonheur à qui y pense chaque fois qu'il enjambe l'argent.

Monsieur Boy jouit de son dimanche allongé dans sa chaise longue. Le soleil monte par degrés sur la grande place si bien que le gendarme qui vient au rapport doit transpirer abondamment malgré l'heure matinale, Monsieur Boy le regarde un moment. C'est un briseur d'os. Monsieur Boy ne voudrait pas tomber entre ses mains. Ancien soldat de la

more silent than ever, he had dug a hole with his own hands on the veranda, so that you couldn't avoid stepping over the money whenever you went in or out through the front door. The money was in the pink metal sweet box; it brought luck to whoever thought of it when stepping over the money.

Monsieur Boy was enjoying his Sunday, lying back on the chaise longue. The sun was slowly getting higher in the sky over the market-place, so much so that the gendarme who was coming to submit his report was sweating profusely even though it was still early in the morning. Monsieur Boy looked at him for a moment. He was a bone crusher. Monsieur Boy wouldn't like to fall into his hands. An

Coloniale, en tenue kaki, chaussé de pataugas, le pistolet au côté, la mitrailleuse à l'épaule, il fait du chemin sans en avoir l'air, comme un éléphant. Monsieur Boy jouit de son dimanche quand même. C'est lui qui commande ici, non.

Le gendarme claque les talons, se met au garde-à-vous, fait son rapport, un rapport impeccable, rien n'y manque, une mécanique. Bien.

"Bien", dit Monsieur Boy en se levant tranquillement. Il bâille après avoir enfilé ses sandales. Le gendarme ne bouge pas. Monsieur Boy pense avec joie à son fils et à ses deux femmes qui vont venir. Elles commençaient à lui manquer celles-là malgré leurs querelles, leurs petites histoires perpétuelles. "Bien", dit-il.

ex-serviceman of the colonial army, he wore a khaki uniform and rubber-soled canvas shoes, with a pistol at his side and a small submachine gun on his shoulder; and walked, without making it obvious, like an elephant. Monsieur Boy was enjoying his Sunday all the same. After all, he was the one in charge.

The gendarme clicked his heels, stood to attention, and submitted his flawlessly detailed report. In a rather mechanical manner. Good!

"That's fine," said Monsieur Boy, quietly getting to his feet. He slipped on his sandals and then yawned. The gendarme didn't move. Monsieur Boy had a happy thought about his son and two wives despite their quarrels, their everlasting little

Le gendarme attend.

"Pouvez disposer."

"Comment se porte...",
Monsieur Boy n'achève pas sa
phrase.

Il lit sur le visage
fermé du gendarme.

"Mon vieux, se dit-il,
si je te disais d'aller le
tuer, tu filerais tout de
suite pour le mordre comme un
serpent."

En quoi il se trompe,
Monsieur Boy, le gendarme on
l'a surnommé "Briseur d'Os",
cela a été déjà dit.

Monsieur Boy ne s'est
pas encore rasé sous la
véranda, ni lavé derrière la
maison dans un enclos de
paille, il est en robe de
chambre, une robe de chambre
que tous les gendarmes
connaissent bien à Uandja.

"D o u b l e r l a
surveillance," murmure

problems. "That's fine," he
said.

The gendarme waited.

"You can go."

"How is ..." Monsieur
Boy didn't finish his
sentence.

He read the gendarme's
impassive face.

"Old boy," he told
himself, "if I asked you to
kill him, you'd dash down
there now and bite him like a
serpent."

Monsieur Boy was wrong
on that score; the gendarme
had been nick-named "Bone
Crusher", as we saw earlier.

Monsieur Boy hadn't yet
had a shave on the veranda
nor taken his bath behind the
house in the straw enclosure.
He was still in his dressing
gown, the dressing gown which
all the gendarmes in Uandja
knew very well.

Monsieur Boy.

"Doublér la surveil-
lance", répète Briseur d'Os
en se durcissant et en
relevant le menton.

"Aujourd'hui, si ses
femmes ou ses connaissances
lui apportent à manger, jetez
tout ou faites-en ce que vous
voulez."

Le gendarme claqué les
talons.

"Quelle idée a-t-il eu
ce... cet animal de Mokta
d'aller donner son nom à un
descendant des rois là-bas à
Bangasu", pense Monsieur Boy
et tout haut.

"Sur quoi couche-t-il?"

Le gendarme ne répond
pas. C'est superflu, Monsieur
Boy lui souffle: "Assieds-toi
maintenant."

Il lève légèrement la
main gauche. Le gendarme est
content. Il cherche des yeux

"Keep a closer eye on
him," muttered Monsieur Boy.

"A closer eye on him,"
repeated Bone Crusher,
stiffening and sticking out
his chin.

"If his wives or
acquaintances bring him food
today, throw it away or do
whatever you like with it."

The gendarme clicked his
heels.

"How dare this... this
beast, Mokta, name a
descendant of the kings of
Bangasu after himself?"
reflected Monsieur Boy, and
then asked aloud:

"What does he sleep on?"

The gendarme didn't
answer. In fact, he didn't
need to answer. Monsieur Boy
whispered: "Now, sit down."

He raised his left hand
slightly. The gendarme was
happy. He looked around for a

un siège, il ne peut quand même pas s'allonger dans la chaise longue d'un si grand personnage, lequel sort une bouteille noire compacte et un gobelet rongé par l'acide de la boisson. Pendant qu'il va chercher lui-même une chaise dans le salon, Briseur d'Os porte la bouteille à ses narines, fait la grimace, une grimace de contentement. L'alcool, le hargui, est fort. De qualité supérieure. On pourrait allumer une lampe avec. Plus cher malheureusement que le pétrole. Monsieur Boy sert lui-même. Ras le gobelet. Briseur d'Os boit d'un trait, frissonne, yeux fermés, mâchoires serrées, frissonne de la nuque aux reins mais surtout de la nuque et des épaules.

Monsieur Boy pose

seat; he certainly couldn't recline on the great man's chaise longue. Monsieur Boy took out a small dark bottle and a goblet corroded by the acid in the drink. As he went to fetch a chair from the living room, Bone Crusher raised the bottle to his nose, which wrinkled in satisfaction. The alcohol, hargui⁵, was strong. Good quality. You could use it to light a lamp. Unfortunately dearer than kerosene. Monsieur Boy poured it himself. To the brim. Bone Crusher drank it at one gulp, shivered, eyes closed and teeth clenched, shivered from the nape of his neck right down to his kidneys, but especially around his neck and shoulders.

Monsieur Boy put the bottle down in front of Bone

la bouteille devant Briseur d'Os. Ce qui signifie: "Sers-toi toi-même comme tu voudras."

C'est la fête pour Briseur d'Os. Il voudrait un kundi, cette guitare ancestrale pour jouer dessus de la musique qui lui monte du coeur.

"Pourquoi tu ne bois pas?", est-il sur le point de demander à Monsieur Boy. On sait que boire comme manger seul n'est pas bon ni réjouissant. Briseur d'Os tout en se servant une nouvelle rasade d'alcool cherche sur la grande place quelqu'un, un passant n'importe lequel avec qui boire. A moins d'emporter la bouteille mais...

"Il veut causer", se dit Briseur d'Os. Il appuie sa mitraillette contre le mur

Crusher. Which meant: "Help yourself to as much as you like."

It was Bone Crusher's birthday. He would have liked to have a kundi⁶, a traditional guitar, so he could play the music he could feel rising from his heart.

"Why aren't you drinking?" he was about to ask Monsieur Boy. We all know that eating or drinking alone is neither good nor cheering. As Bone Crusher filled his goblet to the brim again, he looked around for someone in the market-place, any passerby, with whom he could drink. Unless he took the bottle with him, but ...

"He wants to chat," Bone Crusher told himself. He leant his small submachine gun against the wall after checking that the safety

après s'être assuré que le cran de sûreté... On sait que ces engins partent soudain et ne s'arrêtent plus... que vides.

Monsieur Boy se jure de punir un jour le gendarme pour abandon de poste, cela pour un verre de ngbako, un gendarme qui se désarme, qui se laisse désarmer pour un verre. Quelle punition? Un mois aux arrêts, un mois de garde sans sommeil.

"Cet imbécile, se dit-il, si les enfants mettaient la main sur cette mitraillette."

"Comme si", se dit-il encore à lui-même, "comme si ces enfants étaient aussi invisibles que des démons."

"J'ai un fils", fait-il tout haut.

"Grande famille, dit Briseur d'Os, Dieu est

catch... Those guns could go off on their own, and not stop until the end of the round.

Monsieur Boy vowed to punish the gendarme one day for desertion of duty, for that glass of ngbako⁷ - a gendarme who'd put down his gun for a drink. What punishment? A month under close arrest, a month of guard duty without any sleep.

"The fool," he reflected, "what if the children get hold of that gun?"

"As though," he told himself, "as though the children were invisible like ghosts."

"I have a son," he said aloud.

"A large family," said Bone Crusher, "God is great."

"That's why we're drinking

grand." "C'est pourquoi nous buvons aujourd'hui", et il porte un verre de citronnelle odorante et sucrée à ses lèvres.

"Papa ne boit pas ça?"

Briseur d'Os pose la question comme s'il faisait seulement une allusion.

"Cet "Arabe", dit Monsieur Boy en fermant sa robe de chambre sur sa poitrine - je connais les vrais Arabes, moi - a donné son nom à mon fils."

"Hein?", s'étonne le gendarme, mais Monsieur Boy parle d'autre chose.

"Il aime causer", pense Briseur d'Os derrière ses yeux troubles. "Ah! père, Monsieur Boy."

Chacun s'accorde à Uandja pour dire que Monsieur Boy est bon, que sans lui, il y aurait plus de morts, que

today," and he raised a glass of sweet fragrant lemon drink to his lips.

"Aren't you drinking this, papa?"

Bone Crusher asked the question as if he were being casual.

"That "Arab", said Monsieur Boy, buttoning up his dressing gown over his chest, " - and I can tell genuine Arabs - gave his name to my son."

"Eh? What?" asked the gendarme in surprise, but Monsieur Boy changed the subject.

"He likes a chat," thought Bone Crusher, behind worried eyes. "Oh, papa, Monsieur Boy."

The general belief in Uandja was that Monsieur Boy was a kind-hearted man, that without him more people would

le dispensaire resterait sans cachets de nivaquine, que la ville serait sale, que l'on marcherait entre les herbes sur la grande place comme si les herbes pouvaient pousser dans le sable!

"Briseur d'Os."

"Ho?"

"M'entends-tu?"

"Oui... papa?"

"Demain... Demain!"

Monsieur Boy insiste parce que l'autre est pris d'alcool et il faut qu'il rentre au plus tôt chez lui au campement. Subitement, Monsieur Boy trouve que la chose la plus urgente est d'appeler un domestique pour qu'il conduise Briseur d'Os chez lui.

die, the dispensary would have no novacaine tablets, the town would be dirty and the market-place would be overgrown with grass - as if grass could grow in sand!

"Bone Crusher."

"Sir."

"Do you hear me?"

"Yes... papa."

"Tomorrow... Tomorrow!"

Monsieur Boy insisted because the gendarme was drunk and he had to go back home to the camp as soon as possible. Suddenly, it dawned on Monsieur Boy that the most pressing thing to do was to call for a servant to take Bone Crusher home.

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Ce dimanche religieux, plein comme un oeuf. Il avait voulu en parler à quelqu'un et ce quelqu'un avait été un gendarme (ce n'est pas parce qu'on est gendarme qu'on n'est pas quelqu'un). Mais Briseur d'Os avait préféré l'alcool à la causerie, l'imbécile. Il y a des gens comme ça, comme Briseur d'Os. Le monde est fait de tout cela. Ce dimanche... Sous le soleil auquel ne s'est jamais habitué Monsieur Boy, c'est-à-dire ce soleil pleuvant à cette heure de la journée sur la place lisse, qui n'offre nul obstacle aux rayons si ce n'est les rayons des grains de sable, c'est le vide. Le vide, Monsieur Boy n'aime pas le vide. Un seul oranger sur la place et tout aurait été

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A christian Sunday, crammed with activities. He had wanted to chat with someone and that someone had been a gendarme (being a gendarme doesn't prevent you from being someone). But Bone Crusher - the fool - had preferred alcohol to chatting. There are people like that, like Bone Crusher. The world is full of people like that. On that Sunday... In the heat of the sun, which Monsieur Boy had never got used to, that blazed down at that time of the day on the bare market-place which offered no protection at all from the sun, just sunlight and grains of sand, totally exposed. Monsieur Boy didn't like empty spaces. Just a single orange tree in the

changé, mais personne n'aurait songé planter un oranger au milieu de la place parce que, paraît-il, "cela ne se fait pas" et "qui t'a donné l'idée de faire ça?" Monsieur Boy, bien sûr, n'aurait donné à personne l'idée de détruire ce monument de place si pleine de cris, de vacarmes, de souvenirs, de souvenirs de toutes sortes. Monsieur Boy se souvient très bien, et ce n'est pas la première fois depuis vingt ans, de cet âge de la jeunesse, il se souvient de cela au moins... assez périodiquement.

"Elle a fait caca sous elle... caca! Pipi d'abord."

Monsieur Boy voit distinctement la femme, son bébé sous le ventre, pour le couvrir des coups de lanières.

market-place and it would have been completely different; but no one dreamed of planting an orange tree in the middle of the market-place because it "just wasn't done" or "who gave you that idea?" Of course, Monsieur Boy wouldn't have given anyone the idea of destroying that historic market-place, so full of shouting and noise and memories, all sorts of memories. Monsieur Boy could remember his youth well; he had been doing it for the past twenty years, ... periodically at least.

"She shat... shat! First, she peed."

Monsieur Boy could see the woman clearly; her baby was under her stomach to protect it from the blades of grass.

She was shouting: "Hou!

Elle faisait: "Hou!
houou!"

Monsieur Boy lui voit ses jambes de femmes accroupie. Le pipi est venu le premier, ha! ha! Voyant qu'elle avait été trahie par la nature, la femme nue s'était laissée aller. Peut-être avec soulagement. Ah! cette place. Pourquoi Monsieur Boy se souvient-il de cette femme, petite, noire, dure comme un de ces arbres de la savane au tronc rose, oui, pourquoi se souvient-il plutôt d'elle que des cadavres?

"Ya!", appelle-t-il.

"Boy", fait-elle, parce qu'elle est dans le salon à faire des repassages avec le fer à charbon.

Peut-être se coucherait-il? Il regarde du coin de l'oeil son ventre rond. Elle

houou!"

Monsieur Boy could see her legs as she squatted down. She peed first, ha! ha! Realizing that she had been betrayed by nature, the naked woman went on all the same. Perhaps with relief. Ah! that market-place! Why did Monsieur Boy remember that small dark woman, hard as one of those trees with pink trunks in the savanna? In fact, why did he remember her, and not the corpses?

"Ya!" he called out.

"Boy," she answered, because she was in the living room, ironing clothes with a charcoal iron.

Perhaps he ought to go and lie down. He looked at her round belly out of the corner of his eye. She was stripped to the waist, her belly was bare. He could

est torse nu, ventre nu. Il voit ses poils touffus, frisés au bas-ventre. Elle a son compte.

"Rien", dit-il.

Elle, c'est vrai qu'elle n'a pas l'habitude de poser des questions. Elle s'en retourne à son repassage dans la fraîcheur du salon.

Il enfile son habit kaki, ses bottes de cuir rouge comme au temps où il faisait du cheval - il avait eu deux chevaux, un arabe, puis l'autre, grand, lourd, qu'il avait appelé "Bangasu" du nom du roi son grand-père. Il hésite entre ses deux fusils et décroche le mauser. Il n'hésite pas au contraire à prendre dans la poche de sa robe de chambre la "lettre". Il sort sa bicyclette aux grands roues dont les rayons brillent au soleil.

see the thick curly hair below her belly. She was fed up.

"Nothing," he said.

As for her, it's true she never asked questions. She went back to her ironing in the cool of the living room.

He pulled on his khaki jacket and red leather boots, just as when he used to go riding. He had owned two horses, an arab, and another big, heavy one, which he had called "Bangasu" after the king, his grandfather. He hesitated between his two guns, but chose the mauser. But he didn't hesitate to take the "letter" from his dressing gown pocket. He got out his bicycle with the large wheels and spokes that gleamed in the sun.

"It's hot," said Ya.

"Il fait chaud", dit Ya.

"Je vais à côté", dit-il.

Ce n'est pas cela que Ya veut dire. Elle veut dire: "Prends un chapeau. N'importe quoi. Une coiffure."

Ce chapeau kaki, rougi par la poussière, n'est plus de ce temps mais le large bord s'avère efficace contre le soleil.

"Il fait chaud", veut dire aussi: "Où vas-tu par un temps pareil? Ne peux-tu comme les personnalités rester sur place chez toi assis ou couché?"

"Il fait chaud", veut dire aussi: "Suppose que le président arrive soudainement à bord de son avion, qui pourrait l'accueillir? Et si ce n'est pas le président, un ministre, une personne quelconque mais de marque

"I'm not going far," he said.

That wasn't what Ya meant. She meant: "Take a hat. Something. A scarf."

His khaki hat, reddened by dust, was out of date, but its broad brim effectively kept off the sun.

"It's hot" could also mean: "Where are you going in this weather? Why can't you stay at home like other officials, in a chair or lying down?"

"It's hot" could also mean: "Suppose the President suddenly arrives in his plane, who'd welcome him? And even if it's not the President, it could be a minister or some distinguished person from Bangui."

"It's hot" from Ya could also mean: "Why are you

venant de Bangui."

"Il fait chaud", dans la bouche de Ya, veut dire par ailleurs: "Pourquoi me laisses-tu seule avec un ventre comme ça? Je repasse ton linge pour demain."

Ya s'essuie le front du dos de sa main, sort, pose le fer à repasser dans le petit fossé qui entoure la maison, le fossé-caniveau, car:

"Il fait chaud" veut dire aussi: "Attends. Je vais te chercher de l'eau fraîche dans ton bidon de soldat."

Le bidon n'a pas servi depuis quelques années. Elle le débarrasse des toiles d'araignées mortes, de la poussière morte et au moment où elle commence à le plonger dans un seau d'eau, elle le lave, pliée en deux, jambes écartées à cause de son ventre, sous le soleil qui

leaving me alone with a belly like this? I'm ironing your clothes for tomorrow."

Ya wiped her forehead with the back of her hand, went out of the room, and put the iron in the small gutter around the house that served as a drain, because:

"It's hot" could also mean: "Wait. I'll go and fill your water bottle with fresh water."

The bottle hadn't been used for a few years. She cleaned out the dead spiders' webs and dust, dipped it into a bucket of water, and washed it, bending down in the hot sun with her legs apart because of her belly. The sun brought out beads of sweat on her neck and shoulder blades. He was losing patience.

"She's doing it on purpose."

fait perler la sueur sur sa nuque et ses omoplates, il s'impatiente.

"C'est du boycottage."

Mais il ne dit pas ça. Depuis qu'il est seul avec elle, il évite de lui parler avec brutalité. C'est que: "Si quelqu'un vous parlait au moins. Jamais aucune réponse. Jamais elle ne vous parle."

On connaît suffisamment Ya pour savoir qu'elle agit en silence.

Il pend le bidon à son cou. Il a le fusil pendu à son épaule gauche. Il monte péniblement. Avec le sable de la grande place, les roues de la bicyclette résistent, ne tournent pas. A moins que Monsieur Boy soit devenu trop vieux... A moins que Monsieur Boy ait changé.

"Hier" encore Monsieur Boy faisait la course sur la

But he didn't say that. When he was alone with her, he tried to avoid speaking harshly. Because:

"If she'd only say something. Never answers. Never talks to you."

He knew Ya well enough to know she stayed silent.

He hung the bottle round his neck. His gun hung from his left shoulder. He got on the bicycle with difficulty. With all that sand in the market-place, the wheels got stuck and wouldn't turn. Unless Monsieur Boy had grown older... Unless Monsieur Boy had changed.

"Yesterday" Monsieur Boy could still race across the market-place despite the resistance offered by the sand. Oh! What a sight he was on his bicycle with the huge wheels and his English

place malgré la résistance des grains de sable. Ah! Quel spectacle il donne avec sa bicyclette aux immenses roues, son chapeau d'explorateur anglais. Il descend et derrière lui, Ya a pitié.

"Il peine maintenant pour faire l'amour", pense-t-elle. "Il faut être patiente avec lui. Il finit tôt ou tard."

Elle reprend son fer à repasser:

"Boy n'est pas un si mauvais homme," pense-t-elle, mais il a beaucoup de responsabilités. Les Français d'abord et maintenant les devoirs."

Monsieur Boy sait qu'elle le pousse du regard hors du champ de sable tandis que descendu de son vélo, il marche jusqu'à la route rougeâtre et poudreuse.

explorer's hat! He got off, and behind him Ya felt sorry for him.

"It's hard for him to make love these days," she thought. "You've got to bear with him. He's either too fast or too slow."

She picked up her iron again:

"Boy isn't really a bad man though," she thought. "He just has a lot to cope with. First the French, then now his duties."

Monsieur Boy was aware that she was urging him on from the sandy area with her eyes. He got off his bicycle and walked as far as the reddish dusty road. He crossed over and went back along the little path through the woods. He didn't know that Ya was at that moment suddenly struck by a violent

Il la traverse et rentre par le petit chemin dans les bois. Il ne sait pas que Ya éprouve en ce moment des émotions violentes qui ne durent guère parce qu'elle se dit:

"C'est bien de lui."

Elle sait qu'il lui suffisait à elle de s'allonger sur une natte - pour dormir dans la cuisine - l'autre maison - jusqu'à la nuit noire. Et il faudrait la réveiller sinon elle continuerait de dormir. La crainte d'être mordue par un serpent n'aurait aucune espèce d'influence contre son besoin de dormir, dormir, en suant abondamment. C'est ce qu'elle fait après avoir enterré sous le sable les braises du fer à repasser.

Les herbes de la saison sèche craquent,

sensation though it didn't last long, because she told herself: "That must be from it."

She knew she only needed to lie down on the mat in the kitchen - the other house - and sleep until the dead of night. Someone would have to wake her up or else she'd keep on sleeping. The fear of being bitten by a snake had no effect at all on her need to sleep and sleep and sweat a lot. That was what she did after burying the live charcoal from the iron in the sand.

The grass in the dry season cracked, cackled, crackled unendingly. The very sunlight gleamed like millions of invisible insects. There was only one bird, the kind you never saw.

Monsieur Boy's face was

"craquillent", craquettent en une vague infinie. La lumière elle-même craquille, brille comme des milliards d'insectes invisibles. Un seul oiseau, celui que l'on ne voit jamais.

Le visage de Monsieur Boy n'est que sueurs et même larmes. Il pousse son vélo d'une main et de l'autre, il parle, il dialogue, il se parle, avec de grands gestes:

"Dieu me voit", dit-il.
"Mon coeur est propre."

Il agite la main, doucement.

"Je ne vais pas à l'église. Ni chez ceux-ci ni chez ceux-là."

"Dieu me voit. Bangasu me voit. Si je n'avais pas toujours été honnête, il y a longtemps qu'il aurait dirigé une balle ou la pointe

dripping with sweat, and tears. He pushed his bicycle with one hand and talked with the other, carried on conversations, talked to himself, with grand gestures.

"God is my witness," he said. "My conscience is clear."

He waved his hand slowly.

"I don't go to any church. Not to this group, nor to that."

"God is my witness. Bangasu is my witness. If I hadn't always been honest, he'd have sent a bullet or a knife point through me long ago."

Monsieur Boy came abruptly back to reality. That was because his gun was sliding off his shoulder. He hung it round his neck.

And then back to the

d'un couteau contre moi."
Soudain, Monsieur Boy revient à lui. C'est parce que le fusil glisse de son épaule. Il le passe à son cou.

Et maintenant, l'éternelle histoire:

Monsieur Boy avait échappé aux balles allemandes en 1915-1918 parce que Bangasu ne connaît ni mer ni ciel ni distance, qu'il est toujours là, Boy Bangasu l'ancêtre.

"Mais que me veut cet "Arabe"? dit Monsieur Boy énervé, d'une voix presque audible. Cet "Arabe"-là passe pour être "fakir" et s'il veut briser la carrière d'un fonctionnaire...

"Il a plutôt du poison dans la bouche."

Monsieur Boy entend la calomnie proférée, chuchotée

old story:

Monsieur Boy had escaped from German bullets in 1915-1918 because Bangasu had no regard for sea or sky or distance, he was always there, Boy Bangasu, his ancestor.

"But what does this "Arab" want from me?" asked Monsieur Boy anxiously in an almost audible voice. "This "Arab" claims to be a "fakir"⁸ but if he wants to ruin the career of a civil servant..."

"He has a poisonous tongue."

Monsieur Boy had heard the slanders spoken openly or whispered with malice against him. The hushed rumours! Add to that whatever hidden powers Mokta had to influence people and the big boys in

avec des venins, des salives contre lui. Ce chuchotement! Ajouté à je ne sais quoi qu'aurait Mokta pour influencer les gens, les grands de Bangui.

"Mais ce n'est pas encore arrivé", dit Monsieur Boy. "Tout le monde me connaît. Je suis père de nombreux enfants qui servent l'Etat et il y en a de tout petits qui poussent encore."

Et chacun sait que Monsieur... Boy est un prince authentique, un descendant en ligne droite du roi Bangasu.

"Mais le monde d'aujourd'hui n'est pas bon." Il avise du coin de l'oeil un arbre, il a une touffe ramassée haut, une sorte de toit. "L'arbre à Bangasu" mais il n'y en a pas par ici d'arbres à Bangasu. Celui-ci lui ressemble seulement, mais

Bangui.

"But nothing has happened yet," said Monsieur Boy. "Everybody knows me. I have a lot of children, all at the service of the State and little ones still growing up."

And everyone knew that Monsieur Boy was really a prince, a direct descendant of King Bangasu.

"But the world today is difficult." He noticed a tree out of the corner of his eye, bunched at the top like a roof. The "Bangasu tree"⁹, though there are no Bangasu trees there. It only looks like one, but what a resemblance!"

The "Bangasu tree" which was black, as expected, was owned by a green snake about one and a half metres long. The snake also owned the

combien il lui ressemble!"

Cet "arbre à Bangasu", noir, comme il se doit, a un propriétaire, un serpent vert, d'environ un mètre cinquante. C'est le propriétaire de ces lieux assez tristes sinon austères qui fuit devant l'homme qui avance, avance.

Monsieur Boy fait un "Tcheu" de dérision à l'adresse du "venimeux". Il sait qu'il n'y en a pas un autre et s'installe au pied de l'arbre. Il ne tarde pas à reprendre sa conversation et ses mimiques mais avec deux bouts de bois entre les doigts:

"Ecoute-moi Bangasu..." Suit toute la liste des rois que la mort a rendus "dieux" mauvais ou protecteurs de nous, leurs descendants.

Monsieur Boy tient à

rather gloomy bare places which fled as man moved forward, relentlessly.

Monsieur Boy scornfully drove away the "poisonous creature" with a "Tcheu" sound. He knew there was no other creature around and sat down at the foot of the tree. He soon picked up his conversation and mimicry again, but with two small pieces of wood between his fingers:

"Listen to me, Bangasu..." Then followed a list of all the kings that death had turned into "gods", some bad and some protectors of us their descendants.

Monsieur Boy tried to reason with Bangasu, speaking slowly and arguing his case more logically than he had ever done in any court or before any Government

Bangasu un raisonnement sans faille, parlant lentement, plaidant sa cause comme il ne l'a jamais fait devant aucun tribunal, gouvernement ou capitaine français de gendarmerie. Monsieur Boy retient les faits, tête baissée, sur ses doigts. Un, deux... cinq, six, dix, zéro. Puis, un, deux... dix. Monsieur Boy est persuadé que Bangasu l'écoute, il le sent, Bangasu n'a d'oreilles que pour lui, Monsieur Boy. Mais pourquoi ce nom de "Boy"? Ne nous embrouillons pas. C'est une autre affaire. Les dieux n'écoutent que les hommes qui raisonnent juste, logiquement.

"Ainsi, Bangasu", demande Batila en levant la voix, Batila que l'état civil délivré par l'administration des colonies a effacé, "ainsi

official or French gendarmerie captain. Monsieur Boy outlined the facts, head lowered, counting them on his fingers. One, two... five, six, ten, zero. Then one, two... ten. Monsieur Boy was convinced that Bangasu was listening to him; he felt that Bangasu listened only to him, Monsieur Boy. But why was his name "Boy"? Let's not get involved in that; it's another question altogether. The gods only listen to men who think things out clearly and logically.

"So, Bangasu," asked Batila raising his voice, "Batila" a name that had been left out of all his civil status documents issued by the colonial administration, "tell me, do I have to give back this money stolen from us by that son-of-a-bitch?"

Bangasu, dis-le-moi: dois-je rendre cet argent que ce fils d'animal nous a volé? Ne dois-je pas refuser de le rendre? Parle."

Batila est prêt à laisser l'argent sur place sous l'arbre. Il écoute mais Bangasu ne se manifeste pas le moins du monde. Alors Monsieur Boy empoche la liasse de billets.

La nature, Monsieur Boy s'y trouve à l'aise par cet après-midi de dimanche, qui commence à se rafraîchir. Avec le soleil qui descend sur l'horizon, les oiseaux soudain se multiplient dans l'air. Et à peine Monsieur Boy a-t-il quitté "l'arbre à Bangasu" qu'il entend le serpent qui revient en sifflant, rapide entre les herbes. Monsieur Boy reprend son soliloque qui devient

Well?"

Batila was willing to leave the money under the tree. He listened, but Bangasu didn't show himself at all. So, Monsieur Boy put the wad of notes in his pocket.

Monsieur Boy felt at ease in the woods that Sunday afternoon. It was getting cool and birds were suddenly appearing in the sky as the sun set over the horizon. No sooner had Monsieur Boy left the Bangasu tree than he heard the hissing of the snake as it sped back through the grass. Monsieur Boy resumed his monologue, faster then because it was getting dark. The birds were flapping their wings more rapidly and their singing started up again.

"Tomorrow I'll go and

rapide, il s'active parce que la nuit va tomber et que les ailes et les chants des oiseaux s'activent eux aussi.

"Demain, j'irai voir ce fils de chien." Mais Monsieur Boy sent bien qu'il a oublié quelque chose: il n'a pas attaché une branche verte de cet "arbre à Bangasu" sur son vélo. Cela peut attendre. Ah! ces oiseaux! Ils battent des ailes, ils font un de ces raffuts dans cet arbre sacré!

"Le serpent ne passera pas la nuit ici", pense avec amusement Monsieur Boy qui n'a pas encore lu la "lettre".

La "lettre" vient d'un cousin dont Monsieur Boy a perdu tout souvenir. Ce cousin-là n'a plus pour Monsieur Boy d'autre vie que son nom et il s'appelle de surcroît, comme Monsieur Boy,

see that son-of-a-bitch." But Monsieur Boy had a feeling that he had forgotten something: he hadn't tied a green branch of the "Bangasu tree" on his bicycle. That could wait. Damn those birds! They were flapping their wings and making a hell of a row in the sacred tree!

"The snake won't spend the night here," reflected Monsieur Boy cheerfully. He hadn't read the "letter" yet.

The "letter" was from one of his cousins whom he had completely forgotten. The cousin, as far as Monsieur Boy was concerned, existed only in name; moreover, the cousin's name, like his, was also Batila. The letter had been dictated by three persons at least. His two wives - the strumpets - said they didn't know when they'd

Batila. La lettre a été dictée en réalité par au moins trois personnes. Les épouses - Monsieur Boy réprime un mouvement de fort mauvaise humeur, mais n'est-il pas en état de grâce? - ces deux coquines disent qu'elles ne savent pas quand elles reviendront. Ce qui indique que le pays là-bas leur plaît.

"Elles vont revenir grasses comme des vaches", et Monsieur Boy est gourmand de ses femmes. Il les voit s'engraisser du poisson de l'Ubanguï, de ces fameux "capitaines" qu'on ne trouve pas ici, s'engraisser de manger de l'huile de palme, de pulpe de noix de palme, d'amandes de noix de palme, s'engraisser de l'odeur de l'huile légère des amandes de noix de palmes. Monsieur Boy

be coming back. Which meant they were having a good time in the village. Monsieur Boy managed to repress the surge of anger within him, since he was in a state of grace.

"They'll come back as fat as cows," thought Monsieur Boy who was very fond of his wives. He could see them getting fat on the fish from the Ubanguï, the famous "capitaine", you couldn't get in town, getting fat on palm oil, palm kernel pulp, palm nuts and the smell of the light palm kernel oil. Although Monsieur Boy was proud of his village, he was bitter about it all the same. He vowed to get even with them in one way or another.

The second or third person who had dictated part of the letter was one of the notables:

bien que fier de son pays ne manque pas de rancœur. Il se promet de se venger d'elles d'une manière ou d'une autre.

La deuxième ou troisième personne à avoir dicté en partie cette lettre est un notable:

Depuis la mort de Sayo, fils de Bangasu, la maison, dit-il, s'écroule. Tu as assez rendu service au Gouvernement. Pourquoi ne reviens-tu pas? J'attends une réponse rapide à la présente parce que je mourrai bientôt.

Personne n'a plus l'autorité qu'il faut au pays, l'autorité morale s'entend.

L'autorité morale (Monsieur Boy "ne fait pas de politique"). Ce qui s'avère un mensonge éhonté. Quand il veut éructer contre le Gouvernement et peu de

Since the death of Sayo, son of Bangasu, he said, the house has been falling to pieces. You've served the Government long enough. Why don't you come back home? I'm waiting for a speedy reply to this letter because I'll die soon."

No one had the authority needed in the village; that is, moral authority.

Moral authority (Monsieur Boy "wasn't a politician".) This, of course, was a shameless lie. When he wanted to speak out against the Government, and few people could do that, he did so publicly. Yes, publicly, so as not to be accused of plotting in the dark.

"I'm the only one," he said aloud, "the only one who believes in the religion of

personnes le peuvent, il le fait publiquement. Publiquement. Pour n'être pas accusé de comploter dans l'ombre.

"Je suis le seul, dit-il tout haut, le seul qui croit à la religion de nos pères. C'est moi qui remplacerai Sayo Bangasu! Pour l'autorité... il en a."

La troisième ou quatrième personne à avoir dicté la dernière partie de la lettre a le style bien caractéristique que voici:

"Toi, Batila, toi qui dévores tout seul depuis plus de vingt ans l'argent de l'Etat, là-bas à Uandja, espèce de sagouin."

Batila, puisque tel est son nom véritable, bien qu'abandonné depuis trente ou quarante ans à la suite des circonstances que l'on

our ancestors. I'll be the one to succeed Sayo Bangasu! As for authority... he has it."

The third or fourth person who had dictated the last part of the letter had a peculiar style:

"You, Batila, you who have been eating Government money alone for more than twenty years down there in Uandja, dirty fool!"

Batila, since that was Monsieur Boy's real name, smiled, although we know under what circumstances he had abandoned it for the past thirty or forty years, Batila smiled. He continued reading the strange letter.

"Eat, eat alone."

"Your cousin wants something. A pair of shorts or some tobacco."

"You send your wives

connaît, Batila a un sourire. Il poursuit la lecture de cette étrange missive.

"Mange, mange tout seul."

"Le cousin demande quelque chose. Une culotte ou du tabac."

"Tu envoies tes femmes ici chez nous à tire-larigot, mais on ne voit pas ta sale figure."

Monsieur Boy sourit.

"Morts ou vivants, nous nous rencontrerons un jour! Gare à toi, alors", achève le cousin.

Monsieur Boy termine sa lecture.

La nuit menace mais il sait que la lune se lève vers sept heures. Pas besoin de se presser.

"Dieu te garde. Pas d'autres dieux étrangers qu'on nous impose, mais les

here whenever you like, but you dare not show your dirty face here yourself!"

Monsieur Boy smiled.

"Living or dead, we'll meet one day. So watch out!" concluded his cousin.

Monsieur Boy finished reading.

It was getting dark, but he knew the moon would rise at about seven o'clock. No need to hurry.

"God be with you. Not the foreign gods imposed on us, but our own gods."

Monsieur Boy or Batila pushed his bicycle towards a pond. A pond in the middle of an open space. There was still a little water in the pond; the water was mud-coloured. Two antelopes with elegant horns, elegant beasts antelopes - smooth and powerful, guinea fowls,

nôtres te gardent."

Monsieur Boy ou Batila pousse sa bicyclette vers une mare. Une mare au milieu de la clairière. Il en reste toujours quelque chose, un peu d'eau couleur de boue. Deux antilopes aux cornes élégantes - des élégantes ces antilopes - lisses et puissantes, des pintades, des perdrix, un tas d'oiseaux ternes. Des ailes - un phacochère méfiant. Mais le regard de Monsieur Boy ne quitte pas le buffle, un mauvais, un solitaire. Monsieur Boy se laisse couler à terre perpendiculairement, vise longuement au défaut des puissantes épaules le buffle qui boit seul au milieu de la mare. Au moment où le buffle tête levée, souffle bruyamment, le coup l'abat. Monsieur Boy sait qu'il ne

partridges, a flock of lacklustre birds. Wings - a wart hog on its guard. But Monsieur Boy's interest was caught by the buffalo, a wicked, solitary animal; he didn't take his eyes off the buffalo. Monsieur Boy dropped to the ground, keeping his head up, aimed at the hollow of the buffalo's strong shoulders as it was drinking alone in the middle of the pond. When the buffalo raised its head, snorting noisily, the shot brought it down. Monsieur Boy knew he hadn't seriously hurt it, and was expecting the animal to get up and charge at him. There was no time out there in the open to fire a second shot. The buffalo breathed in and charged at him. Monsieur Boy jumped onto his bicycle, and pedalled as never before.

l'a pas touché sérieusement et qu'il va se relever pour foncer sur lui, il n'a pas le temps, à découvert, de loger une deuxième balle. Le buffle debout prend le vent, fonce. Monsieur Boy saute sur sa bicyclette. Il pédale comme il n'a jamais pédalé. Puis saute à terre et a juste le temps de bondir dans "l'arbre à Bangasu".

8

"Bangasu, Bangasu, protège ton "fils"." Les bras de Monsieur Boy l'enlèvent dans "l'arbre à Bangasu". Il suit le vent d'une corne sur son pied, le bruit du cuir d'une chaussure qui s'arrache, mais il est hors de danger. Un vrai miracle. Avec précaution, car avec la nuit comment savoir qu'une

Then he leaped off, and had just enough time to scramble up into the "Bangasu tree".

8

"Bangasu, Bangasu, protect your "son"." Monsieur Boy's arms clasped at the Bangasu tree. He could feel the rush of air from a horn against his foot, hear the leathery noise of one of his shoes being torn off. But he was out of danger. What a miracle! Carefully, he clambered up because in the

branche est pourrie ou pas pourrie, surtout durant cette saison sèche? Comment ne pas se méfier de la nature et des buffles? Monsieur Boy ne monte pas trop haut. On pourrait dire qu'il reste à mi-hauteur parce qu'il a l'habitude de prendre des décisions moyennes, des demi-mesures si l'on veut, commandées par la plus grande des prudences. Il s'installe à califourchon, la poitrine contre le tronc même de l'arbre et il fait sa prière de remerciement à Bangasu, sans bruit, en soliloquant. Bangasu est assuré de "manger" tout un boeuf à lui tout seul, boeuf que Monsieur Boy promet d'abattre à la prochaine occasion. Au retour de son fils Mokta de là-bas.

Il va se mettre en colère, mais chaque chose en

darkness how could he make out whether a branch was rotten or not, especially in the dry season? How to defy the woods and buffaloes? Monsieur Boy didn't climb too high up. You could say he stopped half-way because he usually took middle-of-the-road or half decisions based on the need for extreme precaution. He sat astride a branch with his chest against the trunk of the tree, and said a prayer of thanks to Bangasu silently. Bangasu would surely "eat" a whole cow alone, a cow he promised to slaughter on the next occasion. When his son, Mokta, would be brought back from the village.

He was getting angry, but there is a time and place for everything. The snake, which owned the tree, had

son temps. Le serpent, le propriétaire de l'arbre est dérangé, Monsieur Boy vient de s'en apercevoir par un singulier sifflement, le serpent recule puis fond en bas.

"Je te remercie encore Bangasu", dit Monsieur Boy en agitant les mains.

Un vrai miracle, il faut l'avouer. Monsieur Boy prie l'arbre, "l'arbre à Bangasu", pour que traîtreusement, au prix de sa propre vie, il ne s'abatte pas pour le livrer lui, l'homme, à cette furie de buffle.

Le buffle recule, charge et cogne, tourne autour du tronc et recule pour charger de nouveau et tourner comme si en tournant autour de l'arbre il l'exorcisait, il agissait plus sûrement sur lui qu'avec des coups de

been disturbed. Monsieur Boy realized that when he heard a peculiar hissing as the snake coiled back, and then dropped to the ground.

"Thank you again, Bangasu," said Monsieur Boy, waving his hands.

It really was a miracle, he had to admit it. Monsieur Boy begged the "Bangasu tree" for all his life's worth not to break and fall down, and so traitorously deliver him to the furious buffalo.

The buffalo moved back, charged and struck, went round the tree trunk and stepped back to charge again, going round the tree, as if by doing so it could drive him out more effectively than by hitting the tree with its horns.

The small area around the foot of the tree was

cornes.

Une vraie petite place propre comme la paume de la main, oui, comme la grande place de Uandja, Monsieur Boy l'avait oubliée celle-là, une belle place autour du pied de l'arbre.

"La ville? Que devient-elle?", se demande-t-il. En révolution. On a dû se rendre compte de l'absence du "commandant". L'organisation comme toujours commence lentement. Bientôt on va se mettre à sa recherche.

"La ville n'est pas loin, se dit-il étonné. On aurait dû entendre la détonation..."

C'est vrai que si Monsieur Boy grimpait un peu plus haut dans l'arbre, il apercevrait les toits plus proches de sa maison et ceux du bureau un peu plus loin, à

bare as the palm of a hand, yes, like the market-place in Uandja which Monsieur Boy had forgotten, a lovely patch round the foot of the tree.

"The town? What has happened to it?" he wondered. In turmoil. People ought to have realized by now that the sub-prefect was missing. Getting organized always takes time. Soon they would start searching for him.

"The town isn't far away," he told himself, astonished. "People must have heard the shot..."

Of course, if Monsieur Boy had climbed a bit higher up the tree, he could have seen the roofs of houses closest to his own house and his office a little further to the right.

He lifted his hand to his heart: "What is left of

droite.

Il porte la main à son coeur: "Que reste-t-il de mon mauser? Cette fortune de fusil?"

Monsieur Boy a la vie sauve. Il ne peut en demander trop, surtout aujourd'hui où tant de "miracles" grâce à Bangasu sont arrivés.

Subitement, Monsieur Boy, le front appuyé contre le tronc de l'arbre, solitaire, commence à philosopher sur la vie et la mort, le regard en bas, fixe: Les herbes brillent à l'infini reflétant la lumière blanche de la lune, des chants d'oiseaux bien doux, insondables. Des bruits d'ailes qui passent dans un souffle de fraîcheur. Et soudain, ce grimacement qui fend l'air. Un oiseau, inconnu de Monsieur Boy.

my mauser? That precious gun?"

Monsieur Boy was safe. He couldn't ask for more, especially today when Bangasu had performed so many "miracles".

Gradually, Monsieur Boy, all alone, with his forehead against the tree trunk, began to philosophize on life and death, staring down below fixedly; the grass all around was shining endlessly, reflecting the white light of the moon, birds were singing sweetly and endlessly. Their wings made a fresh rustling noise as they flew past. And then a noise suddenly pierced the air. A bird unknown to Monsieur Boy.

The motionless buffalo was quivering through all its limbs. It had tears of rage in its eyes, that buffalo.

Le buffle immobile tremble de tous ses membres. Il en a les larmes aux yeux d'énervement, le buffle. Son sang s'est répandu un peu partout par flaques noires coagulées qui sentent déjà. Il a une mare tout à côté de lui, une mare plus importante que l'autre qui se forme en ce moment sous lui. Il s'écarte brusquement, entre dans les herbes, fait un détour. Monsieur Boy suit des yeux un peu amusé mais aussi terriblement grave, la masse sombre du buffle qui se cache tant bien que mal.

Le buffle apparaît aux yeux de Monsieur Boy dans la direction la plus opposée à celle par laquelle il est parti, immobile derrière un bosquet.

"C'est ça l'Afrique", se dit Monsieur Boy. "Vieille

Its blood was splashed around, dark pools of it had coagulated and started to smell. There was a pool quite near it, a pool larger than the one being formed beneath it. It ran off abruptly, went into the grass, then turned back. Slightly amused but deadly serious, Monsieur Boy watched the huge dark bulk of the buffalo as it somehow managed to hide.

For Monsieur Boy, the buffalo seemed to be motionless behind a clump of bushes, having gone round a full circle.

"This is really Africa!" Monsieur Boy told himself. "An old sly trick."

He lifted a derisory finger. But the "old sly trick" didn't apply only to Africa. Animals in other continents also defend

ruse bien connue."

Il lève un doigt moqueur. Mais cette formule de "vieille ruse bien connue", ne s'adresse pas directement à l'Afrique. Les animaux des autres continents de ce monde rond se défendent comme ils peuvent contre la mort brutale que les hommes, pour diverses sortes de raisons plus ou moins défendables, ne réservent pas seulement à leurs semblables.

Ici, un chasseur novice descendrait de l'arbre et se ferait piétiner, déchirer. Le torero novice d'Espagne, de même, aurait grandement tort de se planter sans méfiance sous le muffle du taureau parce que celui-ci, immobile, sombre, la langue pendante, presque sans jarrets, tête basse, n'a de couleur à son puissant poitrail que celle

themselves as best they can against the brutal death which men, for various more or less defensible reasons, do not only inflict on their fellow men.

Here, an inexperienced hunter would have come down from the tree, and have been trampled and torn to pieces. Just like an inexperienced bullfighter in Spain would be making a great mistake to stand off guard in front of a bull even when the downcast animal is standing with its tongue hanging out, its head down, its hocks almost out of sight, its powerful front smeared with its own coagulated blood.

Monsieur Boy was moved. That wasn't the first time he had shot a buffalo. He had already killed about fifty of them with his mauser alone,

de son sang caillé.

Monsieur Boy est ému. Ce n'est pas la première fois qu'il tire le buffle. Il en a abattu une cinquantaine rien qu'avec son mauser, généralement dès le premier coup, dès la première balle. Monsieur Boy est comme ça...

Comme s'ils étaient fous, ils étaient montés à l'assaut à cinq heures, cinq heures et demie. Les Allemands arrosaient le terrain d'obus et de balles de mitrailleuses. (Ces mitrailleuses-là étaient moins efficaces que celles d'aujourd'hui. Le progrès!)

"L'homme aussi est une espèce d'animal, lui", se dit-il, contrarié... mais pas au point de descendre de l'arbre de son ancêtre.

Il avait vu le ventre ouvert par l'éclat d'obus.

usually with the first shot. Monsieur Boy was like that...

Like madmen, they had mounted an onslaught at five o'clock, half past five. The Germans had sprayed the land with shells and machine gun bullets. (Those machine guns weren't as efficient as the ones nowadays. That's progress for you!).

"Man is also a sort of animal," he told himself, annoyed... but not enough to come down out of the tree of his ancestor.

He had seen a soldier's stomach torn open by shells. The new recruit had felt a lot of pain, but nothing could be done. Even the stretcher-bearers said: "Can't do anything for him." But why had the soldier worn such tight uniform, so difficult to get off, a

Il souffrait ce petit blanc-bec, mais rien à faire. Les brancardiers eux-mêmes disaient: "Rien à faire." Et qu'est-ce que c'est que ce soldat habillé aussi serré, si difficile à déshabiller comme pour que l'uniforme en devienne la peau, le linceul. La peau de buffle. Le buffle à balles. Le ventre à obus. Quand on était parvenu à tailler dans l'étoffe de peau de l'uniforme, le ventre était blanc et rouge, boueux et verdâtre...

Ce blanc-bec de Normand était un vrai Africain. Il était tout le temps avec eux. Il aimait rire, faire des blagues tandis que le canon tonnait. A la porte de la mort. Parfois, les Africains le regardaient, assis, surpris eux-mêmes.

"Est-il fou?"

uniform that clung to his body like a skin, like a shroud. The buffalo's skin. The buffalo riddled with bullets. His stomach torn apart. When they had managed to cut through the skin-like uniform, his belly had been red and white, muddy and greenish...

The new recruit from Normandy had behaved like a true African. He had been with the Africans all the time. He liked laughing and making jokes, even when the cannons were thundering on. At the gates of death. Sometimes, the Africans sat and watched him, surprised themselves.

"Is he crazy?"

"He's crazy."

He was. The pain. Twenty years old. The mud. The fear. All that together.

"Il est fou."

Sûrement. Les chagrins.
Les vingt ans. La boue. La
peur. Tout ça ensemble. A
moins que...

- Il n'était pas fou.

- Un gars courageux.

- Du genre à ne pas
avoir d'étoile.

- Courageux sans le
savoir.

- Peut-être qu'il ne le
sait que trop.

- Pas ça de mauvais en
lui.

Il était trapu, rond,
avec des larges fesses comme
une vache.

De Normandie.

La Normandie de Guy de
Maupassant. Monsieur Boy a
chez lui, un livre, il ne
sait pas si c'est un roman ou
non, il lit ce livre depuis
au moins deux ans, mais il
n'a pas le temps de le

Unless...

"He wasn't crazy."

"A brave chap."

"One of those who'd
never win a medal."

"Brave without realizing
he was."

"Perhaps he knew it only
too well."

"Nothing bad about him."

He was thickset and
plump, with buttocks as large
as a cow.

From Normandy.

The Normandy of Guy de
Maupassant. Monsieur Boy had
a book at home; he didn't
know whether it was a novel
or not. He had been reading
that book for two years at
least, but he had never had
the time to finish it. When
did he have time to read? In
any case, the "thickset and
plump, with large buttocks"
image of the young recruit

terminer. Où trouver le temps de lire? En tout cas, l'image "trapue, ronde avec des larges fesses" de ce blanc-bec lui sert de nom, à celui-là. Monsieur Boy l'a oublié ce nom. Il l'a sur la langue, ce nom. Peut-être un jour... Les sons, les mots, les noms c'est comme ça. Un jour, sans qu'on sache comment, ils se font vie, se forment et jaillissent sur la langue et on les entend alors...

Guy de Maupassant - Monsieur Boy ne connaît pas d'autres noms d'écrivains à part René Maran et son propre fils à lui. Guy de Maupassant - Monsieur Boy n'a pas le temps de lire, de retenir les noms des écrivains - Guy de Maupassant... Son propre fils vit au Canada plutôt à côté de Québec. Il écrit en français. Pourquoi

would serve as his name. Monsieur Boy had forgotten his name... The name was on the tip of his tongue. Perhaps one day... Sounds, words and names are like that. One day, without knowing how, they come to life, are shaped and flow out of our mouths and then we hear them...

Guy de Maupassant - Monsieur Boy knew no other writers' names apart from René Maran and his own son. Guy de Maupassant - Monsieur Boy had no time to read or remember the names of writers - Guy de Maupassant... His own son lived near Québec in Canada. He wrote in French. Why didn't he write in Sango? He lived in the cold in Courville. He preferred that. Strange. He'd run away from home, hadn't he? Strange to

n'écrit-il pas en sango? Vit à Courville dans le froid. Préfère ça. Bizarre. La fuite, non. Bizarre un écrivain, quand même, mais son fils n'est pas un écrivain puisqu'il n'écrit pas en sango.

"Qui me lirait?" avait-il demandé, le fils.

En effet.

"Qui te lirait ici si tu écrivais en sango?"

Reste là-bas. Ecris et évite les ennuis.

Monsieur Boy parle, on le voit comme devant son fils. Quand il était venu, le fils. Ils en avaient discuté de la littérature sous la véranda pendant une heure ou deux. Bien que son fils, comme lui, quand il était jeune, ne tint pas en place.

Il tenait en place pourtant sous les bois,

be a writer, too, but his son wasn't a writer since he didn't write in Sango.

"Who'd read my books?" his son had asked.

Good point.

"Who'd read you here if you wrote in Sango?"

Stay there. Keep on writing and avoid problems.

Monsieur Boy talked as if he could see his son, before him. When his son had come, they had talked about literature on the veranda for an hour or two. Though his son, like himself when young, didn't stay long in one place.

However, he had stayed in the woods alone for days on end, hearing and listening to what Monsieur Boy couldn't imagine.

"If I wrote in Sango, which publisher would print

tout seul, des journées entières à entendre et à écouter Monsieur Boy ne savait quoi.

"Si j'écrivais en sango quelle imprimerie me publierait?"

Ah, la mécanique toujours... Guy de Maupassant quel écrivain. Un style comme ce que son fils recherchait dans les bois et qu'il a fini par trouver à Courville au Québec.

Courville comme les villes de Normandie. Le pays de Guy de Maupassant - Maupassant - Courville.

"Vis tranquille, fils, et travaille."

Et il lève le doigt, Monsieur Boy.

"Il en restera toujours quelque chose. On se cherche des emmerdements en vain."

On ne travaille que dans

my books?"

Ah, technology again! What a writer Guy de Maupassant was! With the sort of style his son had looked for in the forest, but had finally found in Courville, Quebec.

Courville like the towns in Normandy. Where Guy de Maupassant came from. Maupassant - Courville.

"Live in peace, son, and work hard."

And Monsieur Boy lifted a finger.

"There'll always be something left. We're bothering ourselves for nothing."

You can work well only in peace and understanding.

Monsieur Boy glanced at the buffalo waiting patiently behind the clump of bushes.

"That's quite a beast!

la paix et la compréhension.

Monsieur Boy jette un coup d'oeil à son buffle toujours patient, derrière le bosquet.

"C'est ça une bête. C'est ça, la vengeance."

Comme disent les Français, un plat qui se mange froid. Mais...

"Il est en train de perdre tout son sang. Il maigrît", s'écrie intérieurement parlant, Monsieur Boy.

"Il n'en restera pas grand'chose pour vendre sur le marché."

Monsieur Boy comme les possesseurs, disons les propriétaires de fusils, fait commerce de viande.

On en devine les conséquences en fait de carnage ou de massacre, n'est-ce pas?

That's what vengeance means!"

As the French would put it, a dish to be eaten cold. But...

"It's going to lose all its blood. It's getting thinner!" shouted Monsieur Boy in his own mind.

"There won't be much left to sell in the market."

Like all owners, that is gun owners, Monsieur Boy dealt in meat.

You can therefore easily imagine the consequence of carnage or massacre, can't you?

Owning a gun.

Hunting - even after losing the fires of youth, the youth he had brought back intact from the war.

"Thanks to Bangasu," said Monsieur Boy... intact from the war. As for

Posséder un fusil.

Chasser - encore qu'il ait perdu le feu de la jeunesse, cette jeunesse qu'il avait ramenée intacte de la guerre.

"Grâce à Bangasu", dit Monsieur Boy... intacte de la guerre. Chasser, pour ce qui est de chasser, il chassait, chassait. "Qui a donné l'amour de la chasse aux hommes pour qu'ils vivent de viande fraîche et pure?"

Bangasu évidemment.

Et le fils de ce dieu-roi ne peut s'empêcher de sourire. Il pense aux petits Européens hauts comme ce "blanc-bec" qui s'était fait ouvrir le ventre par un obus... Ah! Charron qu'il s'appelait. Charron, Charron!...

"Il serait encore alerte comme Batila."

hunting, whatever hunting was, he was always hunting.

"Who instilled in men the love for hunting, so that they can live on fresh, uncontaminated meat?"

Bangasu, obviously.

And the son of that god-king couldn't help smiling. He thought of the slim tall Europeans like the new recruit whose stomach had been torn open by a shell... Ah! Charron was his name. Charron! Charron!

"He'd still have been as alert as Batila." ... Charron! Charron! The small Europeans - like Charron - fired at a bear in a mechanical box in a pub.

"Machines all the time!"

A hit, and the bear laughed. It laughed whenever it was hit by an electric shot. And when all the

... Charron! Charron! - Les petits Européens comme l'était Charron tirent l'ours dans une boîte mécanique de bistrot.

"Toujours ça la mécanique."

Touché, l'ours rit. Il rit autant de fois qu'une décharge électrique le touche. Et c'est quand le nombre de ces balles électriques est épuisé que l'ours rieur qu'on tue interminablement dit d'une drôle de voix:

"Merci."

Au cinéma...

"N'avancez pas", hurle Monsieur Boy de toute la puissance de ses poumons.

"Restez là-bas. N'avancez pas."

Déployés sur quatre ou cinq cents mètres les gens, torches brandies au-dessus

electric shots had been fired, the laughing bear, already killed several times over, said in a funny voice:

"Thank you."

In the cinema...

"Don't come any closer!" screamed Monsieur Boy with all his might.

"Stop there! Don't come any closer!"

Spread out over four or five hundred metres, people were searching for Monsieur Boy, with torches held above their heads.

"Who?..." choked Monsieur Boy.

"Buffalo! Buffalo!"

The others were making a lot more noise than he was. If only they'd stop that din for a second!

They pricked up their ears.

"Buffalo", screamed

de leurs têtes, ont entrepris de le chercher, Monsieur Boy.

"Qui?..." étouffe Monsieur Boy.

"Buffle! Buffle."

Les autres font plus de bruit que lui. S'ils arrêtaient un peu ce tintamarre.

Ils tendent l'oreille:

"Buffle!", crie Monsieur Boy. Il ajoute:

"Blessé!... Blessé!"

C'est-à-dire:

" A t t e n t i o n !
At...tention! les cons!"

Ils hurlent ensemble, les cons, tous accourent.

Monsieur Boy voit le spectacle, atterré: Le buffle, un instant surpris, fonce. Comme un éclair. Monsieur Boy le voit charger. Deux, trois, quatre personnes volent en l'air. C'est la panique parmi les gens et la colère de Monsieur Boy.

Monsieur Boy, and added, "Wounded!... it's wounded!"

That meant:

"Watch out! Watch out! Idiots!"

The people roared together and surged forward.

Monsieur Boy watched the scene in horror. The buffalo was taken by surprise, then charged. With lightning speed. Monsieur Boy looked on as it charged. Two, three, four people flew into the air. Panic in their midst, and for Monsieur Boy anger.

"The fool..."

Meanwhile, he forgot to come down from the tree.

A lot of stomachs torn open. As usual, serious injuries to the groin.

"Who's going to take the blame, eh? When the President hears about it? Me..."

The gendarmes'

"L'imbécile..."

Il oublie cependant de descendre.

Beaucoup de ventres ouverts. Comme toujours des blessures graves à l'aine.

"Qui sera responsable, hein? Quand la nouvelle parviendra aux oreilles du Président? Moi..."

Les mitraillettes de la gendarmerie arrêtent là les soucis de ce haut fonctionnaire républicain, descendant des dieux-rois.

Batila oubliera-t-il jamais cela, qu'il est dieu-roi et reste roi-dieu?... Même s'il est seul à le croire. Même s'il n'a plus d'adorateurs.

"La viande est foutue. Ils ont ouvert le feu trop longtemps", dit-il furieux en descendant de "l'arbre à Bangasu."

Quelqu'un va payer.

submachine guns put an end to the worries of the high ranking civil servant of the republic, descendant of the god-kings.

Would Batila ever forget that he was a god-king and would always remain a god-king?... Even if he were the only one to believe it. Even if he no longer had any worshippers.

"The meat is ruined. They've fired too many shots into it," he said angrily as he came down from the "Bangasu tree".

Someone would have to pay for that.

N O T E S

1. Although forced labour was abolished on independence, President Dacko introduced community labour days throughout the Central African Republic in 1962 as one of the measures to remedy State budget deficits. It is likely that Bamboté is alluding to such labour here.
2. Leaves of the cassava plant used as vegetable for preparing a local sauce.
3. Although making faces may be considered childlike behaviour in countries such as Great Britain, it is accepted as normal adult behaviour in Africa, especially in situations of mimicry.
4. Indigenous languages of the Central African Republic.
5. A very strong, dry local alcoholic drink made of maize, cassava, etc. Since it is legally prohibited, the sub-prefect is certainly flouting the law.
6. Local guitar made of wood and plant strings used for entertainment and during festivities.
7. A local alcoholic drink.
8. A member of a muslim religious sect who lives through begging.
9. A type of tree that has grown on the grave of King Bangasu who died in 1907. It is inhabited by a green snake, the totem of the Bangasu family.

5.4 Conclusion

By and large, I have attempted in this chapter to apply the analysis and transfer strategies presented earlier with regard to the translation of francophone African literary texts into English. The choice of a text has been dictated mainly by my knowledge of French and English, my familiarity with African literature, my horizon of expectation, and the fact that the text presents features likely to be encountered in francophone African literary works. I have applied approaches suggested in the mapping of transfer strategies for the analysis of the original text: both textual and extra-textual material have been used in the interpretation of the excerpt. Extra-textual information includes situating the work within Bamboté's works and the francophone African literary system, his life and experiences as well as their influence on his work, the setting of the novel, etc. The textual material comprises the themes or ideas presented in the novel, the author's individual style, etc. In the light of this analysis, translation options and strategies have been examined and ultimate choices justified. The readers of the translation have also been taken into account when adopting translation strategies; hence in order to enable readers who are not familiar with the relevant extra-textual information to understand the translation, background information has been provided in a short introduction and unfamiliar words and expressions have been explained in endnotes.

The translator, first as reader, would need the textual and extra-textual information in his or her attempt to analyze the ST. A discussion of transfer strategies and decisions as well as

reasons for choices within the overall translation strategy indicate a pattern which I as translator have adopted in my approach to the text.

CONCLUSION

1 Focal argument of thesis

In this thesis, I have attempted to map out or outline patterns of transference in the translation of African literature from French into English. To do this, my approach has been to compare original works and their translations, picking out parts of texts and their renditions which are indicative of analysis and transfer strategies in the translation process. In my attempt to present a systematic and global picture of strategies, my analysis has tried to situate them within the translation process - a process which has necessarily been reduced to two main stages for convenience since the focus is on describing and explaining translation strategies.

As a preliminary to the analysis, a brief survey of issues in African literature and a description of some of the typical features of African literary works in European languages with particular reference to English and French have helped to indicate in what aspects this literature is different from English and French literatures. Since the differences are bound to have implications for translation, a historical overview of the translation of African literature has provided an insight into how translators have approached, and continue to approach, literary texts as well as cope with their target readership. Research and debate in African literary translation studies having been found to be scanty, fragmentary and scattered,

dominant contemporary trends in literary translation studies (mainly in the West) have therefore been explored to determine if and in what ways they could be useful in the analysis of translation strategies from a wider perspective.

While my analysis has been limited to typical features such as content, cultural setting, peculiar use of English and French, and the target audience, examples from a variety of literary works and their translations have indicated some of the dominant trends in transfer strategies adopted by translators of African literary works from French into English. Some of these trends, supplemented with other possible options, are used in translating a text and a commentary on the various strategies and choices serves to shed more light on certain parameters of the analysis and transfer.

2 Significance and implications of the study

As part of suggestions for future research in literary translation studies, Susan Bassnett has stated that

the discussion of all types of literary translation will also be greatly advanced by a consideration of the problems of translating texts from outside Europe and the Americas.¹

This thesis could be considered as a step in that direction. Literary translation studies in Africa could contribute significantly to debate on the problems of translating various types of literature, especially as the literature is expressed in certain European languages, Arabic and indigenous languages, and written against a background of a multitude of different

¹ *Translation Studies*, p. 134.

cultures and thought patterns.

Furthermore, the thesis has attempted to look at patterns of analysis and transfer strategies within a broad and coherent framework, over and above the isolated and fragmentary perspective that has hitherto characterized research and debate in the translation of African literature, especially from French into English.

By basing my analysis on actual practice and using parts of translated texts, the thesis hopes to demonstrate that theory comes out of practice and that theory can assist practice; it has tried to look into what is actually done in translations of African literature and to suggest some explanations for some choices. Indeed, one of the main implications is that there needs to be a dialectic relationship between theory and practice in Africa instead of the present state of isolation from each other; translation theory and practice necessarily complement and feed into each other. This means that the practising translator and the scholar need not disregard or be suspicious of each other; a collaborative relationship between them is likely to contribute significantly to the development of translation studies and practice.

By looking, though briefly, at some of the intended functions of translated African literary texts and why certain works (and not others) have been translated, the importance of the political, historical, ideological, and social dimensions of translation in Africa has also been underscored. Thus studies and practice in the translation of African literature might need to pay more attention to these parameters. In this way, the identity

or "otherness" of African literature, even when expressed in European languages, could be accounted for in translation, and disseminated to the rest of the world.

Even though the thesis has focused on translation from French into English, the study could also be applied to translation from English into French since typical features of African literary texts in the two languages have been shown to be similar especially at the levels of content, cultural references, language use, and the target audience. However, the intrinsic peculiarities of these languages and the African languages which have influenced their use would have to be taken into account. It is very likely that similar translation problems might be encountered in translating from English into French, and the various analysis, interpretation and transfer strategies already outlined in my survey could be relevant and useful.

As concerns application to the translation of African literature in Portuguese, it is worth noting that writing in Portuguese has typical features similar to those of writing in English and French. The theme of protest against colonialism and of national identity is evident in the works of most Portuguese-speaking writers in Angola, Cape Verde, Mozambique, Sao Tomé, and Guinea Bissau:

[The] theme of protest is explored time and again in African poetry of Portuguese expression, but in the prose it is never obtrusive, for it is always conveyed in conjunction with incident, thereby adding a certain toughness to the writing.²

Indeed, the writers have been strongly influenced by négritude

² O.R. Dathorne, *African Literature in the Twentieth Century*, p. 252.

and often attempt to portray their societies, extolling traditional customs and rejecting European values. For example, Oscar Ribas in "Festa de núpcias" from *Uanga-Feitiço* presents some aspects of the marriage customs of his people, the Kimbundu, in his story. As Dathorne further points out, "Angolan poets make conscious use of African words in their verse." (p. 261); Geraldo Bessa Victor in "Kalundu" uses the word *butuque* which is a type of dance. Like anglophone and francophone writers, many of them use *linguae francae* in their writing; for instance, in "My Problem with the Swamps" Valente Malangatana uses standard Portuguese, Pidgin Portuguese, Creole, and some English. Given these similarities, it is probable that my analysis could also be applied to the translation of African literature between Portuguese and French and English or could at least serve as basis for carrying out a similar study specifically for African literary works in Portuguese.

As regards translation pedagogy, even though there is no guarantee that the study will automatically make good translators out of students who read it, knowledge and application of the analysis might encourage students to reflect on their translation strategies and choices; they might also become aware of potential options and reasons for making certain choices. That is why Kitty van Leuven-Zwart has also argued that research into the relationship between original texts and their translations might, in addition to being important for Descriptive Translation Studies, be useful in the teaching of translation:

methodically sound descriptions of translations can serve to show prospective translators that they can make deliberate choices in the translation norms and strategies that they use; ...they can make conscious

and argued decisions as to whether they want certain characteristics of the source text to show in the translation, or whether they prefer to alter them or leave them out altogether.³

Finally, as indicated in Chapter 4, the information provided by the survey could be used in theoretical translation studies research for developing models and theories.

3 Suggestions for further research

As I write the conclusion to this thesis, I am fully aware of the limited scope of the research I have carried out. First of all, my analysis of transfer strategies does not cover all aspects involved in the translation of African literature. With further and sustained research on the aspects I have considered and those not covered, deeper insight might be gained into analysis and transfer strategies. In addition, more research on the translation of oral literature, drama and poetry, and how this can be integrated into the mapping might help to promote literary translation studies in Africa.

Since my study has been limited only to French and English, other studies could focus on other pairs of European languages, between a European and an African language, or between African languages. Of course, the small number of African languages with written literatures still constitutes a major problem, but work could start on those with written literatures such as Swahili, Xhosa, and Yoruba, to mention but a few.

I hope that this thesis will bridge the gap that has existed between the fragmentary and scattered studies that have so far

³ "Translation and Translation Studies: Discord or Unity", p. 42.

been carried out on the translation of African literature, especially from French into English. The attempt to propose a coherent view of various translation strategies might, I also hope, be the start of broader research and debate on the translation of African literature. As I advocate a dialectic relationship between researchers and practising translators so that translation problems and approaches can be discussed from both the theoretical and practical points of view, I believe it would be an important step towards contributing to debate in translation studies in general and to making the works of African authors known through translation.

B I B L I O G R A P H Y

This thesis has been presented following the guidelines of *MHRA Style Book* (London: Modern Humanities Research Association, 1991) and 'Guide to Examinations for Higher Degrees by Research' of the Graduate School of the University of Warwick, September 1992.

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APPENDIX 1

FRANCOPHONE AFRICAN LITERARY WORKS TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH
AFRICA SOUTH OF THE SAHARA

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- Epée, Valère, *Transatlantic Blues* (Yaounde: Editions CLE, 1972) trans. by Samir Zoghby, *Transatlantic Blues* (Yaounde: Editions CLE, 1972)
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APPENDIX 2

A LIST OF SOME OF THE UNPUBLISHED RESEARCH WORK ON THE TRANSLATION OF AFRICAN LITERATURE BETWEEN ENGLISH AND FRENCH BY STUDENTS OF THE ADVANCED SCHOOL OF TRANSLATORS AND INTERPRETERS, UNIVERSITY OF BUEA, CAMEROON

- Atumu, Ignatius Asah, 'Evaluating the Translation of the African Novel', 1990.
- Awa, Peter Terence, 'Fidelity in the Translation of the African Epic', 1987.
- Azenui, Leo Suh, 'Translating African Literary Works: An Appeal for the Source-Text-Oriented Approach', 1988.
- Aziah, Walters Abie, 'A Commented Translation of an Excerpt from Remy Medou Mvomo's *Afrika Ba'a*', 1988.
- Datchoua, Daniel, 'Traduction commentée d'un extrait de *The Edifice de Kole Omotoso*', 1988.
- Diom, Richard Ngong, 'Commented translation of Mongo Beti's *Les Deux Mères de Guillaume Ismaël Dzewatama: Camionneur*', 1987.
- Fai, Aboubakar Banyuy, 'Stylistic Considerations in a Commented Translation of Moussa Konaté's *Fils du Chaos*', 1988.
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- Fuh, Godlove Ambe, 'A Commented Translation of Excerpts from David Ndachi Tagne's *La reine captive*', 1988.
- Kamga, 'Traduction commentée de *The Rape of Michelle de Bole Botake*', 1989.
- Kang, Martin Tegha, 'Commented Translation: Delphine Zanga Tsogo's *L'oiseau en cage*', 1987.
- Lingom, Jean Jacob Antoine, 'Traduction commentée d'un extrait de *The Concubine d'Elechi Amadi*', 1987.
- Mbenkum, Adeline Wieleikfe, 'Patrice Etoundi Mballa's *Une vie à l'envers: A Textual Study of Equivalence in Translation*', 1988.
- Meafo, John, 'Traduction commentée d'extraits de *The White Man of God, roman de Kenjo Jumbam*', 1990.

- Mefire, Moussa, 'Traduction commentée d'un extrait de *The Taboo Kingdom* de Joseph Anchangnyuoh Ngongwikuo', 1988.
- Mouliom, Jean Marcel, 'La modulation comme technique de traduction: une étude textuelle à partir d'un extrait de *Director!* de Agbor Areo', 1989.
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- Ntamark, Constance Ngoyana, 'Analyse et évaluation de la traduction française de *Things Fall Apart* de Chinua Achebe par Michel Ligny', 1988.
- Nzoyem, Gabriel, 'Traduction commentée d'extraits de *Taboo Love*: roman de Joseph A. Ngongwikuo', 1988.
- Tabod, Vivian Agwah, 'A Commented Translation of Jacqueline Leloup's *Gueido*', 1988.
- Tadie, Jean Rémy Dzetchuin, 'Traduction commentée d'un extrait de *Dangerous Waters* de Maurice Sotabinda', 1988.
- Tola, Godfroid, 'Traduction commentée de *Kwabena and the Leopard* de Geraldine Kaye', 1989.
- Wirkom, Tobias Mbiydzenge, 'A Commented Translation of Excerpts from Pabe Mongo's *Bogam Woup*', 1988.
- Zesseu, Claude Tankwa, 'On Translating Modern African Poetry: A Case Study of Selected Cameroonian Poets', 1990.

RESEARCH IN AFRICAN LITERATURES

December 18, 1991



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Moses N. Nintai
 28M Tocil Flats
 University of Warwick
 Coventry CV4 7AL
 England

Dear Moses,

Your letter arrived about two weeks ago, and I apologize for not having replied sooner, but the unexpected death of our associate editor, Josaphat Kubayanda, has made it difficult for us to keep up with the usual workload. I was very interested in your project for a PhD thesis on the translations of francophone African literature into English. As far as I know, there is no official list of such translations, but there would be several places to start. Jahnheinz Jahn's Bibliography of African Literature listed all the translations of African works, but it is by now somewhat out of date. Some additional material is available in The New Readers' Guide to African Literature, and you might find the Index Translationem of some help. Professor Frederic Michelman (Dept. of French, Box 411, Gettysburg, PA 17325 U.S.A.) was at one time the chair of an ALA committee on translation, and I know that he gathered some material on this subject. You might want to write to him and ask whether or not he would be able to send you copies of the lists that he had compiled. There are some good books on translation history of this kind (I'm thinking, for example, of The Golden Tapestry, which deals with translations of Golden Age Spanish works into English), but no one has, as far as I know, attempted such a study within the African context. There is the possibility for you to do some exciting work on this topic, and I hope that you'll continue to work on it.

✓ (As far as my own work in the field of translation is concerned, I fell into it rather by accident. I was teaching in Yaoundé in 1976-77, and I became

acquainted with the work of René Philombe. I was particularly attracted to his Histoires Queue-de-chat, which I thought (and still think) contains some of his most powerful writing. After I had spoken with Philombe himself on a number of occasions, I undertook to translate one of the stories in this volume for my own amusement. I believe that it was "Le Petit Serpent du Docteur Tchumba." The finished manuscript was lying on the table of my apartment when the anglophone poet and bookseller Buma Kor happened to stop by for a visit. He saw the story and asked if he could read it, and I of course said that he could. He was so excited by the story that he wanted me to bring out an English translation of one of Philombe's entire books. I had never really thought of myself as a translator, but the idea intrigued me, and I agreed to give him the manuscript of Lettres de ma cambuse before I left the country in August 1977. I honestly didn't think much would come of the matter, but Buma Kor did publish the volume, which he sold in Cameroon and in eastern Nigeria. A few months later, Philombe was invited to the United States, and a certain number of copies of the translation were distributed here. At that time, Don Herdeck met Philombe, read the stories and liked them so much that he asked me to translate more of Philombe's work for a new edition. It was then that I did the other four stories in Histoires Queue-de-chat and put them together with Tales from my Hut to create the new volume Tales from Cameroon that Herdeck brought out in Three Continents Press.

I still didn't think of myself primarily as a translator, for I was continuing to work on a study of Cameroonian literature and literate culture (The Cameroonian Quest for Freedom and Identity: Cameroonian Writing and the National Experience, which was published by Indiana University Press earlier this year). But Herdeck asked me to undertake the translation of Mongo Beti's La Ruine presque cocasse d'un polichinelle, which he had contracted out to someone else who had not been able to finish it on time. He was worried that he would lose the translation rights and needed to bring it out within a year. With some trepidation, I agreed to do the translation. It was one of the more difficult ones that I have done because Beti's syntax can be extraordinarily complex. I finished the project and having worked on Oyono for an encyclopedia, I asked Herdeck if he would be interested in a translation of Chemin d'Europe, which had not, I thought, received nearly the attention it deserved. I very much enjoyed that translation because of the verbal agility of Oyono; there are word plays and jokes in the original

that I tried to render into English, and it was hard but somehow rewarding. Then Herdeck asked me to do Hazoumé's Doquicimi, and I hesitate at first, because I was not convinced that Hazoumé was as accomplished a writer as Beti or Oyono, but I finally agreed to do it because I was enthralled by the epic sweep of the novel, by the ethnographic value of its descriptions, by its depiction of noble values within a cultural context that had not been understood by the outside world. The translation itself was a long one, but it was not particularly difficult in the sense that Hazoumé used a straightforward language without too many syntactic complexities.

I suppose that the reason I continue to do translations occasionally and to teach a translation workshop from time to time is the sheer creative joy that one derives from the satisfaction of having satisfactorily solved a puzzle, of finding words in English that have somewhere near the same effect that the original French ones did. For me, the primary prerequisite for a good translator is to have a good sense for the various registers of expression in his or her own language. We use a number of paradigms in our work, and we tend to be satisfied when our translation "fits" the paradigm that we have constructed in response to the original passage. The greatest danger is a willingness to be satisfied with an "à peu près." Although the perfect translation is impossible, we need, I believe, to strive to come as close as possible to the original in terms of register and impact upon the target audience. For example, I worked hard on the title of Beti's novel and finally settled upon "The Fairly Farcical Fall of a Pompous Puppet." I was more or less satisfied that I had captured the alliterative and parodic qualities of the original; however, when I delivered the manuscript to Herdeck, he balked, calling the title too long. He had wanted to change a few usages in the text, and after having argued long and hard with him, I finally agreed to accept his title, "Lament for an African Pol," if he would print the rest of the text the way that I had written it. I still sometimes regret this compromise, but it did show me that translators are not always free to determine the way in which their work will appear.

I hope that these comments will prove helpful to you, but if you have any further questions, please feel free to write to me. I will be back in Cameroon during the month of January, and there is some possibility that I will be in London later in the spring. If I do get there, I will try to contact you,

and perhaps we could get together at that time.
Sending warmest personal regards, I remain

Sincerely yours,


Richard Bjornson
Editor