



Reflections on the Concept of Literary Engagement: a Trial of Opinions*

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IN the collective imagination of readers and / or literary critics, Jean-Paul Sartre is reputed to be an emblematic figure of the commitment of the writer in the sense that he declares that a written text always bears the marks of its epoch. Starting from the premise that one should not "speak for nothing," Sartre concludes that the writer must always and fully assume his responsibility. However, Sartre's thesis has been criticized. The questioning director of the present reflection is the following: in what and under which conditions can the notion of commitment make it possible to clarify the representation of literature? What representation of literature does emerge from the use of the notion of commitment? Should we strictly return to the Sartrean sense of the term, or define new lines of interpretation or reflection? Taking into consideration the positions of Jean Bessière in *Quel Statut pour la littérature ?* (2001), *Le Roman contemporain ou la problématique du monde* (2010), of Emmanuel Fraisse and Bernard Mouralis in *Questions générales de littérature* (2001), of Jean Rancière in *La Parole muette. Essai sur les contradictions de la littérature* (1998), of Justin K. Bisanswa *Roman africain contemporain : fictions sur la fiction de la modernité et du réalisme* (2009) and of Patrice Nganang in *Manifeste d'une nouvelle littérature africaine. Pour une écriture préemptive* (2007) and *Principe dissident* (2005), we want to show that beyond the political

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and social commitment of the writer, literature is, above all, an autotelic act. Our purpose is essentially to "think about the (re)configurations of literary commitment" (Chloé, 2016). To achieve its objectives, the analysis first pays particular attention to literary commitment in the sense of Jean-Paul Sartre before showing that Sartre's conception of commitment has been rejected by the critics. As a result, literary commitment must not be eliminated from the modes of social intervention available to the individual citizen. The place where political convictions must be evacuated is the work of the author while their legitimacy is not the subject of any controversy in the action of the citizen. While recognizing that "the writers of the African continent have never given up on the political field", Xavier Garnier (2009: 10) says that Sony Labou Tansi claims a committing literature rather than a committed literature. The writer is that indefatigable warrior or soldier whose most effective weapon is his pen that he puts at the service of society. However, this belligerent conception of literature has been questioned by many theoreticians of literature. Nowadays, the notion of commitment in the Sartrian sense is generally disavowed within criticism. The notion of commitment, which considers literature as action, has, so to speak, undergone a de-emanation from the perspective of reflexivity and self-representation of the act of writing. It is easy to understand why the 2016 Nobel Prize for Literature was awarded to the famous American musician Bob Dylan. Even if the literary specialists have taken very hard or even disparaging positions on the occasion of this prize, it is nonetheless true that this is an intoxicating proof that literature has removed a lot of barriers and is now everywhere and in everything. This forces us to rethink, as we have just done, the notion of literary commitment. Thus, we have "resemantised" Sartre's political dimension of commitment in literature. From there, we are entitled to conclude with Roland Barthes that "writing is an intransitive verb" (1973: 71). Clearly differentiating both Sartre's criticism of formal games with language in the name of re-commitment from Blanchot's readings, which adheres to an almost mystical conception of literature, Jacques Rancière presents a new interpretation of this evolution. The contradiction, which penetrates literature, is, in fact, the gamble of a so-called democratic. From this perspective, literature is this contradiction, this "silent word" according to the Rancière's thought.