



Return of the Subject, Chaos Theory and General Interest in *Madame Bâ* and *Mali, ô Mali* by Erik Orsenna and *La Découverte de l'Amérique* by Rafaël Pividal*

Bernard DJOMESSI TONGMO**

BASED on two novels by Erik Orsenna, *Madame Bâ* et *Mali, ô Mali*, and *The Discovery of America* by Rafaël Pividal, we intend to question two of the elements that characterize postmodern literature: the return of the subject and the poetics of chaos. Through these two elements, the two postmodern French writers attempt to revise the predictable principles of scientific rationality. They apply for a flexible world, which is the "weak thought", as suggested by Gianni Vattimo (1987). Hence the problem of reflection: the critique of sectarian reason in literature and existence. So the problem is to know: how do Orsenna and Pividal deconstruct the individualism and predictability, which govern the rational sciences of modernity? To resolve this question, we have resorted to postcolonial thought which, theorized by Edward Said in 1978, aims to analyze colonial discourse and the thoughts of modern systems. In the application of this theory, we conducted a reflection around two axes.

The first consecrates renarrativization, which, in postmodern aesthetics, implies the return of the subject, whom modern writing had rejected in the aftermath of Romanticism, which itself used it from a very individualistic perspective (quest and creation of distant lands, imposition of his vision on others).

*Received: 2020/04/24

Accepted: 2020/08/09

**PhD student, University of Douala, Cameroun, E-mail: jovenseingamaleu@gmail.com

However, in postmodern writing, the "I" of the writer or the character-narrator perverts the atavistic identity and opens up to the integration of otherness, and hence the general interest. We saw it in *Mali, oh Mali* of Orsenna, where Ismaël, character-narrator, is so involved in the historical life of the Malian nation that he almost forgets his private life. Only the general interest is its prerogative. He is busy writing down in his griot notebook the maneuvers that punctuate the cultural, political and economic life of Mali. Moreover, in *Madame Bâ*, the heroine, tells her intimate life in the first person, but with modesty, since she knows that it is also that of all humanity.

The second axis devotes the poetics of chaos in the postmodern texts of Orsenna and Pividal. It is characterized first of all by the criticism of the thoughts of systems, which are based on rationality, Arts and Crafts, arithmetic, complicated operations, such the attempt to arbitrarily attribute the name to a ship, the alleged objectivity of science in defiance of the myth, a misunderstanding of the myth of Oedipus, which would refer to the holy trinity or the three members of a family, the father, the mother and the child. The human imagination has limitless functions.

Orsenna challenges the Parisian School of Arts and Crafts for its alleged predictive assurance: the characters, Ousmane (Malian blacksmith-engineer), Sidibé, French and director of the Kati refugee camp, having systematically made a career there, give themselves the opportunity to make fun of the magic, the animism that characterize unpredictability and therefore postmodern culture. They say they are "one hundred percent" rational "and believe that there is no world except rigor, logic, premeditation and duties. Ousmane likes to prepare by correspondence the complicated Arts and Crafts competition, which the novelist Orsenna describes as "terrible". Moreover, French rationality does not only maintain an incredible anticipation, it also wants to be ambivalent and maintains double talk: the French character Sidibé maintains a process of rationalization which makes the source of refugees inexhaustible, even though he was sent to Mali by the High Commission for Refugees with a view to stopping terrorism; it feeds it earlier in order to ensure employment for the French. In the same vein, Pividal deconstructs the theory of the hypotenuse of Pythagoras, which borders on the arbitrary, because such the theory of the lie of the Americans according to which the virgins would obtain the blessing to all the men, in Greece where they come from. While it is rather a question of cultural colonization, the formula of the divine mathematician of Samos is imposed on the whole world.

Still at Pividal, the science that ignores the myth is called into question. In other words, any alleged scientific objectivity, characterizing modernity,

is far from acceptable. There is no exact science. Science naturally passes through fiction. The scientist is endowed with subjectivity. Pividal also rewrites the myth of Oedipus, which is arbitrarily said to embody the totality of symbolic representation. Thus, it is absurd to think that a family is good insofar as it is full of legitimate members; yet illegitimacy, which in modern societies is a problem when legitimacy is only incidentally applied, happens to be the very nature of a family. He takes the case of Télédamos and Télégonos who, illegitimate sons, bring new blood to the family of Ulysses. How could the latter do twenty years of non-Mediterranean drift, after the siege of Troy, without being in love with Calypso and Circe, mothers of his two bastards, when he had abandoned his wife Penelope? Thus, we can understand why Telemachus, legitimate son of Ulysses, irritates Paul, a revolutionary character whose spirit no longer embodies only postmodernity. The latter also disputes the baptism of his ship Ax: he considers that his ship cannot bear the name of an international firm, even if it has financed its naval project. Paul is therefore far from being of a materialistic spirit, which characterizes the modern world.

Pividal in *The Discovery of America* challenges all of this. In addition, the chaos-world is based on the entanglement of cultures, the beautiful illustration of which is seen in *Madame Bâ* by Erik Orsenna. Far from being hybrids, cultures are "disseminated" and interweave in a natural way through interstitial zones. No one can say what a culture or cultures should be; the only thing to do is to see that they meet naturally. Thus, a country, according to Orsenna's postmodern narrative, is a named geographic reality, inhabited by a multitude of people from all over the world. The central character, Marguerite, Malienne, leaning over the Robert, explains to the French master Benoît that a country appears as a mother or a father with whom a citizen can take refuge. Like a mother who takes the protection of her child without asking him the slightest question, a country should welcome every human being without looking at his culture and his imagination. For the natural contacts of cultures, which are always good, can only be confrontational if men, seized with rationalism and selfish interests, begin to reflect in order to sow panic among men. Every human being happens to be a country that everyone can move towards in a natural way. And Marguerite concludes, by asking these questions to the Frenchman Benoît, who is taken by rationality and therefore cultural atavism, is astonished: "*How many countries does a human being have in him, real countries in the dictionary sense: "Inhabited territory", "named realities"? Two, three, five? Is it my fault that life is rich? Either the French form is useless, or it should take it into account*" (MB: 90-91). This explanation is all the more relevant as "My nice advice [Benoît] gives up arms" (MB: 91). Erik Orsenna will insist also on the metaphor of water to

explain this natural intermingling of cultures. Her heroine Marguerite, asks the French engineer, Jean Baptiste, who did not believe in the myth of cultural rationality -atavism-, thinks that "water only likes group trips"; the earth, the seed, the mineral salts, which metaphorically represent three cultures, naturally need to become entangled by means of water, a metaphor for speech or dialogue.

In short, the texts of Orsenna and Pividal that we have targeted are characterized by the return of the subject and the theory of chaos, which indicates the limits of rational thought. With the help of postcolonial thought, we have shown how writers deconstruct it. The notions of forecasting and double-talk that characterize the rational mind deserve to be rewritten so that life is restored as it is and the general interest is guaranteed among men.

Keywords— Return of the subject, Chaos, Postmodern French novels, Deconstruction, Postcolonial thought.

SELECTED REFERENCES

- [1] Bhabha, Homi, *The Places of Culture*, Payot, Paris, 2007.
- [2] Glissant, Edouard, *Introduction to a poetics of diversity*, Gallimard, Paris, 1996.
- [3] Gontard, Marc, *Le Roman français postmoderne*, Gallimard, Paris, 2003.
- [4] Mbembe, Achille, "What is postcolonial thought? », In *Esprit*, 2006.
- [5] Orsenna, Erik, *Madame Bâ*, Stock / Fayard, Paris, 2003.
- [6] Orsenna, Erik, *Mali, oh Mali*, Stock, Paris, 2014.
- [7] Pividal, Raphaël, *The Discovery of America*, Grasset, Paris, 1981.
- [8] Said, Edward, *Orientalism. The Orient created by the Occident*, Seuil, Paris, 2005.
- [9] Spivak, Gayatri, *Can Les Subalternes speak?*, Amsterdam, Paris, 2009.