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**THE WRITER'S PROFESSION AT  
THE END OF THIS CENTURY**

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## Literature is a vocation.

If we refer back to authors who have written on the subject since the days of Rousseau, it becomes clear that writing is considered to be a profession unlike any other. To be a writer is more of a "condition" than a "profession". The self-respect of writers would even seem to depend on such a distinction. Not that such scruples result in their refusing remuneration certainly not the fortunes that success can bring. Getting rich as a writer is still, however, the exception rather than the rule and even for those who do make money, their status in the profession is not defined by the size of their earnings - they pocket said money without identifying themselves too much with it.

Much discussion has been devoted to the notion of writing as a "second job." It seems that writing was not considered a real job by such practitioners as Agrippa d'Aubigne, a soldier in his professional life, or by the many other famous examples who have worked as ambassadors. For them, writing is not motivated by economics. It is a vocation.

Recognizing and protecting this vocation is the true dilemma when, even in countless literary conferences on the question of defining the professional writer, the application of the most obvious criterion i.e. the amount earned from writing, inevitably leads to the exclusion of many who should be considered real writers.

2) A second "constant" does make the writer's lot one to be recommended: his vocation remains firmly established through the ages. There are statistics to prove it: the media Galaxy of Marshall McLuhan has not destroyed the Gutenberg Galaxy. Through a satellite or the Internet, a pen or a printer, it remains a matter of communication between people.

One should define three aims of writing: to inform, to communicate and to express oneself. There is a need not just to provide information but to educate and to develop the mind of the recipient. It is this drive to educate that distinguishes human beings from animals and that carries within it our need to advance and our capacity to surpass ourselves. (Hegel's "self-realization of the human spirit").

3) The imagination which has its origins in a dissatisfaction with the present state of affairs and its power in the faith that an alternative state can be invented, finds in writing a privileged medium. And a medium whose formative role is all the more important since it remains at the root of the literary vocation. "The Ludion effect" (Cohen Seat) of television probably excludes it from any chance of replacing the formative vocation of writing.

The "writer's profession" goes far beyond simply offering an abundance of images. It is an expression of the inner life. Literature is a 'science of sensibility' (R. Caillois.) A

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literary project is so obviously rooted in radical optimism and confidence in man's intellect and sensibility that it cannot stray far from the well-trodden and noble path of ethics. Hence it is difficult to consider this vocation to be a profession. A parallel can be drawn between literature and religion (Etiemble). There is something of the priest in the writer. However it is necessary to acknowledge that..

## LITERATURE IS ALSO A PROFESSION

From the individual to society:

4) The idea of an author's ownership of his work, of copyright was first introduced by Beaumarchais at the time of the French Revolution and became an imperative during the nineteenth century. The right of the author over his work is "the most sacred, the most personal of all properties," stated the le Chapelier report which formed the basis of the 1791 law.

Based on the model of Beaumarchais' "Bureau dramatique", the first writers' societies were born and in 1838, the "Société des gens de lettres" - the Society of Authors. That first phase was imbued with liberalism: the intellectual property was seen as a means to freedom. Patrons were replaced by commercial distributors. However it soon became evident that far from assuring its freedom, ownership was dragging literature along behind it. The socialist ideas of the end of the last century saw in a work of literature, not so much a form of material goods liable to the rights of ownership as a social service whose value should be recognized and whose author should be remunerated. The writer, thus, becomes a cultural labourer. Unfortunately the reality does not correspond to the dream. Under regimes that have applied this principle, the subservience of the writer soon becomes the rule to the point of his losing his soul or even his life.

5) As decolonization takes place and new countries are formed or reborn, more than ever they need to hear the sound of their own literary voice in order to understand just who they are. At stake is an awareness of their own culture from its oldest traditions to its newest creations. At the present time, the social structure of these countries does not give much hope for a rapid formation of a wealthy class whose children will be free enough from financial constraints to take on the work of self-expression necessary, through novels and poetry, to give words and form to the political realities that the peoples of new-born nations must confront.

### Social Integration

As the Panafrican conference on the conditions of work and life of the artist (Brazzaville, 20-23 July 1994) reaffirmed, the crisis that Africa is currently experiencing is predominantly cultural rather than political, economic or financial. The conference acknowledged that the writer's role is as much to educate as to question but this can only be guaranteed if the

social structure permits it. The weakness of the African countries in this domain and the result of conditions created by colonialism and the sacrifices necessary to earn their freedom mean that there is no milieu, no nurturing framework within which the writer can live and literature can survive. Two statistics quoted at the conference illustrate the weakness of the African nations in this domain: less than ten thousand titles were published for the whole continent - less than 2% of world wide production. It is to be hoped that the plan of action on cultural industries, adopted at Dakar in 1992 will bring about the expected results and, in particular, will allow the creation or reinforcement of the necessary social structures able to replace the traditional structures that have been destroyed or weakened.

A legislative and administrative effort is necessary not just in Africa but in the other countries where conditions are equally unfavourable, notably: to guarantee the moral and patrimonial rights of authors, to explore the possibilities of writing as a second job, to strengthen the various Societies and Associations for writers by guaranteeing their administrative and financial autonomy, and to reorganize the educational system in order to make a place for literature and the arts.

Even if they are of a particularly urgent nature in Africa, many of the recommendations made by the Brazzaville conference seem universally applicable such as : the introduction of a Biennale or book fairs, the development of libraries with priority of place accorded to contemporary regional and national authors, writers' workshops , opportunities for contact between authors and their public, and an ongoing fight against pirating and illicit photocopying - "photocopillage".

7) The evolution in the developed countries, although different, also threatens the relative equilibrium attained by the profession before the war and in the years just after the war. Here the problem was almost the opposite since it was a result of the growing integration of society. The writer ran the risk of finding himself excluded because of social progress. The writer's lack of financial and social protection made his situation intolerable in a society that had reorganized itself around the social security system. Thus the only means of social integration for the artist in general and the writer in particular was for their profession as a writer to be acknowledged by equating them with salaried employees - in other words by giving them a professional status. The same principle applied to efforts made on behalf of writers from developing countries. This latter idea was only acceptable on paper. Who, after all, employed our salaried employee? And since a literary writer did not have an employer, the task fell to society itself, that is to say the state. Even the most well-intentioned could not help but see in this scenario, the ghost of the Gulags. And it froze them into immobility. Any form of national or international action remained paralysed.

8) In France the dual nature of the literary profession finds itself sanctioned in some ways by the two sorts of rights that are seen as its due: the moral right which corresponds to the profession's spiritual and cultural vocation, and the patrimonial or material right which guarantees the author a part of the profits from his work. Even Victorian England, the ultimate champions of commercial "laissez-faire" had to put a stop to the abuse of the latter with the creation in 1889 of the Incorporated Society of Authors, Playwrights and Composers.

In order to understand the problem one has to be aware of its dimensions. If the total royalties from a book in a country such as France are around a 1000,000,000francs, the royalties earned on literary fiction are only about 250-300,000,000 francs in other words a quarter. Of the 10,000 members of the Societe des gens des lettres (French equivalent of the Society of Authors) the number of literary authors varies between 2000-3000 according to the criteria applied. We see how modest is both the money earned and the number of people earning it. In other words, the profession is a small one.

The French law of 1957 introduced a right of ownership that would transform a work into a capital transmissible by inheritance but for a period reduced to fifty years. After that the work falls into the public domain - and can be exploited for nothing. It is free.

It could become profitable. At least that's the theory. For the moment it's necessary to emphasize the complexities of exploiting this "capital" which can only be built up by depending on publishers to publish a work and on book distributors and booksellers to then make money on it. The latter see themselves as dependent on the publisher and not the author. The author's economic fate depends in turn on a public with whom he or she has no direct contact. In Anglo-Saxon countries the author often has recourse to an agent to smooth out any difficulties. Nevertheless it's worth remembering that by temperament and vocation the writer is poorly armed for economic combat. Those who would champion chimeras are rarely masters of the money markets. The society that acknowledges their value should therefore, accord them special protection but has been deterred from doing so by tragic historical precedents.

### Writers' Societies

9) It is towards this end that Writer's Societies are working and that is why they merit the good will of the powers that be. The fact that they still exist, let alone that they may be evolving is worthy of consideration. Since they were originally created to defend the rights of the author over his or her work, they should surely have ceased to exist as soon as such rights were recognized by the law. It is in fact the only domain where a private organization takes it upon itself, either through the police or through espionage, to ensure that such laws are enforced. And nobody questions the usefulness or

even the existence of such societies, so singular is the domain of the writer. When it comes to the authors' social situation, these societies, in particular the S.G.D.L have played a positive and original role.

10) The precarious, even perilous situation of the artist and the writer was the main concern of the authors of the Recommendation of Unesco of 1980 (and it's the reason why the international labour Bureau was so closely associated with its development.). Today in most of the industrialized countries the statutes in force protect people in these categories almost as well as those in comparable groups. The risks of illness, old age and maternity are covered, in France, by l'AGESSA (the association in charge of social security for authors). Admission to this society is open to those who have earned a certain amount of royalties over three consecutive years or whose request to join has been approved by a professional commission. A supplementary pension is planned, financed by authors themselves as well as all those who stand to profit from the distribution and sale of books. These measures are inadequate. The charitable actions of authors' societies are proof of this. Thanks to legacies and donations, as well as subscriptions and other income, these societies, and in particular the S.G.D.L intervene in many cases to give financial help to sick and distressed authors and their families. Certain risks are unique to authors and cannot be covered by insurance. What does unemployment mean for an author and how can it be calculated and covered? How can an author be protected from the fallow periods, the 'blocks' that can last for years and have at one time or another devastated most creative careers? It is time to resort to the solution of the second job.

### The second job

For both short and long periods, most contemporary men and women of letters resort to various jobs in publishing, journalism and teaching. Any study undertaken should distinguish between the situation of the young man or woman who has dreamt of making a living out of writing but discovered that they cannot, and the situation of he or she who took up another career from the outset either because they feared the instability of a literary career or because they did not consider it to be a "real job." Only in the first case can we truly speak of a second job.

12) A systematic study should be undertaken, more psychological than economic, with the aim of determining which kind of job is the least likely to interfere with the creative process. Its conclusions would be of particular significance to the developing countries where it is safe to say that no writer can hope to live from his writing but where, with the identity crisis that these new countries are inevitably experiencing, there is the most urgent need for a local literature with which they can identify. If, as it is believed, teaching is the job that best integrates the writer into the working world while doing the least amount of damage to the creative faculties,

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then this profession must be reassessed. And in such a way that the poet and the novelist can easily find a place where their talent can also be fulfilled in an educational application.

### The media explosion

13) Where the developed countries are concerned this search for a supplementary insurance against the risks of life in general and the job in particular is just as urgent although the problem presents itself differently. The media explosion, followed by the computer explosion has had less effect on the social and economic landscape of the literary profession than is claimed. It would be dangerous, however, to ignore their current influence and the weight that they will carry in the foreseeable future. For better or worse, writers will always be drawn to the various forms of the media and the evidence shows that they can bring to them an originality of talent and experience.

In France the SCAM was born as a result of certain reforms and restrictive interpretations that prevented the French Society of Authors from collecting royalties. Events had long cried out for SCAM's creation. It is, indeed, a strange society of writers, of the pen so to speak, where 90% of its income comes from sounds and pictures, in other words from the audio-visual media. What is true of the society is equally true of its members. Writers can make a living in television and radio. It is, therefore, important for those who intend to protect the writing profession to open up to it the doors of the studios and to organize special training courses that will permit the writer not just to work but also to shine in this new medium.

14) Such initiatives could well lead to other openings. The technological revolution in communications cannot fail to have an effect on culture. It will change the capacity and power of the imagination. It should enrich the language and, through the language, contemporary man himself. It is time for the writer to become more aware of this inevitable revolution of our sensibilities and to acquire the knowledge necessary to make good use of it. This is the 'raison d'etre' of the world wide Congress of International Pen that will be convened in 1998: The new technologies of communication: Death or renaissance of culture? with which, it is hoped, Unesco will be associated.

### Increased protections

15) We must also think of ways of reinforcing the author's participation in marketing and making money from his work. One can well imagine the loss of earnings due to duplications - what the Brazzaville conference termed "photo-co-pillage". To fight such abuses the various writers' organizations in France have joined together in the SDRM (Society For the collection of royalties earned from mechanical reproduction) and have recently obtained inclusive compensation from their repertoire, financed by royalties collected from the equipment

in question, disc players, films, cassettes, video recordings etc And from a tax on repeated playings.

16) The losses on an international scale due as much to piracy as to legislative shortcomings remain enormous (billions of dollars). So great in fact that were they to be recovered and evenly distributed, they would solve most of the problems that have been discussed here. Writers' organizations have endeavoured to obtain a public lending right where a fee for the author is levied on books borrowed from libraries (with success in Germany, the United Kingdom and some Scandinavian countries - a percentage being paid to the author and a percentage to the social services for writers. This system has not been enforced in France.)

### Cultural Politics

17) Any aid given to literature must take on a broader, more varied form within the framework of national and international cultural politics and in the area of profits earned from copyright. The day when literature can pay for itself is not an impossible dream. Already the French CNL (National Book Council) which has done so much for writers through the distribution of grants, helping with publishing costs and the translation of important cultural works, is financed in part through royalties earned from electronic copying. The writers' organizations that annually distribute important literary prizes contribute to the healthy life of both literature and its writers. Some, such as SACEM, work also as publishers and launch record collections. Other organizations might be encouraged to follow this example.

18) It is worth noting that throughout the world, at least in the industrialised countries, there is a proliferation of various cultural industries. The UNESCO conference on the Condition of the Artist that met in Hanassare, Finland in Spring 1992 made a special mention of this. It is not impossible to imagine a profitable system of copyright whose resources would be derived from these industries and when administered by Writers' Organizations could finance cultural politics to an extent unknown until now and which could respond to all the cultural needs of society - especially those of literature.

The progress that has been made during the last decade encourages us to aim high. It is true that the post-communist countries of Eastern Europe are experiencing a collapse of their old systems and have not yet succeeded in finding a path to lead them through the "free-market jungle". The call to the rest of Europe to come to their aid remains, and it would be the role of short term politics to introduce a similar system of assistance - notably by encouraging the creation of Writers' organizations whose guiding role has already been discussed here.

19) This was one of the main recommendations of the Panafrican Conference of Brazzaville, and it is true that in this respect

the problems of both areas are similar. What is true of post-communist Europe is even more so of the African and Latin-American countries. Even though the topic of creative writing is less current in Asia, the renewal of any tradition is taking place under conditions that call into question the respect for and maintenance of the cultural identity. This was demonstrated by the conference organized jointly by Pen and Unesco in Seoul, South Korea in 1991. The situation for the African writer is such that many of them have found themselves forced to emigrate.

20) If literature should, as is stated in the recommendation of 1980, "preserve and enrich the cultural identity", if it should play "a vital role in the life and development of both the individual and society", it would be advisable to reassess this role at the heart of a public service of culture. It should take education as its model. But literature would have over education the advantage, noted above, of the growth of cultural industries which would help it, in part at least, to pay for itself. This public service could and should take charge of both the literary profession and literature itself, always respecting the dual nature of this unique vocation which is also a job.

21) A few priorities:

1) In the field of patrimonial rights

a) to guarantee as far as possible the protection of copyright of original works in the fields of broadcasting or any other form of reproduction - notably through additional legislation relating to electronic copying by obtaining the means to fight piracy, by introducing a public lending right in libraries and by studying the possibility of charging a tax on any works that are photocopied.

b) to promote a better relationship between authors and publishers and a code of practice protected by law.

2) In the field of moral rights

a) To ensure that the author's moral right is respected, anywhere that it risks becoming part of a commercial property, when it should in fact remain "imprescriptible, perpetual and transmittable to one's heirs," or to societies entrusted with protecting the author's works.

3) In the field of education

a) To guarantee a place in TV and Radio schedules for training writers in new ways of presenting or adapting their work for these media. A place should also be reserved in the schedules for the broadcasting of said literary works adapted by their writers.

b) To reassert the value of a literary education at all levels and to ensure a role for contemporary writers either by

integrating them into the school and university systems or by creating a network of writers in residence in schools, universities and libraries.

#### 4) In the field of Writers' organizations

a) To promote the creation of writers' organizations where they do not already exist and where they exist but function poorly, to work for their improvement - notably through bilateral help from one organization to another.

b) To guarantee their financial and administrative autonomy.

c) To entrust or associate them with the task of organizing cultural events liable to stimulate public interest e.g: A book Biennale, other forms of book fair that will provide an opportunity for writers to meet their readers.

#### 5) In the social-economic field

a) To promote a complementary pension scheme financed by all those who profit from written works and to look into a means of paying unemployment benefits to those involved in a literary career.

b) To undertake research to discover which second profession is the most favorable to the protection of creative talent and to render that profession more welcoming to writers, particularly in the case of teaching, by reserving posts for writers at various educational institutions.

c) To introduce or further the creation of publishing co-operatives and literary foundations to support works of cultural importance both on their publication in their original language or in translation.

d) To introduce a network of grants and travelling scholarships to nurture young writers of talent .

e) To promote a series of socio-cultural activities that will be open to all (inauguration of monuments, restoring of the cultural heritage, Olympiades). To promote a similar system to the one that grants 1% to painters and sculptors to decorate new buildings , in this case destined to finance prizes for the best pieces of writing that explain and celebrate a contemporary event.

f) to promote within the framework of cultural tourism and its budget a plan both national and international, similar to the 1% system mentioned above, and intended to finance the expenses of writers travelling and residing in other countries. The aim will be to add to their compatriots' knowledge of said countries through their writings.

#### 6) In the field of cultural politics

a) to promote the creation of writers' advisory committees to

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work in association with ministries of culture and other cultural services with a similar function.

b) to conduct an enquiry on copyright, funded by all the cultural industries, and destined to finance cultural politics on a national and international level, and in particular to benefit literary creation.

c) to promote at both a national and international level, a joint undertaking between publishers and literary foundations with a view to more efficient utilisation of resources available for the publication of literary works. To promote the organisation of literary archives; libraries and literary Museums - in association with Writers' societies such as International Pen.

d) To look into the possibility of instituting at both a national and international level, a cultural service inspired by the model created last century by the teaching profession. A thorough enquiry should be undertaken into the role of literary creation in cultural life as well as its role in the formation and renewal of cultural identity; in the evolution of language, manners, morals and standards of behaviour, and particularly its role in the related domains of tolerance and peace.