

THE SAVAGERY OF WORDS: LINGUISTIC DOMINATION AND
IDENTITY IN CHRISTOPHER HAMPTON'S SAVAGES.

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"Literature that is not naive passes through
the refusal to write under the dedication of History."^f

The concern with the relationship between history and literature, between language and "reality," is not new. In fact, this has been a long tradition in Criticism, from Plato and Horace to Trotsky and Marx, or to Sartre, Adorno and Brecht, who, among countless others, have approached the concepts of truth, realism, engagement, the social function of literature, and the role of the writer, from every conceivable angle of analysis. And yet they remain surprisingly recurrent questions, still generating debate and opposing statements by a long list of writers and critics.

Britain from the late 50's on has been a fertile ground for an increasing concern with the relationship between politics and drama. The revival of social realism after Osborne's Look Back in Anger coincides with — or rather responds to — a growing sense of uneasiness and dislocation due to the collapse of the old order. Socialist theatre saw the word as weapon, and its aim was, according to John McGrath, "to gain support for a particular party, a position inside the working class, and among its potential allies ..., its ultimate purpose (being) agitational. It uses theatrical devices to explain, elucidate, remind, and eventually persuade its audience to think or act

differently."² It thus favored the realistic mode, and aimed at the transparency of language, at a denial of ambiguity, and at total communication with the audience. The refusal of the opacity of language and the attempt to reach, in the clearest and most direct form possible, the social reality whose description or indictment was the target of the writer constituted the basis of the work of "committed" British playwrights of the 60's and 70's. In this refusal lies the most serious flaw in these plays, which ended up by masquerading rather than revealing the ideological contradictions of the social system they intended to put under attack.

Such extremely naive view of the role of art accounts for the failure of socialist theatre. Trotsky once remarked that "one cannot approach art in the same way one approaches politics... because [artistic creation] has its rules and methods, its own laws of development."³ Blind to this distinction, British socialist playwrights gave their plays an explicit didactic purpose resulting from their beliefs that it is possible to subject reality to rational analysis and that literature may lead to effective action and social change. Curious position for a theatre largely subsidized by the government, to believe itself autonomous within the system! By defending the transparency of language and the possibility of attaining truth, these playwrights ended up by reduplicating the ideology they meant to oppose. To deny the ambiguities of language is to ignore the fact that ideology works exactly by presenting it as transparent, as pointing to a referent which is "natural" and "obvious." To operate on those premises is to deny the essential ideological question — that language is a social construct, a convention in which ideology is inscribed. A drama that refuses to examine itself as a linguistic construct, that refuses to foreground the ambiguities of the

several discourses contained in it, that does not set itself to reveal the contradictions of its languages and the mechanisms of production of discourse, and that presents itself as "truth," reasserts the authority of ideology and the restraining power of language. It criticizes the system but reproduces its languages, because it shows no self-awareness, thus operating uncritically within the system it apparently denies.

Jacques Ehrmann's essay "On articulation: The Language of History and the Terror of Language" presents some views on this question that very clearly point to the core of the problem: "Are words weapons? They are insofar as revolutionary rhetoric stirs up crowds and insofar as they inform us of certain political situations. But what we expect to find in these cases is not art. No, words are not weapons, since we continue to read authors independently of their ideology. Lenin read Pushkin. Furthermore, when used by "true" artists, words reveal to us precisely the other side of political ideologies ... After all, what good would literary language be if it only recapitulated political language?"⁴ In his discussion of didacticism, Ehrmann states that to try to educate through literature, is to return to the myth of education inherited from the Enlightenment. The belief that literature (socialist drama, in our case) can subject reality to rational analysis and reflect it as through a transparent crystal is to confuse matters, and to substitute sociology for the literary mode of operation. Also, the myth of education through literature presupposes a direct, logical relation between text and action. And, as Ehrmann correctly states, "there is no example of a work of literature (poem, novel, play) which has had a direct and immediate influence on the course of history."⁵

Rather than being a form of action in the immediate sense, poetic language is "suspension of action."⁶ It is self-referent,

it is necessarily metalinguistic, and in its opaqueness it remains open, as it examines its own reversal, as opposed to the closing and closed character of political language. As Ehrmann concludes, "what literature says originates in language and the possibilities of language. What politics says originates in the world and its possibilities. World and language thus limit each other reciprocally."⁷

The most revolutionary art is not necessarily that which talks of a meaningless, chaotic, oppressive world, but the one that recognizes and lays bare the collapse of meaning through and within the language or languages used. In Ehrmann's words, "it embodies the presence of meaninglessness in meaning."⁸ It empties the word of any absolute value, it subverts its apparent original stability, it exposes its emptiness, the gap that separates it from the real and from action. But, by so doing, by exposing "the several languages which articulate the game of history,"⁹ what is laid bare is the structure of that history.

The question is, then, unlike what those who advocate a "revolutionary", iconoclastic drama looked for, not outside language, but within language itself. This is a point that many socialist British playwrights finally ended up perceiving: to be a revolutionary writer is rather a question of language than of subject matter. Thus Stoppard, so many times accused of being a dangerous reactionary, is one of the most revolutionary dramatists in Britain, due to his awareness of the relationship between language, power, and morality. He referred to Savages in an interview as follows:

"The plain truth is that if you are angered or disgusted by a particular injustice or immorality, and you want to do something about it, now, at once, than you can hardly do worse than write a play about it. That's what art is bad at. But the less plain truth is that without that play and plays like it,

without artists, the injustice will never be eradicated. That's why it's good and right that Savages has a long run in the West End. All kinds of people have said to me, how ridiculous to sit in the theatre and watch this, how pointless, how useless – what they were saying in effect was that Hampton's play wasn't going to save a single Indian, but that is to misunderstand what art means in the world. It's a terrible reason for not writing Savages."¹⁰

The question in Savages is thus not, as Stoppard so correctly perceived, whether the play will or will not prevent the extermination of the Indians. However, one cannot deny that the impact of the subject matter – the genocide – on readers and spectators is so intense that it has led to a misunderstanding of the nature of the play. Students of mine, asked to write a final exam on Cultural Interaction and Linguistic Domination in the play, developed long and emotional defenses of the Indians and, not setting aside nationalistic bias, related several instances in Western History in which similar events occurred. What could be argued as constituting an instance of unsophisticated reading is nonetheless very similar to the reactions of critics and spectators of the first production of the play in London, who concentrated almost solely on the Indian question, as Martin Esslin points out in his "The Critic in the Theatre No. 3: In Search of Savages." Or what is even worse, they directed their attentions to finding fault with the characterization of the Indians, disregarding the real issue: "Robert Brustein complained of the ' ochre-painted Equity Indians... 'Catherine Itzin suggested they were 'uncomfortably' close to looking like frauds! Martin Esslin found they 'demanded a certain degree of willing suspension of disbelief."¹¹ It seems to me that this is to miss the point altogether, since the question here is not the Indian genocide

in itself, but the relationship of language and manipulation, individual responsibility and omission, art and morality, aesthetics and ethics.

As a matter of fact, what seems at first glance to underscore the importance of the event itself (the bombing of the Cintas Largas tribe during the Quarup ceremony) aims at the opposite effect. The perigraphy of the play (Introduction, Notes on the First Production, A Note on the Quarup, and the note included in the list of characters) presents the subject matter as "real" in the sense of being historical, since it is stated that the idea of the play resulted from a newspaper article by Norman Lewis published in the Sunday Times Colour Magazine in 1969. In addition, the author states he has travelled to Brazil where he researched, saw films, and visited slums and Indian reservations. And, furthermore, help was received from a Brazilian anthropologist as the play was being written and rehearsed; this anthropologist also "worked with the director during rehearsal of the play to give the scenes with the Indians a richness and authenticity we could otherwise never have achieved."¹² Also, the author states in the list of characters: "The bombing of the Cintas Largas tribe during the performance of their funeral ritual took place in 1963; and the confession of Ataíde Pereira was recorded shortly after this by Padre Edgar Smith, S. J. The rest of the play is set in Brazil in 1970-1. Most of the characters in this play are fictitious: most of the events are not" (p. 19).

The play is thus presented almost as a documentary, which would then apparently justify all the questions of relevance, effect, and the responses it elicited. However, had it been the intention of the text to cause impact in terms of the Genocide itself, the killing might not have been announced and expected from the start. There is total elimination of suspense,

and the emotional impact and horror of the genocide is thus minimized as the questions of linguistic interaction and of the relationship between morality, language, and art come into focus. Manipulation through language, moral evasion, destruction of personal and cultural identity by language imposition, the role of art in the symbolization (and thus appropriation) of experience through restraining and limiting words, this is what constitutes the core and real issue of the play. The critic Christopher Bigsby points out that its "truth derives less from its portrait of Indians rendered inarticulate by the enormities of progress, than from the deforming power of language, the coercive fact of appropriation implicit in the act of writing."¹³

Indeed this statement does strike the right cord, but it seems to me that it is the whole fact of linguistic appropriation, including writing but going beyond it (as it is only one of the forms presented), that is questioned in the play. The killing of the Indians functions more as a silent commentary on the emptiness of the several discourses used, and points to the inevitable incapacity of language to reach the real, to capture the essence of human experience, to grasp that which only silence can convey and which we can perceive but not completely symbolize — pain. And yet, man can only operate within language, which is among the several symbolic codes at our disposal not only the most complex, but the one which shapes our perception of reality. To lay bare the ideological marks of this social construct, its limitations on the one hand and its coercive and destructive power on the other, is the aim of this play much more than to present an indictment of society — Brazilian, British, American, or any other, for the genocide. In fact, Hampton has one of his characters remark that more babies die in the Brazilian slums

every year than all the Indians in the country. Thus one could be led to ask why would Hampton write a play about the Indian genocide if other things are, at least quantitatively, more horrible? The only answer is that all of the "real" events of recent Brazilian history mentioned — genocide, starvation, torture, guerrillas, kidnappings, killing of foreign officials — are only the raw material out of which the main questions (or rather the conducting thread that unites all of them) are unwound: language, its power and its limits.

The structure of the play and the several types of discourse and other semiotic codes used all serve the main purpose of the text, which is the foregrounding of the language question. It is an episodic play, composed of twenty two scenes whose linear succession does not correspond to a chronological sequence. There is rather a succession of interrupted dialogues or broken images of the Quarup ceremony or other scenes which operate as a juxtaposition of non-sequential and non-simultaneous events. There is no linearity, but the breaks in sequence do not interfere with the internal coherence of the main threads of the action. This discontinuity serves the purpose of creating the A-effect, thus preventing emotional involvement with some of the shocking events depicted. Detachment is achieved by the quick pace of the play, the alterations in mood and tone, the alternation between scenes which are predominantly visual and/or poetic and those in which dialogue prevails or in which story-telling (a device frequently used by Hampton in his plays) dominates the discourse of the characters. Epic, dramatic, and lyric modes are thus fused in the overall structure of the text, and one serves to reinforce the other by contrast. Likewise, in the several discourses voiced by the characters, the degree of self-awareness varies from total blindness in the use of ideological clichés to anxiety and even anguish due to a

sense of personal impotence. Exposure of that sense of impotence or uneasiness, as well as omission, moral evasion, or total lack of concern for the immorality of one's acts or for non-action, is not achieved in most cases by verbal or explicit analysis of the subtext of each speech, but rather, in a very effective manner, by a process of opposition of discourses among themselves and between discourse and action.

The play presents a tripartite structure, each part constituting a network of similar scenes:

1 - Scenes of the Quarup ceremony, in which the silence of the Indians and the visual images of their rituals are juxtaposed to West's delivering of his versions, in poetic form, of the Indian legends (1, 4, 9, 12, 15, 20);

2 - Scenes between West and Carlos Esquerdo during the kidnap scenes that take place in a closed room (3, 6, 10, 13, 16, 19);

3 - Scenes between West and other characters: his wife, the British anthropologist Miles Crawshaw, the American missionary Reverend Elmer Penn, Major Brigg (2, 8, 5, 11, 18).

In all of these scenes, West constitutes a link, an element of connection, a pervading conscience in the play. West is absent exclusively from four scenes: scenes 7 and 14, in which the statement of the killer Ataide Pereira is taken down by the American investigator; scene 17, in which a recorded American voice is heard, advertising the profits to be made in the new Brazilian Eldorado, in a juxtaposition to the image of decadent Indians, "integrados,"^{ff} drinking in a bar; and scene 22, after West's murder, with a final image of the end of the genocide after the Quarup ceremony and the setting fire to the bodies. The dialogue of the General and the Attorney General in scene five, from which West is absent, was not included in the above category, because it is framed by the conversation

between him and Crawshaw. He is present, then, although his presence is backgrounded.

The too literal symbology of West's name and his presence in most of the scenes contribute to his unifying presence as constituting a synthesis of the thoughts of the decadent, amoral Western world in relation to the atrocities. Contained in these scenes that could be considered almost as flashbacks since they obviously occur before the kidnap, are a multiplicity of discourses by either American or British subjects, as well as by Brazilian officials and military men, that amount to the same constitutive elements: a sense of hierarchy and superiority of the white race, the attempt to caricature the Indians as grotesque imitations or as animals – inhuman and inferior, in other words, – as well as the denial of personal responsibility, and the use of the Indians to attain personal interests (investment, profit, religious catechisation, subject matter for scientific research, to write books and be promoted or to publish poems). In other words, all of these discourses are "contained" in West's (Western) focus or are narrated to him by different people. The Indian reality is thus always mediated by a western voice. They become subject matter for narrations of funny or ridiculous stories or are viewed by West's eye in grotesque situations as in the piano scene in Reverend Penn's house: it is either someone telling West a story or West as spectator of a fact. The same pattern is repeated in the West-Carlos scenes, in which both "compete" to tell more horrifying stories about the atrocities in Brazil. There is always a filter. If this does not put West into the function of narrator in the manner of epic theatre, it does confer to the different scenes a type of unity I would call narrative, as if they were all perceived by the same eye/I. This unity is reinforced by the fact that on several occasions, after the

dialogues, West is seen reflecting about the events, or revealing his reactions to them, as at the end of scenes 3, 6 and 8.

The unity is broken by the Quarup scenes, although even there West takes part. But the visual code here is used as an element of disruption, as it reveals the distance between the Indian reality and West's view of it. And, in fact, the legends he made into poems are not even part of the Quarup ceremony. In other words, what is reinforced is the distance and contrast, both the impossibility of conveying reality by means of words and the incapacity of the western eye to apprehend the culture it is faced with. The two scenes in which Pereira's testimony is taken down, the crudest part of the text, present the only dialogue in the play in which there is no attempt at hiding or masking the brutality of the facts by discourse. In all of the other discourses, different reasons for moral evasion and for not taking responsibility in the events are given — from West's statement that he could not act because interests of British investors had not been harmed to Miles's critical attitude of West's writing of legends (and yet he continues his research which ethically amounts to the same) — to Brigg's and Penn's remarks, to Carlos' "broader" concern with the overwhelming poverty of the Brazilian people. Only Ataíde speaks plainly, and it is exactly his discourse that is presented in poetic form, a device which serves different purposes in the text, as will be seen below. One other recurring element — a thematic one — is also projected by all the "White" discourses about the Indians: the interaction between the two cultures is destructive to the one which is most vulnerable. Or, if we want to put this in a different way, no real communication is possible between the dominating and the dominated cultures. Appropriation, absorption, and thus

destruction, whatever name or form it takes, will inevitably occur. West's poetic writings and Miles's anthropological research, religious work and land appropriation, Brigg's advocacy of euthanasia and Penn's barbed wire around the mission all amount to the same thing: the Indian either becomes a grotesque mirror image of the white model – cultural destruction – or is physically exterminated. Language repeats the two possibilities here mentioned: either the Indian reproduces the languages of his master or he is reduced to silence. In both cases the destruction of cultural identity is carried out and symbolized by abdication of language.

As a correlative of the several "white" discourses presented in the play, there are then three different types of Indian discourse, all of them foregrounding the relationship between language, culture, and identity:

1 – visual codes of two types:

a) the Quarup ceremonies, in which silent figures perform the rituals and represent the still integrity of a culture inaccessible to the Western eye.

b) the visual images, conveyed mainly through the code of clothes, in which the Indians, grotesquely dressed in civilized clothes become caricatures of the alien culture. These images are also translated into a verbal code when Kumai tries to speak English (scene 1) or when he and his friends join the Reverend to sing religious hymns. Here the two codes, the verbal and the non-verbal, indicate the abdication of culture, the grotesque assimilation to the white culture and the consequent loss of identity, which restates the content of the discourses about the Indians. Here the contact, however apparently direct, either in the "dialogue" West/Kumai or in the visual images of the integrated Indian, has a mediator revealed in the visual codes or in the caricatures: the alien culture imposed on them.

In the same way, the discourses about the Indians are all voiced by representatives of a culture alien to theirs.

c) the myths: because of their "mixed" status, I have included them in the two categories, as Indian discourse (since the myths are theirs) and discourses about the Indians, for here there is also the presence of a mediator. West, who functions in most other scenes as enunciator of narratives and sometimes as enunciator here functions as a mediator for the narration of the myths. Thus the Indian only reaches the white mediated by a foreign voice. Or, in other words, they never reach each other, as the gap is insurmountable. The only possible relationship is one of destruction. No coexistence is possible, since there will always be a mediation from a point of view of a culture that sees itself as superior.

Even Miles' reflections about the organization of the tribes as compared to European culture, his anthropological discourse, point to the same motif of destruction (scene 5, pp. 34-35). But at least this type of discourse reveals its awareness of the falseness of the notion of cultural superiority.

Silviano Santiago, in a very lucid statement in his essay "Apesar de dependente, universal," touches on the heart of the question:

"Relevante papel, dentro deste contexto, passou a ter a Antropologia, ciência criada pela consciência ferida européia. Dentro da cultura dos conquistadores, criou-se um lugar especial e sacrossanto de onde se pode avaliar a violência cometida por ocasião da colonização, lugar onde se tenta preservar — sob a forma de discurso científico, não tenhamos ilusões — o que ainda é passível de ser preservado. Esta adição às disciplinas propriamente européias não é tão sem importância como parecia dizer o diminuto lugar inicialmente reservado à Antropologia.

Acaba ela por operar um "descentramento" importante no pensamento ocidental, pois deixa a cultura européia de ser detentora da verdade, de manter-se como a cultura de referência, estabelecadora por excelência das hierarquias."¹⁴

However, it is through irony that the decentering of European culture is effected in Savages. The "Nobistai" scene constitutes a privileged instance of reversal of cultural prejudice: it seems to constitute, through the grotesque presentation of the "integrated" Indian, an indictment of the notion of integration and a statement about loss of cultural identity by assimilation. However, it serves another very ironic function, as it constitutes an even more grotesque representation of foreign cultures which, in their narcissistic enterprise of conquest, aim at making of the "inferior" culture a mirror image of themselves. Here, however, the image of the "superior" assimilated by the "inferior" is that of a football player. Are we reenacting, in inverted form, what a student of mine, Marie-Anne Kremer, in a final exam on the play has called "the same kind of cultural interaction Brazilians are used to undergoing abroad: "Ah! Brasileño! Pelé!"?

To pursue the irony even further, it occurs to me that the corruption of the signifier may open up a range of interesting associations: Nobly Stiles/Noble Styles/Nobistai. Very noble indeed and very superior is the culture of the dominators who — the same as Americans whose culture is symbolized in the play by Coke and T-Shirts — have looked for assertion in the New World through assimilation. Is there a hint here of the fact that the caricature is necessarily a subversion of the model and that it reveals, in its grotesque imitation, the even more grotesque cultural blindness of notions of purity and superiority? To reinforce this line of interpretation, one other extremely ironic scene occurs, and

again the word becomes the vehicle to foreground through irony the notion of cultural superiority. In scene 8, Major Brigg tells West that the strangest thing he had ever seen was a body he had found in the jungle, "obviously ... English or at any rate English-speaking," who had carved this message on a huge "jatobá" trunk, before he died. It said IMAGINE US, all one word, IMAGINEUS. And underneath, a sort of a map." Deciding he "was't going to take any notice of the map " because "that's always the first step to disaster," Brigg was, however, intrigued by the message: " _ But the message was so intriguing, don't you think, imagine us. What could he possibly have meant, it haunted me for years.

_ Did you ever think of a likely explanation?

_ Well, I did, yes. In the end I decided his spelling wasn't very hot, and that what he'd actually been trying to say, in a spirit of bitter irony, was, 'I'm a genius."

In this same scene, when West asks what the name of the silent Indian servant is, Brigg answers:

_ "Oh, I don't know, he has some endless unpronounceable name, but I call him Bert, after my late brother. The rest of the tribe all died of a flu epidemic, you know. Caught it off me. One of our many failures."

The scene ends with West, in a pensive mood, repeating: "Imagine us" (pp. 49-50).

This seems to me to constitute the most important scene of the play in terms of a symbolization of the relationship of language, identity, and cultural appropriation, and the destructive relationship between two cultures through language. Silviano Santiago, in his essay mentioned above, points out that the Indian is an European fiction and lives as a mere actor, a mere "recitador," a history that is not his, as he is doubly dislocated from his culture and his land. Colonization is a

teaching activity and it is a narcissistic operation performed from an ethnocentric perspective by means of which the Indian "loses his true otherness (to be the other, different) and receives a fictitious otherness (to be the image of the European)." ¹⁵ The ethnocentric viewpoint has as its constitutive elements the notions of superiority, hierarchy, and purity, and as its form of operation the conquest by naming; to name is to conquer, to assimilate to what one already knows, to submit the new reality to the constitutive (and coercive) power of our language. In this sense, by giving to the Indian the name of his late brother, the Major denies him his own name, his identity, and ironically presents him as a brother. The image of the map under the inscription points to the same idea - the first act of the colonizer is to draw a map - the "mapeamento geográfico" corresponds to the process of naming in terms of implementing the conquest of the land. The map introduces the notion of place - Imagine us there, in that map, in that situation, in their place? Or imagine us, believing we are geniuses - i. e., superior, conquerors - , trying to conquer their land, and in that very act of apparent superiority asserting our inferiority, our need to be reproduced, and thus being forced to see our culture subverted, undermined, grotesquely mirrored?

Interestingly enough, to be able to decodify IMAGINEUS as I'M A GENIUS Brigg conceives of a possible irony of the man who carved the inscription, but does not perceive the even greater irony - the genius' spelling is not very hot - he does not dominate his own language. Also, in order to transform IMAGINEUS into I'M A GENIUS, a phoneme dislocation must occur. Relating this to the map, it could also be said that the European has to dislocate himself from his place and come to the new world to try to assert himself as superior. The skeleton

remains as an ironic commentary on the notion of superiority and on neo-colonialism itself, which is destructive for both cultures.

One other interesting aspect is that to decodify the message, Brigg has to dislocate, to distort, the word, as neo-colonialism has dislocated the Indian, and distorted his culture. It would be a more immediate decodification, however, just to separate IMAGINE US. This gap between the two words indicates, I believe, the insurmountable gap between two cultures inexorably separated by the activity of colonization, whatever name it takes - integration, investment, genocide, catechization. It is also indicative of the gap between Man and his act, between thought and action, thought and the subject.

In addition, the distortion of the word indicates how one acts upon reality to interpret it, to read it, according to one's own interests, and how one uses language to mold reality so that it suits one's purposes.

The impossibility of communication between the white - be it European or Brazilian, as Carlos's attitude well indicates - and the Indian finds a counterpart in the relationship between the First World and the Third World. Carlos Esquerdo, the leftist guerrilla, and West, share a discourse rooted in Europe - it is as if they spoke the same language. And, in fact, they both write poetry. Their attempts at communication, however, are doomed to failure, since they speak from different points of history. It becomes a sort of power struggle, symbolized by the game of chess, as they compete to tell the most horrible stories, or as they try to persuade each other of their "truths." They only approach a level of communication, however, when they silently play chess. Not even their poetry works out: no bridge is possible, for history separates them. Again, silence occupies the space of the word as a recognition

of this impossibility of communication, and the metaphor of the game of chess indicates the political character of the use of language. It is also interesting to note that West is prevented from writing in English. The utmost concession Carlos makes is to allow him to write in English if he accepts to translate his texts into Portuguese and to destroy the English original. This is equivalent to reducing West to silence. And sure enough, he does not write. Again the relationship between language and identity, and between linguistic domination and power, are reinforced. This time, however, the dominator – the first world – is forced to use the language of the dominated. Decentering has once again occurred, as the power now shifts to the hands of the Brazilian guerrilla.

In this game, however, there is no winner – all voices are silenced at the end as the two final scenes present the murder of West by Carlos while the police surrounds the house, followed by the sound of a machine-gun which indicates he has also been killed, and the headlines of newspapers and a T.V. news bulletin on West's death. And, once again, the rapid succession of pictures and headlines reveals the distance between the code and the real experience.

All these instances of foregrounding of the language question will find the highest expression in Ataíde Pereira's testimony. In fact, the two scenes in which he describes the expedition to kill the Indians constitute the exposition of the central issue of the text, the relationship between language and reality. The ironic use of poetic rhythm and structure in the testimony given by the brutal killer creates an effect of strangement and this A-effect is used to call attention to what he is narrating. But more important than this is the irony contained in the use of the poetic form itself, since it points to the possibility of aestheticizing the most horrible

events. It thus constitutes a device by which there is an intratextual summary in terms of the process of the construction of the play, a "mise-en-abyme" of the technique employed. Christopher Bigsby has pointed out that Hampton, "fully aware of opposing temptations, not only in his own creative imagination but equally in the nature of writing itself, ... has, in Total Eclipse, to some degree in The Philanthropist, and most clearly in Savages, questioned the morality of art. For indeed, to give social experience linguistic form is already partially to appropriate the ethical to the aesthetic. The British diplomat in Savages, who turns the real experiences, the myths, the values, the lives of the Brazilian Indians into carefully sculptured poems, is committing an act of aggression not only against reality, forcing it to accommodate itself to the aesthetic and moral purposes of the writer, but against the living truth of people whose existence is in some way denied by decontextualizing them, by making entertainment out of pain. (...) Reality is reduced to allegory. Pain is aestheticized."¹⁶ This remark, although pertinent, remains on a superficial level, since it paraphrases Miles Crawshaw's reaction to West's poems. More important in terms of foregrounding the mechanisms of production of poetic language and its appropriation of the real is not West's poems but, on the contrary, Ataíde's testimony, which presents in poetic form what would seem the least poetic (or "poetizable") scene of the play. As a mirror of the technical process used by the author, this scene calls attention to the crucial issue of the play, that is, the problematic relation between literature and reality and between language and action. Presenting as a poetic statement within the play the narration of the genocide, Hampton thus reveals how poetic language – and literature (if we understand how the mise-en-abyme here aims not at the reproduction of

events but at the reproduction of the relationship between language and events) shapes the world, the real, in an imaginative form. This is the moment in which the text achieves an awareness of itself: the foregrounding of the process of composition, the foregrounding of technique, detaches the play both from the mere portrayal of events and also from the concern with exposing the ideological nature of each discourse. It is poetic language itself which is inspected. What is laid bare is the capacity of the imaginative writer to confer a different status, through poetry, on the most horrible aspects of reality. But in this laying bare, the play rescues itself from what would otherwise have constituted a level of semi-awareness of its own methods and thus would maintain it still too close to a reproduction of the ideological system. At this point, the text achieves what none of the several discourses had revealed - that articulacy leads to awareness only through a deconstruction of the discourse used. All the games are thus exposed, all the languages that "articulate the game of history," including poetic language. Thus West's poems and Carlos's "New Beatitudes," as well as all the other discourses, and the play itself, participate in the same game, but it is possible to recognize the forms of the operation of language. The obvious irony of the title, for which several readings are possible, is an echo of the key sentence in the play: Imagine us. In the game.

The end of the play presents the beginning of a TV Bulletin, West's photographs, headlines in several languages, and groans of pain, followed by the sound of machine guns as the killers of the Indians complete their mission of destruction, and then silence. Silence and Death. But the word has taken its place and has examined itself: isn't this a very good reason for having written Savages?

NOTES

¹ Ludovic Janvier, as quoted in Jacques Ehrmann, "On Articulation: the Language of History and the Terror of Language," in Literature and Revolution, ed. Jacques Ehrmann, Yale French Studies 39 (1967): 20.

² John McGrath, as quoted in C.W.E. Bigsby, "The Language of Crisis in British Theatre: The Drama of Cultural Pathology," Stratford-Upon-Avon Studies 19 (1981): 34.

³ Trotsky, as quoted in Ehrmann 15.

⁴ Ehrmann 18.

⁵ Ehrmann 18.

⁶ Ehrmann 22.

⁷ Ehrmann 23-24.

⁸ Ehrmann 27.

⁹ Ehrmann 26.

¹⁰ Tom Stoppard, "Ambushes for the Audience," New Theatre Voices of the Seventies, ed. Simon Trussler (London: Eyre Methuen, 1981): 67-68.

¹¹ Sebastian Black, "Makers of Real Shapes: Christopher Hampton and his story-tellers," Modern Drama 25.2 (June 1982): 212.

¹² Christopher Hampton, Savages (London: Faber and Faber, 1974) 12. All subsequent quotations from the play are taken from this edition and page numbers are indicated in the text.

¹³ Bigsby 27.

¹⁴ Silviano Santiago, "Apesar de dependente, universal," in Vale quanto peso (Rio de Janeiro, : Paz e Terra, 1982) 17.

¹⁵ Santiago 15-16.

¹⁶ Bigsby 27.