

It's an odd fate writers and artists have in our times. The dissemination of their work takes place within a strictly commercial circuit the size and diversity of which had never been dreamed of before. This means that each book or each painting is within the reach of an audience which is as vast as it is anonymous and whose reactions, naturally, are impossible to know. But, on the other hand, the artist or writer, in conceiving a work and creating it, has had in mind a restricted group of persons as an ideal audience who with the artist or writer and through him conceives the existence of what he has created.

In this fashion, artistic creation today happens on two parallel planes that will never be joined and will always be estranged from each other. "I write so that my friends will like me," the most widely read Latin American novelist of our times once said. With candid eloquence this statement summarizes the situation to which we are referring. No one doubts that it's been this way since the beginning of time. It's just that the monstrous machinery of massive distribution in all the languages of the earth didn't exist before; this means that the artist entered into direct contact with a small circle of persons for whom the work was created. Today those "happy few" are mixed in with the anonymous and faceless masses, which leaves the artist facing a landscape that is as desolate as it is frustrating. I believe that one of the principal functions of our "Société Imaginaire" ought to be to recover this small group of followers for the artist; recognize it and identify it as the work is disseminated, putting it within reach of those for whom in fact it was created. We should return to the Benedictine task of placing the artist in contact with those who will be able to measure the deep meaning of the creation. A meaning which the great mass is incapable of perceiving, nor do they have the time or interest to do it. Weekend novels and paint by number landscapes are the only food that our contemporaries are able to digest. It manages to keep them from a boredom that has turned them into a greedy digestive tract, tolerating only what in English is known as "entertainment" but which so far in other languages doesn't have an equivalent.

It is probable that the proposed "Société Imaginaire" will be labeled elitist, a word whose use has been extended to mean many things, doubtless with a validity that is impossible to deny. But it is useless at this stage to insist that an artist orient himself to a vast, faceless herd that extends to the farthest reaches of the planet. This fallacy has already spent its tenuous arguments and belongs to a past that by now we all find embarrassing. There is no ivory tower either, false counterpart of the previous idea. A simple and more down to earth truth persists: the artist, in order to create, needs a handful of accomplices in whom his work resonates and gathers meaning. The public, that monster with a thousand heads, comes later. The work may be shipwrecked in that multitude or may find unexpected acclaim; it means nothing to the creator. His vanity is fed from other sources few and familiar, and not from the vast and anonymous torrent whose name was obliterated by the mud centuries ago. If the "Société Imaginaire" can return to the artist, the authentic and certain chorus that gives meaning to the work, it will have achieved, in my judgement, the principal and most urgent of its charges. Let it be so.

Alvaro Mutis .