The Native and the Outsider: Literature and Nationality

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1. The idea that cultural identities or national images have an independent existence as what we might term *substances*, an idea which belongs to a Europe whose middle classes had of course completed their historic rise under nationalism, would be unlikely to find much support in learned circles today. And yet who would be prepared to say that it has disappeared without leaving very visible traces? What and how much exactly remains of it? To the extent that it really has vanished, what precisely have we put in its place? These are questions which go beyond literature and art. But within this sphere at least, literary scholars do have some duty to ask themselves such questions, and some right to attempt partial answers, since they concern their subject both actively and passively. On the one hand, in that it has been considered an essential part of a national cultural heritage, literature has often played a fundamental political role. On the other, it has often been treated by educational institutions as though its language could be reduced merely to the historical-natural language in which it is written. Or better still, I would say, to that language's signifiers, to the exclusion of the meanings which these create: in other words, to the single component which is undoubtedly and only national, whether this be Italian, French or English (except, that is, when regional names become necessary). The fact, however, that all the other elements in the meanings created from those different linguistic signifiers are widely and evenly distributed and in international circulation (literary genres, stylistic levels, themes, ideologies, characters, images, rhetorical figures, narrative procedures, and even metrical forms etc.) is something from which consequences at the institutional level have never been drawn. At most, it is taken into account in individual works by scholars whose knowledge leads them to do so, or by those whose subject requires them to.

Have you ever seen in the University a post in *Seventeenth-century Literature* whose holder, restricted within those hundred years by his specialisation, was able to compensate by ranging over Italian and German poetry, or English and French theatre? A Utopia, certainly, for a whole variety of practical reasons, none of which is really insuperable, and of which the teaching of the language is really only the most serious. Nevertheless, it does provide an opportunity for disinterested reflection. This kind of specialisation by ages would be *no more* extensive, it would perhaps be less wasteful, and certainly more illuminating, than one by geographical areas. In the universities, not just Philosophy and
History but also Music and the figurative arts cross national boundaries; for the whole of the Medieval period in literature, Romance Philology in Italy follows the German model in spanning several languages. The formula Lingua e letteratura X can only seem so natural to us, apart from through habit, because through the language it captures an undisputed piece of national substance. And in any case, only a piece. Even within literature alone not even the most extreme idealism, brought up-to-date as the apotheosis of the signifier at the expense of the signified, would dare to settle the problem of these national substances by reference to the language alone. The reification of this kind of substance triumphs indirectly in the priceless nineteenth-century name which is applied internationally to the cross-cultural discipline which should serve as a corrective, namely Comparative Literatures. But the Italian university system, with its own peculiar emphasis, vaunts the reification of these substances. It has Faculties of Lingue e letterature straniere, and these are kept separate, as the main centres for teaching and study, from the national (and ancient) literatures which are situated in the branch of the university given over to the Arts in general, in the Facoltà di Lettere. Explaining this to foreign visitors is embarrassing, and they are invariably confused by that jumble of duplications and separations between disciplines for which the students of the two Faculties either cobble together an explanation or resign themselves to doing without. At one time subsidiary courses in the Faculties of Economia e commercio, the Lingue courses grew and have now become firmly established through various balances of power, as a counterweight to the indifference of Italianists and Classicists towards the literatures from beyond the Alps and overseas.

2. The fact that it takes foreign guests to make the absurd situation at home embarrassing, or even simply to bring it into clearer focus, is nothing new. It is an apparent paradox which is as old as the mirage of a national substance, and certainly not unrelated to it. I require a more general standpoint than that of literature and art to start from, and it will be a quotation:

Since human beings do not come into the world either with a mirror or as Fichtian philosophers, I am I can only be reflected in other human beings. Only by entering into a relationship with the human being Peter who is like himself, does the human being Paul enter into relation with himself as a human being. And thus Paul, in flesh and blood, in his corporeity as Paul, counts for him as the phenomenic form of the human race.

Who are these lines by? If, like me, you experienced the years around '68 at an age at which you were still receptive although already selective, the more brilliant and less mystificatory core of Jacques Lacan's thought will come to
mind. The new-born human without motory coordination, unable to conceive itself as an entity except through the image of other adults; the mirror stage as the otherness of the image of the self, the unconscious as the interiorized word of others. The great hope, somewhere between scientific and political, that the discoveries of Freud would finally be integrated within human social relations – only my own naivety, alas! which arose from a discourse which was already getting itself tangled up in empty literature. For better or worse, all this, I believe, is now out of fashion. Nor is it that easy to guess that the passage is in fact by Karl Marx – note 18 from Chapter 1 of the first part of *Das Kapital*. (Marx-Engels 1962: XXIII. 67)

And since it appears immediately transposable from relations between human beings to relations between human communities, it is thereby rendered doubtful whether a national substance can really feed off itself, even in the prolonged absence of contacts and comparisons. Does it not risk remaining invisible unless these take place? Would not the culture of a small community isolated for centuries between sea and mountains be invisible to itself? Let us look immediately at the opposite example, that of a culture which was for so long central and influential, if not indeed dominant, over all around it. Such was French literary culture under Louis XIV and for the whole of the seventeenth century, and again to a large extent between Napoleon and the First World War. At this opposite extreme, and more understandably so, the substance is fairly well sheltered from contacts and comparisons, imposing upon others more than it bears itself. When it does expose itself beyond certain limits, this becomes visible as resistance. At three distant but precise dates, French literary culture began to take account of English, German and Russian cultures respectively, through mediators who were authorised by their stays in these three countries: in 1734, in Voltaire’s *Lettres anglaises*; in 1814, in Madame de Staël’s *De l’Allemagne*; and in 1886, with Vogüé’s *Le Roman russe*. On the first occasion, the rejection of the baroque with its Italian and Spanish models was less than a century old: the greatest expression of this taste in a language which was likewise neglected, namely Shakespeare, was to be discovered late and at the wrong moment historically. On the other two occasions, it was almost a question of emerging literatures, as one would call them today. Both of them were considered new insofar as they were barbarous and had flowered recently.

On all three occasions, the interesting thing is that an almost compulsive admiration is manifested very close to, or even at, the limits of tolerance. Here are a few sentences. On Shakespeare (the text is famous):

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1 *I am I*: in the philosophy of Fichte, the I "posits" both itself and $A = A$. 

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il y a de si belles scènes, des morceaux si grands et si terribles répandus dans ses farces monstrueuses, qu'on appelle tragédies, que ces pièces ont toujours été jouées avec un grand succès.

La plupart des idées bizarres et gigantesques de cet auteur ont acquis au bout de deux cents ans le droit de passer pour sublimes [...] (Voltaire 1965: 81)

Goethe's Faust:

si l'imagination pouvait se figurer un chaos intellectuel, tel que l'on a souvent décrit le chaos matériel, le Faust de Goethe devrait avoir été composé à cette époque. On ne saurait aller au delà, en fait de hardiesse de pensée, et le souvenir qui reste de cet écrit tient toujours un peu du vertige. (Staël: I. 322)

il est à désirer que telles productions ne se renouvellent pas; mais quand un génie tel que celui de Goethe s'affranchit de toutes les entraves, la foule de ses pensées est si grande, que de toutes parts elles dépassent et renversent les bornes de l'art. (Ibid.: 349)

Dostoevsky after Crime and Punishment:

Il donnera ancore de grands coups d'aile, mais en tournant dans un cercle de brouillards, dans un ciel toujours plus trouble, comme une immense chauve-souris au crépuscule. (Vogüé 1971: 242-243)

Je ne m'arrêterai pas davantage aux Frères Karamazov. De l'aveu commun, très peu de Russes ont eu le courage de lire jusqu'au bout cette interminable histoire; pourtant, au milieu de digressions sans excuses et à travers des nuages fumeux, on distingue quelques figures vraiment épiques, quelques scènes dignes de rester parmi les plus belles de notre auteur [...] (Ibid.: 250)

Whether or not it is called good taste, as was the case on the first two occasions (Voltaire 1965: 81; Staël: 349), the limit is all of a piece with solid consciousness of a national substance, which resists that which it finds it can no longer assimilate. This is further substantiated by the fact that a criticism directed toward the centre, by a consciousness which is not yet as well-established, does not come up against such a limit. The comparison with Euripides to which the German August Wilhelm von Schlegel subjects Phèdre, the height of French classicism, in 1807 is argued wholly from within, just as a Frenchman might also have done (Schlegel 1846: 333-405). Yet in the three mediators I have placed alongside each other we have the opposite of the apparent paradox I mentioned earlier. Rather than it being the foreign guest rendering the
situation at home embarrassing, it is the writer returning from abroad who censures barbarous absurdity at the point where his embarrassment either begins or culminates. We intend an imaginary returner from abroad here of course: less a sojourner than a reader of foreign literature.

Even in this case, which has nothing paradoxical about it, Peter touches the inalienable bedrock of the relation with himself by approaching the insuperable barrier of the relation with Paul. But the other case, as I was saying, is far from being a recent discovery. We know how Greece became conscious both of itself and of relativity in the battle with the Persians. Rather than through static opposition to the Muslim world in Medieval times, Europe gained this knowledge with the discovery of America and the imperialistic beginnings of the unification of the planet. It is curious, though purely coincidental, that it is again Persians, this time fictional, harmless and only two in number, who are the visitors to Paris in the epistolary novel with which the modern consciousness of relativity moved, like a kind of Enlightenment, onto the offensive. In a preface by Paul Valéry to the *Lettres persanes*, the mutual reactions there portrayed between oriental and western characters are summarised like this:

> Entrer chez les gens pour déconcerter leurs idées, leur faire la surprise d'être surpris de ce qu'ils font, de ce qu'ils pensent, et qu'ils n'ont jamais conçu différent [...] (Valéry 1959: 513. Italics mine)

The first surprise in the order of the sentence is that of the native, the second that of the outsider – but it is the latter which precedes and causes the former. A single very dense sentence of comment on Montesquieu will serve to outline the main distinctions which will be useful in the continuation of our discussion. Montesquieu was not Persian. If we look therefore at the relation between text and author, at the act of production of the text, we will be led to state concisely that the native understands his own world better through contact with the outsider; the contact in question being no other than the choice by a learned French magistrate who conceives a novel to mobilise characters with exotic origins. Let us look now at the text as a finished product, at that which is represented in it, and in particular at the defamiliarising and illuminating consequences of that contact. In the imaginary sense which is no longer that of the author but that of his characters, there will at least be suggested an even more compromising statement, to the detriment of national substance: the outsider understands the world of the native better than the native himself. This pattern has variations – through which logical frameworks and oppositional symmetries can be made clear and varied still further: according to one proposition, one reappropriates the inside via the outside; according to the other, one appropriates the inside from without.
3. And if Montesquieu had really been Persian? If the outsider is not only he who best understands the native's world, but he who expresses it best? And if he had to give it full expression in all its complexity in place of the native? I had the good fortune to read the lessons on French literature by Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa for the first time at the age of twenty-one. In them he explained that *Rome, Naples et Florence* and *Promenades dans Rome* are not travel books, unless in the sense that Stendhal's penetrating mind is attracted by the Italian solutions to the problem of bonheur, which is also his own problem. Incidentally, it is also an example of how the literary fate of Rome has differed from those of London, Paris, St. Petersburg and Berlin, which have been ensured by native writers from each of these countries:

This is the moment to point out once again the astonishing lack of concreteness of Italian literature from the 1400s to the end of the nineteenth century. [...] if it had depended on Italians alone, Rome would have left no artistic traces between Boccaccio and D'Annunzio's *Piacere*. In order to gain an impression we have to see it through foreign eyes. It is fortunate that those eyes are good: those of du Bellay, Milton, Goethe, Chateaubriand, Stendhal and Zola. (I do not include Belli for his unparalleled evocations were only of the Roman people and not of the whole city.) (Tomasi di Lampedusa 1995: 1784-1787)

More worrying than the difference between the nationality of the person writing and the townscape being observed would seem to be the heterogeneity which marks the work of D'Annunzio, in both Italian and French, according to Mario Praz. With regional, rather than national origins and a culture, rather than a language, which was appropriated rather than his own:

he is, in short, always and above all the son of a race of semi-barbarians who, having come into contact with a maturer civilisation, have assimilated it rapidly and superficially [...] he is, firstly, a native of the Abruzzo who comes to make a second home for himself in Tuscany, and then an Italian who makes a second home for himself in Paris. But D'Annunzio is not "born" to either Tuscan or French cultures, they are not in his soul. He would have to acquire those cultures on the surface, and would not be able to go into depth immediately through long familiarity.

D'Annunzio's habit of constructing everything from the outside, searching for himself in others, appropriating and reducing all the different sources to a common denominator, [...] has meant that the poet's work as a whole takes on the appearance of a monumental encyclopaedia of European decadentism. (Praz 1996: 356-358)
The acuteness of this judgement, which brings into play the worth of a literary work with its characteristics, does not seem to me to preclude two emendations which controvert it. On the one hand, a certain overestimation of the European importance of that encyclopaedia seemed more plausible in the 1930s than it does today; on the other, the whole context in which I have included this quotation should demonstrate that there is nothing wrong in doing that which everyone does, in looking for oneself in others.

There may, though less rarely than with D'Annunzio, be a difference of nationality between the writer and the historico-natural recipients of the language he uses. The alien quality of the work will not then necessarily correspond to the presence of any particular content in the text as finished product, nor to any prior choice of content in the act of producing the text, and yet it will arise in this act, in the relation between author and text. The prejudice of a national substance would have it that an alien quality of this kind should manifest itself in every case. At best, as the advantage gained from an unexpected perspective, and at worst as poorly rendered expression. In a chapter of the *Storia della civiltà letteraria inglese*, of which he is General Editor, Franco Marenco writes on one of the most famous examples ever of this phenomenon:

The fact that Conrad was of Polish origins and that he became familiar with English only late in life, after the age of twenty, certainly influenced his destiny as literary outsider: he remained to a great extent outside the English tradition, choosing French writers as masters – Maupassant and Flaubert above all – and his thought must be measured not against that of British intellectuals but against that of the Europeans – Nietzsche, Dostoevsky, Kafka, Mann – even if he did not know their works or, where he did, he rejected them.

Up to this point, the prejudice (as can so easily happen with prejudices) would appear to be well-founded. But the literary historian continues:

Still today in the criticism there exists a noticeable difference between a reading of Conrad made in the light of the European tradition and one based on principles and tastes which are more insular, inclined towards simplistic and consolatory interpretations – one which is continually surprised by the negative irony present in the texts. (Marenco 1996: III. 48-49)

Those readings which ignore Conrad the outsider, which with difficulty make him the equivalent of a native narrator, are therefore reductive. As if there were a relationship between the foreign origin of the man and the worth or meaning of the work – but this time a favourable relationship, by contrast with Praz's view of D'Annunzio. I do not know Kipling's work well enough, though I know that it too is still accorded worth and meaning, so I am not myself able to give an
answer to the questions I am now posing. Faced with the endless and remote complexity of high colonialism (which it would be euphemistic to call international in the ordinary sense), whose is the most significant and meaningful narrative expression in the language of the vastest empire in the world? Which is the true poet of that world per eccellenza, as Croce would have said, the Englishman born in Bombay or the acculturised Pole?

4. One of the mainstays supporting the prejudice in favour of national substances ought at the very least, one would think, to be all forms of popularising literature. That it is perfectly possible for this not to be the case was discovered with a certain amount of discomfort by the political leaders least likely to feel unease that modern history can recall – by those in charge of culture under Nazism. All Jewish writers had to disappear from the schoolbooks. What, then, was to be done with those lines which everyone remembered, those in which the Germanic legend of the Lorelei had been sung by Heine? Their popularity, which gave the lie to national-popularist ideology, forced that ideology to compromise: the lines remained and were attributed to an "unknown poet". Remembering this ignominious act at the beginning of his essay on Heine, Adorno ironises on the "honour" involuntarily accorded him by this recognition as a popular song of a poem which in reality was far from being one (Adorno 1963: 144). But Ladislao Mittner in his great history of literature (I am referring to more than one Italian work of this type as I find them informative and they cross national divisions) seems to hold a different opinion:

In the ballad of the Lorelei Heine succeeded in being German as in no other poem and at the same time managed to express the profoundest substance of his own soul [...] (Mittner 1971: I. 193)

Thus, in the space of six quatrains, a Jewish German poet could incomparably express two substances at the same time, his own soul and the German spirit. Only the antisemite will be surprised by the fact that such extreme versions of the phenomena I am discussing appear alongside the modern Jewish condition. And this is a condition which partakes of an extraordinary double territorial and metaterritorial identity, which in relation to territories and nations involves a unique coincidence of proximity and distance, familiarity and cultural marginalization. The outsider, at this point, not only understands and expresses the world of the native better than or instead of him, he competes with the native and surpasses him in the expression of those qualities which are presumed to be most innate in him. A variation on this pattern: from the outside one appropriates that which most characterises the inside. One phenomenon which seems to me to have offered literary and musical examples of this, in the century between the Congress of Vienna and the Treaty
of Versailles, is the European fascination with Spain where, as in out-of-the-way Russia and by contrast with Italy and Germany, Napoleon had arrived only to be repulsed. Alarcón's *The Three-cornered Hat* (1874), the novel which inspired two musical masterpieces, opens with a short chapter establishing a pre-1808 setting. A date, that is, when the deeds of the man who was shaking Europe were still admired by the Spaniards "as if they were dealing with a hero from a chivalric tale, or with events taking place on another planet". And their archaic regime continued "as though, among so much novelty and confusion, the Pyrenees had turned into a Chinese Wall" (Alarcón 1971: 27-29). An archaic regime or an anachronistic Middle Ages, a proud, resplendent and remote periphery, a space which had unwittingly become time, decadent Spain was to be transformed into the past of Europe. That is why it was elsewhere that the image of Spain took shape so suggestively. The destiny of those authors of a Romantic theatre which followed the French closely in the thirties was the limited, though not provincial, one establishing a strange triangular relationship through the pursuit of their favourite themes. Carmelo Samonà makes this point in his *Profilo della letteratura spagnola*:

It would be a mistake to consider that return to the Middle Ages as the effect of internally circulating national values, which emerge again through the gradual reestablishment of a direct dialogue between the poet of the new generation and his legendary past. In reality, the European romantics had made and assimilated that same discovery early in the century: the discovery of what the significance was -- for the French and Germans -- of the baroque inheritance of the *Edad de Oro*, the myth of the drama of Lope de Vega and Calderón, the ancient Iberian exoticism with its Middle Ages historically in line with new developments through its contacts with the Orient [...] and the poet who arrives as a political exile in the France in the first years of the century (Rivas, Martínez de la Rosa, Espronceda to name but three), discovers to his surprise that Spain has already been discovered and manipulated in a variety of ways [...] (Samonà 1985: 144-145)

5. Napoleon defeated the Germans several times, Bismarck defeated France, Clemenceau defeated Germany, and Hitler France. I do not know whether, for the other bank of the Rhine, there exists a similar work to Cesare Cases' magnificent study *I tedeschi e lo spirito francese* on the relationship between the two cultures from the eighteenth century to post1945. At the beginning of this essay, I notice that the consistency of "the substrate of national psychology" is viewed as "something negative, a limitation and a barrier" (Cases 1963: 5). With a century and a half of tension on the most central border in Europe, we can expect to find versions of alienated identification which are more contradictory than ever in national images. But let us begin with Proust who in *Contre*
Sainte-Beuve, just before he embarked on the Recherche, also wishes to make amends to Nerval. Except that the disregard of nineteenth-century critics seems to Proust to be almost preferable to the present admiring misunderstanding:

Il est convenu aujourd'hui que Gérard de Nerval était un écrivain du XVIIIe siècle attardé et que le romantisme n'influença pas, un pur Gaulois, traditionnel et local, qui a donné dans Sylvie une peinture naïve et fine de la vie française idéalisée. Voilà ce qu'on a fait de cet homme, qui à vingt ans traduisait Faust, allait voir Goethe à Weimar, pourvoyait le romantisme de toute son inspiration étrangère [...] (Proust 1971: 233)

And Proust continues with Nerval's madness, the journey to the East and his suicide; he then returns via the poetry to the stratifications and oneiric vacillations of memory in Sylvie:

Cette histoire que vous appelez une peinture naïve, c'est le rêve d'un rêve, rappelez-vous. (Ibid.: 237)

La couleur de Sylvie, c'est une couleur pourpre, d'une rose pourpre en velours pourpre ou violacée, et nullement les tons aquarellés de leur France modérée. (Ibid.: 239)

This time, in the act of assimilation, the native misunderstands the real qualities of the outsider. A variation on the pattern: that which comes from outside is falsified, so that it may describe the inside. Proust censures this, in passages on Nerval by Lemaitre and Barrès, as lying somewhere between obfuscation and arrogant abuse of power. Rather than native it will be better from now on to use the more aggressive term nationalist, and rather than outsider, foreigner. The last book of the Recherche was written just before the advent of war. There was worse obfuscation and arrogant abuse of power to come, and the text portrays this by exposing it through the voice of a character who is sufficiently intelligent to place the nationalisms of the two countries in contradiction with themselves. While walking beneath the aeroplanes in the night sky of Paris M. de Charlus, who has many reasons for being a pacifist and a German sympathiser, deliberates at length:

En fait ils poussent bien à la continuation de la guerre. Mais ce n'est que pour exterminer une race belliqueuse et par amour de la paix. Non seulement ils reprochent à la Prusse d'avoir fait prédominer chez elle l'élément militaire, mais en tout temps ils pensent que les civilisations militaires furent destructrices de tout ce qu'ils trouvent maintenant précieux [...] (Proust 1989: IV. 377)
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Et pourtant l'Allemagne emploie tellement les mêmes expressions que la France que c'est à croire qu'elle la cite, elle ne se lasse pas de dire qu'elle "lutte pour l'existence". Quand je lis: "Nous lutterons contre un ennemi implacable et cruel jusqu'à ce que nous ayons obtenu une paix qui nous garantisse à l'avenir de toute agression et pour que le sang de nos braves soldats n'ait pas coulé en vain", ou bien: "Qui n'est pas pour nous est contre nous", je ne sais pas si cette phrase est de l'empereur Guillaume ou de M. Poincaré car ils l'ont, à quelques variantes prés, prononcée vingt fois l'un et l'autre [...] (Ibid.)

The comment on Proust by René Girard in Mensonge romantique et vérité romanesque clarifies and develops that which is most useful for us in the text:

Le chauvin hait l'Allemagne puissante, guerrière et disciplinée car il ne rêve lui-même que guerre, puissance et discipline. (Girard 1961: 208)

Thus, finally, either shamelessly or furtively, in conflict with himself or unawares, the nationalist imitates what are presumed to be the worst qualities of the foreigner. A variation of the pattern: in shutting oneself in, one makes one's own that which would otherwise most nearly describe the outside. It does not seem possible to go beyond the contradictoriness of this proposition.

6. But what do I really think of national substances, of the idea that cultural identities and national images can have an independent existence, when, among the notes and recollections of a lifetime's reading, I have found such an abundance of troublesome and doubtful examples? To stay within the province of literature and art: do I perhaps judge the labels Flemish painting, Italian music, or German literature to be mere nonsense, or merely excusable empiricism for the sake of convenience? Do I really find the English humour of Sterne or Dickens indistinguishable from, let's say, the French esprit of Molière or Stendhal? In a passage from Nietzsche, extraordinary in spite of its antidemocratic and anti-historicist bias, we glimpse a modern solution which is even more sceptical in its pessimism. Related as they are to the different styles and ages, nationalities too, it would seem, exist like clothes to be worn or removed at will and without gain:

The promiscuous European – a plebeian who is passably disgusting, all things considered – has an absolute need for clothes: and he needs history as a wardrobe for these clothes. In reality, he notices that none of these fit him well – and he keeps changing them. The nineteenth century is recognisable from these passing preferences and for its quick changes in the masquerade of styles, in moments of desperation too, because "nothing fits". – It is no use appearing in romantic guise, or
classical or Christian or Florentine, or Baroque or "national", in moribus et artibus: "Nothing looks right"! (Nietzsche 1964: 146)

The reactionary prophet touches upon the greatest problem for a future cultural ecology. In other words, that risk of the spread of decontextualized cultural values, a pervasive effect in mass society of a cheap historicism, but also of the colonial levelling of the globe, which is one way of defining Kitsch.²

The phenomenon is contiguous with the problem set out in these pages. It is not identical. Apart from anything, in a historical discussion that risk can hardly have much relevance: either objectively, if authors and texts which are far above the level of mere consumer products are cited, as I have done here, or subjectively, if one makes the assumption (certainly not guaranteed but by no means impossible) that the reception of authors and texts is free from decontextualization and Kitsch. The solution derivable from the passage from Nietzsche will not do for us. An idea which we can use, however, may be stated using Nietzsche's own metaphor, as follows: the freedom to wear or to remove more than one suit of clothes does not necessarily constitute stylistic promiscuity, capricious licence or weak deficiency. I will explain this further after what appears to be a digression. I recalled near the beginning of this paper how, for some time, I took Jacques Lacan seriously as the most important interpreter and follower of Freud. I owe the fact that by the mid seventies I had become intolerant of his work to early comparison with Ignacio Matte Blanco, an interpreter and follower of Freud with a very different kind of rigour and frankness. In his reformulation of the so-called unconscious, Freud's central discovery, rather than being the non-conscious location of certain psychic contents, becomes the location of these in what the founder himself called a "realm of the illogical" (Freud 1966: XVII. 91). They are described by an alternative or "symmetrical" logic, by an antilogic – something which, we must not forget, commonly abounds in conscious thought too. As baffling as it is ubiquitous, while at the same time being specifiable, this antilogic does have its "generalising principle". That is to say it treats every individual thing as part of a whole, this whole as part of a larger whole, and so on. But in the process of this expansion which tends literally towards the infinite, it prefers aspects which "preserve some of the particular characteristics of the individual thing" (Matte Blanco 1981: 43-44).

It may be, then, that the idea of national substances would no longer elude us as substances, and what remains of them or what we put in their place would become clear if we were to conceive of them as wholes within larger wholes,

2 Cf. Orlando 1994: 564. See all the references by subject under "Pretenzioso-fittizio" (in particular "Kitsch, decontestualizzazione", and "sincretismo culturale, colonialismo, storicismo").
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without ever losing sight of individual characteristics. It is to be understood, however, that the wholes (or logical classes) designated by the words "Spain" and "Spanish", "France" and "French", "Germany" and "German" are both lesser than and greater than others. Than all those which might refer for ideas and images to sunny or foggy countries of uncertain geographical location, backward or civilised, honest or corrupt, with traditional or more open-minded cultures, free or oppressive, superficial or profound etc. To put it simply, and to use a simple truism, there can be both a Spaniard who is not proud and a man who is proud but not Spanish, but the latter could quite conceivably pass for a Spaniard in the right circumstances merely on the grounds of his pride. To clarify our problem, in order to attribute to nationalities a basis which is less rigid and more plausible than a substance, it is important that the wholes which relate upwards to them are smaller than the wholes to which all the other possible predicates refer. Within the logical-fantastic space which thus opens out or superabounds, there are substitutions, mutations, assimilations, levellings out, but also confusions, falsifications, mystifications, denegations; and in all cases idealisations or (in the words of Matte Bianco) infinitizations. In the same way and to a greater extent than Freud's unconscious, symmetrical logic can give rise to negative and positive outcomes, both pathological and dysphoric and euphoric and creative. These latter are the prerogative of the discourse of the work of art, to the success of which I suppose symmetrical logic or the so-called unconscious to make an essential contribution - as, in their turn, these latter find their institutionalised outlet into the work of art. The negative outcomes, on the other hand, are for the most part the scourge of all types of ideological discourse. For artists, this include poetics, in other words their ideas on art, and it is difficult to see how the infiltration of what is by definition an antilogic into this kind of discourse could fail to cause prejudice. Let us look at one or two of our examples again.

One example refers beyond art, in that its literary expression locates it in history. For Proust's French nationalists, "Germany" really constituted a smaller whole which was part of the larger one "militarism, power, discipline". Of this whole they desired the smaller whole "France" to become a part, yet without the obstacle of not wishing to admit the similarity they were aiming at, of violently relegating it to the unspoken. In this removal of the self that envious aggressiveness which is polarised by the other reverberates and is concentrated. Literary examples: Heine was able to give poetic form to the Lorelei, and Victor Hugo to compete quite happily with the Spanish poets because certain suggestions emanating from the wholes "Germany" or "Spain" were for them lesser wholes, with strong individual characteristics, of evocative larger wholes. We know that neither in the nostalgic yearning of the Nordic ballad, nor in the passionate and sunny Mediterranean character, nor in any other of this type of formula, are the predicates which can be linked to a national description
exhausted. On the other hand, we also know that those formulae are predicates which contain much more than just a national description, in spite of the fact that the national description, in its individuality, expresses them by antonomasia. This time there is no obstacle, but if anything growth. There is a knowledge of the other through identification, and not a disowning of the self through repression; regression to the child's imaginative power can only take place within the social communicativeness of art; subjective moments are channelled, without violation, into the objective capacity of the text.

Translated by Andrew Thompson

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