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TO BE UNIVERSAL OR TO BE NATIONAL

Дилема «Бути універсальним, чи бути національним» у даній статті розглядається на прикладі португальської культурної, зокрема літературної традиції. Як констатує автор, відомі португальські письменники та інтелектуали (Луїш ді Камоенс, Еса ді Кейрош, Камілу Каїштелу Бранку, Фернандо Пессоа) не мають таких досягнень, як класики інших країн (Чехов та Достоевський в Росії, Ортега-і-Гассет та Сервантес в Іспанії, Гьоте в Німеччині, Мольєр у Франції). Не дивлячись на це, література та культура Португалії, як і інших «маленьких країн», відіграє важливу комунікаційну роль та є часткою світової культури. Це також підтверджується тезою, що універсальності не може бути без національного елемента, та навпаки, бо: «Великий горизонт та маленький горизонт мають повністю однаковий розмір».

Дилемма «Быть универсальным, или быть национальным» в данной статье рассматривается на примере португальской культурной, в частности, литературной традиции. Как констатирует автор, известные португальские писатели и интеллектуалы (Луиш ди Камоэнс, Эса ди Кейрош, Камилу Каїштелу Бранку, Фернандо Пессоа) не имеют таких достижений, которые имеют классики других стран (Чехов и Достоевский в России, Ортега-и-Гассет и Сервантес в Испании, Гете в Германии, Мольер во Франции). Не смотря на это, литература и культура Португалии, как и других «маленьких стран», играет важную коммуникационную роль и является частью мировой культуры. Это подтверждается также тезисом, согласно которому не может быть универсальности без национального элемента, и наоборот, поскольку: «Большой горизонт и маленький горизонт имеют полностью одинаковый размер».

Talking about big things requires a lack of humility which I don't particularly fancy. The universe or even the nation are far too big for me. I do not even pretend to be unduly humble when I say what I have just said. I am in good Company. The late Thomas Carlyle once stated: «I don't pretend to understand the Universe - it's a great deal bigger than I am... People ought to be modester».

But here we are elaborating about universalism, without even blinking, accepting the universe as our equal or less than that: as a mere pretext for our reflections. The English writer Peter Cook belonged in this bold category when he once said: «I am very interested in the Universe - I am specializing in the Universe and all that surrounds it.»

We Portuguese, being of a small country known as Portugal, are pretty well acquainted with notions such as universalism. Living pretty much unemployed since we discovered the world for you - we probably became exhausted by our exertions in that epic venture-, we have found it extremely difficult to adjust our expanded ego to this marginal life we were left with after having been all over the world saying: «We are the first to arrive here.» To be or not to be universal became an Obsession with us. Are our writers - I mean the big ones: Camoes, Ega de Queiros, Camilo Castelo Branco, Fernando Pessoa - [are our writers] proper universal artists or just good enough for this small rectangle at the extreme West of Europe; in other words, are they after all interesting but rather parochial producers of literature? Are they interesting to the eventual inhabitants of Lisbon, Oporto, Coimbra or Leiria but utterly unacceptable in London or Liverpool? This question seems to have obsessed generations of critics, novelists, poets, playwrights usually possessed of masochist tendencies. Statements are rife and usually very harsh. Of a good novel it is often said: «It is a good Portuguese novel but not a good universal [or European] novel». We love to oppose the adjective Portuguese to the adjective universal or, lately to the adjective European. Even great writers like the recently deceased Miguel Torga rejoiced in bitterly diagnosing the market limitations which afflicted, according to him, the masterpieces of Eca de Queiros: «Sanjoaneira [he used to say], the Gansosos, Amelinha, Amaro, Canon Dias [all characters from the novel The Sin of Father Amaro] are from Leiria, Evora, Braga but mean absolutely nothing in Liverpool.»

I am not sure that this masochistic appraisal of our intrinsic lack of universalism is altogether a manifestation of humility. Sometimes I even suspect that there is here an implication that our uniqueness is far too subtle, far too complicated for the average foreigner to understand it properly. Shakespeare, no problem. But the intricacies and minute perversities of the bigots of Leiria are too much even for the likes of Proust or Henry James. I may be wrong. But known critics as Joao Gaspar Simoes or historians of culture and literature such as Antonio Jose Saraiva elaborated for years on our self proclaimed inability or ability to express our problems and our condition to the outside world. For some peculiar and rather intricate reason everybody else more or less managed to make themselves understood beyond their national borders but we Portuguese did not. We were - it was said - too national to ever be able to become really universal. Somehow our too deeply imbedded nationality prevented us from reaching the universal.

This is a very old problem and - as far as I am concerned - a false problem and a Byzantine one at that. All literature is always the expression of a people. In this respect the Portuguese are not more particular than the others. Nothing more Russian than Tcheckoff or Dostoiewsky which did not prevent them from becoming world writers admired in every corner of the earth. Long-time ago the French writer Andre Gide stated in this same connection: «The most human literary works, those which remain of the most general interest, are also the most particular, those where the genius of the race clearly shows through the genius of one individual. What more national», asked Gide, «than [...] Dante, Shakespeare, Cervantes, Moliere, Goethe, Ibsen, Dostoiewsky? What more generally human? And, also, what more individual? Because we should at long last understand that these three terms overlap and that no work of art has a universal meaning if it has not first a national meaning; and has no national meaning if it has not first an individual meaning». In other words, in art - so far as it is good art - we always go from the particular to the general, from the national to the universal. «Individuality, said Hebbel, whom Gide quoted, [individuality] is not so much an end as a path. It is not the best: it is the only one.»

This is why, contrary to the pessimistic predictions of Miguel Torga, Eca de Queiros did get translated into English and was highly praised in London and Liverpool, in spite of the fact that Amelinha and Amaro and the Canon Dias were extremely particular human beings, lost in the middle of the little town of Leiria - a town full of bigots and intrigue and narrow-mindedness. No more, though, than the peculiar universes of Tcheckoff and Dostoiewsky, so deeply particular and Russian but, at the same time, so general, so universal, so engaging.

Critics who regret that Portuguese writers did not create characters similar to Aliosha Karamazov or Julien Sorel or Erna Bovary remind me of the utter chauvinism of Winston Churchill when he said: «The Almighty in His infinite wisdom did not see fit to create Frenchmen in the image of English-men».

There are no valid prescriptions for universality or there is only one: to be true to oneself, to describe as well as possible the reality we know without thinking about the possibility of others grasping the full meaning of our work. To set out to produce deliberately a universal work is a recipe for disaster. The universe Starts at home: it is utterly futile to look for it elsewhere: «listen» said the modernist American poet e.e. cummings, «listen; there is a hell of a good universe next door: let's go». Cummings was so humble that not only he wrote his name with small letters but he refused to go far away to find out about the universe: he had it next door and next door was exactly where the universe was - waiting for him.

Great artists make sometimes peculiar Statements. Not all artists have the lucidity or the power of analysis displayed by the likes of Gide or cummings. The anxiety about being or not being universal devours them: «Great artists have no country», proudly proclaimed Alfred de Musset. On the contrary, I would say, great artists do have a country and that is what makes them belong to all countries.

On the other hand, proclamations of the kind: «The Greeks had a universalistic genius and the Portuguese do not» are, as it was shown by Antonio Jose Saraiva, nonsense or, if you prefer, a contradiction in its own terms. Because if you believe that there is such a thing as a «universalistic genius» on the one hand but that, on the other hand, certain peoples like the Greek have it and others like the Portuguese have not, what sense does it make? If some races don't have it where is universalism? If a Portuguese masterpiece has not the ability to make

itself understood in Germany, it is very likely that a German masterpiece will have no chance of being understood in Portugal - so what do we mean by universalism, after all?

The belief that some literary works present us a bigger horizon than others and that is what makes them bigger works or more universal works was long-time ago given the lie by the Spanish philosopher Ortega y Gasset when he said: «No horizon [...] is interesting on account of its content. All are interesting for its shape of horizon, that is to say, of cosmos or complete world. The microcosmos and the macrocosmos are equally cosmos; they only differ in the size of the radius; but for the persons who live inside each one it has always the same absolute size.» One cannot pretend to arouse our interest in the content of a novel through the amplification of our daily horizon, by introducing us to uncommon adventures. One has to operate, on the contrary, tightening up even further the reader's horizon.» In his typically teasing way, the Spanish philosopher explained it: «If by horizon we understand the circle of beings and events that are part of the world of each one of us, we could make the mistake of imagining that there are horizons so wide, so varied, so anomalous, that they become truly interesting, while others are so diminished and monotonous that they have nothing that could be of any real interest to us. This is utter illusion. The signorita at the comptoir imagines that the world of the duchess is more dramatic than her own, but it actually happens that the duchess gets so bored in her luminous world as the romantic comptoir girl in her poor and obscure corner. Being a duchess is a way of daily life as any other.» In other words, following the teasing Statements proposed by Ortega y Gasset, Julien Sorel of world fame shines no more than the humble bigots of Leiria in the novel by Ega de Queiros.

The great universal producer of fictions has not to be ashamed of the tiny size of his fictional world. Tcheckov's three sisters live in a remote and utterly peculiar Russian little place which in no way affects the agonising importance of their plight. «Living in a big city», added Ortega, «we do not understand how can anybody stand to live in a little village. But if mischance submerges us in it, we find ourselves after a while completely taken in by the little intrigues and gossip of the place. The author's tactics will consist in isolating the reader taking him away from his real horizon and making him a prisoner inside a little hermetic and imaginary horizon. In a word what he has to do is to make him settle in the village, to make him take an interest in the people he introduces him to [...] To make of each reader a transitory countrified person is [...] the great secret of the novelist. That is why I said that instead of wanting to widen the horizon [...] one should rather aim at narrowing it, at confining it.» If Ortega y Gasset is right as I think he is, no small country should be afraid of its size. Size is not the trick. Small size is not incompatible with universality. «The nations which have put mankind and posterity most in their debt have been small states -Israel, Athens, Florence, Elizabethan England.»

This was said by the Dean Inge and, as it has become usual, Portugal was left unmentioned in spite of having left quite a mark on mankind.

No problem: Camoes, Pessoa, Eca de Queiros, Camilo Castelo Branco knew how to confine the reader in their peculiar provinces and through that countrifying Operation make them supremely interesting and universal. Some of what they wrote has been translated, some has not. But translation has nothing to do with universalism. Translation is an accident. «It is by becoming nationalized that a literature takes its place in the territory of human kind and takes its meaning in the world concert», said Gide. Small literatures, I mean, literatures originated in small countries should not be afraid of not being part of the world concert. The big horizon and the small horizon have exactly the same size.

Only most people don't know it.

Примітка до публікації

Автором цієї статті є відомий португальський письменник та літературознавець Еухеніу Лісбоа (нар. в 1930р.). З 1995 по 1998рр. він був Президентом Португальської Національної Комісії ЮНЕСКО. Зараз Еухеніу Лісбоа є доктором та професором Університету Авейро (Universidade de Aveiro) в Португалії та почесним доктором Нотінгемського університету у Великій Британії.

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