

HUMANISM, HISTORICAL CONSCIOUSNESS AND NATIONAL SENTIMENT¹

Under the impact of humanism the historical sciences were placed in a paradoxical situation: philology, publishing, archaeology brought with them an enormous increase of factual knowledge, but the ancient universal and abstract perspectives still provided the necessary framework. If one compares a mediaeval chronicle to an Italian history from the 15th or 16th century, whether it be humanist or claims to be pragmatic, such as the work of Machiavelli, one is generally struck by an essential difference: the chronicler relates the events as a simple succession of facts, but for the Renaissance historiographer there is always an underlying theme, "human nature," "the lessons of history," the model of Rome.

For a long time history had served as a repertoire of *exempla*, illustrating moral life. In the Renaissance the nature of the

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¹ This essay is an extract from a volume on the culture of the Renaissance, entitled *L'Europe Humaniste* (to be published, Éditions des Deux Mondes, Paris).

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facts, the sense of human activity, the careful rereading of the chronicles invited the search for more and different factors in the unfolding of the past: history was actualized unscrupulously by being boldly "typified." Each town, each family, each personality had to have an ancient hero as a sort of patron. Every event, every situation was measured by an historical or mythical model.

Mediaeval history and culture were not ignored; but this familiar domain did not lend itself to an interesting and new articulation. Rome and Greece, and indirectly ancient Egypt and the Near East, were par excellence the historic countries. The extent of knowledge of their past had increased through the accessibility of historical texts that had been long forgotten (Tacitus had been rediscovered in the 14th century), or misunderstood (Titus Livius), and due to Greek translations and compilations. A new direct value, which hitherto had been lacking, was restored to the texts, mainly through the examination of coins, monuments, inscriptions, etc.

The commentary on a classic author was composed of hundreds of erudite and ingenious comparisons, which rendered life in ancient Greece and Rome imaginable and concrete. People were avid for all sorts of information: the ritual names of the divinities, the shapes of sandals, the etiquette of banquets. This was arranged in volumes of "commentaries" or treatises which very frequently lacked any methodic sequence at all. The most striking example of this erudite disorder is given in the *Miscellanea* by Poliziano, notes of an astonishing perceptivity, which still seduce the reader by the passionate interest they display in everything that had to do with the realities of the world of antiquity.²

No excess of precision or technical detail was daunted in this restoration; on the contrary. One of the famous books of the 16th century, the masterpiece of the great Budé, was dedicated to the Roman monetary system. The authors of specialized treatises—on chasing, architecture, agronomy, the art of seige—

² After four and a half centuries, the manuscript of the second *centuria* of the *Miscellanea*, which had disappeared in 1494, and was mentioned by all Poliziano's friends, was found and presented by V. Branca in *La incompiuta seconda centuria dei "miscellanea" di Angelo Poliziano*, Florence, 1961.

and even those who merely summed up the definite knowledge of their contemporaries about astronomy, geography, archaeology, or those who instructed in the details of cults and beliefs were read and commented upon with inexhaustible enthusiasm; one can imagine the impact of this accumulation achieved in the study and exploration of nature. Knowledge is enumerative; this is as true for the poet and the inquisitive mind as it is for the historian.

For humanist thought only the historical dimension was endowed with a superior, almost transcendental quality; one is tempted even to say: sacred. No one, or almost no one, contested the idea that any information whatsoever on the world of antiquity threw some light on natural order or the ideal nature of things. And this, because the great Mediterranean episode necessarily had become the core of a history conceived as the unfolding and conquest of civilization. It is here, perhaps, that the presence of humanism and its doctrinal imperatives had most weight. It went beyond both exterior periodization, such as that of Eusebius and Augustine, familiar in the Middle Ages (which frequently the Renaissance seemed to retain, or in any case to imitate), and eschatology, the dramatic conception that weighs on the present (something of which may be found in the heralding of the "golden age"). With humanism man proceeded toward a new formula that gave real weight to every human conquest and placed itself half-way between antique "myth-history" and the future "history as the education of humanity," according to Lessing.³ This may be clearly perceived apropos the theme of the origins.

De rerum inventoribus, by Polydore Virgil, after its publication in Venice (1499), had 110 editions, which were constantly enlarged until the Bâle edition, 1540.⁴ This compilation cites the religions, including Christianity, among the feats of civilization whose spirit gave it its measure; it moreover alludes to the continuity between the cults of the pagan gods and the saints

³ Polybius and other historians of antiquity also contributed, with their theories on the cycles of evolution, to the humanist idea of an internal logic of history.

⁴ See D. Hay, *Polydore Vergil, Renaissance Historian and Man of Letters*, Oxford, 1952.

of the church—hence the inevitable expurgation in 1576. The novelty and boldness of these ideas should not be exaggerated; certain mediaeval circles had already without trouble conceived of Christianity in history. The idea became disturbing only with the astrologers, who, with their intention of making “the religions” dependent on the course of the planets, a posteriori calculated Christ’s horoscope.⁵ Christianity could be regarded as an event of civilization, since civilization was endowed for the humanists with a religious dignity. The founders of cities, legislators, the first inventors of the arts and sciences did not lose their divine character by passing from the mythology of antiquity to Renaissance historiography: the half-gods Orpheus and Hermes Trismegistos, who had organized the first human societies and who brought them music, poetry, and writing, became non-canonic prophets for the neo-Platonists. The question of principle had been solved in the 4th century before our age, thanks to Eumerus, who affirmed that the mythological personages were great men made divine by a grateful or fearful posterity: a commodious doctrine for the Renaissance to save the entire Olympus through history. But in this fashion history itself was in some ways divinized. Jupiter could well have been no more than a just and pious king; if the imagination of the people made him the father of the gods and even the planet of justice and of religion, the historic past was then tied to the order of the heavens and the supra-celestial order. In celebrating the “divine” inspiration of the sages, the new history merely confirmed this concurrence.

The preoccupation with designating and exalting the founding heros and “inventors” of the sciences corresponded to a need, typical for humanism, to retrace the historic development of human activity. It was at the same time a rational reconstitution and a fabulous idealization, without in any case any particular relationship to the evolution of sacred history, geared to the fall and redemption. New difficulties arose with regard to the

⁵ Against the hasty assimilation of the ideas by rationalist free-thought, see E. Garin, “Renovatio e oroscopo delle religioni,” in *La cultura filosofica del Rinascimento Italiano*, Florence, 1961, pp. 155-59. The appearance of Luther was also, to the indignation of the reformer, explained by astrology; though Melanchthon was less hostile to the idea.

early ages, and nothing perhaps demonstrates more aptly to what extent humanism resuscitated problems rather than brought simple solutions. A pessimistic description of the first state of man was drawn from the recently discovered Lucretius, as well as from Vitruvius and Pliny: a bestial savagery, which technical improvements and social life gradually softened. This description of the "hard primitivism" was quite different from the fable of the "orphic" golden age, narrated by Ovid, not to speak of the story of Genesis, which combines both conceptions. But the apprenticeship of the first men, explained along the lines of the Lucretian model, did not constitute an evolution in the true sense; it was an awakening of human possibilities, which had remained unchanged since the beginning of time. Man was only more or less well, more or less faithfully, realized. With reference to the passing from huts built on tree trunks to the temple of stone pillars, one believed invincibly in the effort of modern men to forget gothic naturalism, the imitation of the life of the forests,⁶ to arrive at stylized and pure forms taken from antiquity. This development, which actualized the essential virtualities of man, seems to us like the projection of humanism itself to the dimensions of universal history.

In any case the ancient history of man before civilization necessarily had, for the humanist mind, a high symbolic value. This was the privileged place of the great fables, "truer" than any reality. Hence a new application to pinpoint and determine its fabulous origins. Images of Orpheus permitted a pagan and optimistic version to be given the history of Eden; and it is interesting to find on the other hand the "hard" version in the famous panels by Piero di Cosimo, portraying on one side the horrors of primitive humanity and on the other the mythical civilizers, Vulcan and Prometheus.⁷

⁶ The idea that gothic architecture was a "stylization" of Nordic wood cabins was expressed in a letter to Pope Leo X and attributed to Raphael. For more than three centuries it met with great success; see J. Baltrusaitis, in *Aberrations*, Paris, 1957.

⁷ Three "genre scenes" of the life of primitive men (New York and Oxford), also the History of Vulcan (Florence and Ottawa) and Prometheus (Munich and Strasbourg). The iconographic interpretation is due mostly to Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology*, New York, 1939.

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We know enough through Vasari about the painter, an original artist who was possessed with the idea of "savagery," to be able to confirm the psychological function of these astonishing evocations: they are like a reparation due to nature, which we never cease to wound within and around us. One sought so far as possible the animal in man, perhaps with the thought in the back of one's mind that Prometheus' act, civilization, purified and prolonged nature, rather than repressed it. This was doubtless Leonardo's idea and the sense of his multiple research on human activity. No naive illusion on the primitive and ideal golden age was then necessary.

Renaissance art pullulates with "primitive men," more or less disguised. They intervene gaily in artistic decoration in the North and South. In the mythological idylls, the species is restated in the faun, the satyr, the leprechaun, the half-man, who can parody the gods. Into religious paintings the allegorical ape was insinuated, "man produced by degenerate nature," as Bernard Sylvestre called him in the 13th century, the grotesque image of the sinner who has completely forgotten himself. In the fables and stories from the repertory of courtly love, it was the "man of the woods" or the "savage," the laughable and terrible version of the knight deprived of his veneer: his courage turned into blind violence, his perfect and deferent love, into enraged and jealous passion (Ariosto's *Roland the Furious* has certain traits of this "savage"). Intrepid and efficacious projections of the subconscious, the lewdness of the satyr, the gluttony of the ape, the anger of the savage were associated with Folly and finally with Death, as in the famous coat of arms by Dürer painted in 1503. It was the intimate bestiary that was displayed in this fashion, brought into the light, in the ambiguous complacency of laughter and sometimes in the hilarity of the carnival, in order to confirm the victory of civilization.⁸

History written according to these postulates gives the impression of a perpetual disguise. It is not a separate discipline, but a basic component of a culture. It overhangs the present: "the great ancestors," real or fictitious, still reappear through

⁸ Richard Bernheimer, *Wild Men in the Middle Ages*, Cambridge, Mass., 1952; H. W. Janson, *Apes and Ape-Lore in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, London, Studies of the Warburg Institute, XX, 1952.

their descendants. Outside of Italy, the results of this vast process of ideal reconstruction and multiple information were frequently disconcerting. The adaptation to the Mediterranean perspective, which again had become complete, gave rise to a strange cult of barbarian ancestors, at the same time assimilated by and opposed to Rome: they were claimed to be of Trojan origin, since Rome was built by a descendant of Aeneas; they were endowed with the virtues of the Roman Republic, in order to oppose them more conveniently to the laxity of imperial Rome. All of this development in the transalpine countries was secondary: it merely answered the "à l'antique" style of Italian historians.

Petrarch boldly undertook to fashion the present on the Roman model; but, as opposed to all the doctrines of the Empire, which presupposed a continuity between Augustus' Rome and the Roman-Germanic Empire, he recognized the true hero in Scipio, and thought that his place in the Western world was vacant. The municipal historiography of the Italians, with Leonardo Bruni and Poggio Bracciolini for Florence, Platina for Mantova, Sabellico and Bembo for Venice, etc., clad its personalities with togas and the pallium and had them discourse in the style of Titus Livius. The disguise of contemporary history was accomplished through the pseudo-epos, Sforziades, Borseides, Borgiades, Laurentiades or Trivulziades, which supplied an occupation for mediocre pedants, spreading a veil of advantageous fiction over all of Europe. Only a few relevant themes may be set apart, such as that of Titus Livius' antagonistic pair: Scipio-Hannibal. Confounded in the welter of "types" with the pair Alexander-Darius—the young hero blessed by Fortune and the Graces facing the terrible old warrior from the East—, it became, in Verrocchio's atelier a fecund artistic theme, rich in poetry, and most typical of the discoveries of humanism.

The presence of antique ruins gave this proud historiography, sure of itself and subservient to its dreams, an assurance of reality. In Rome above all the visitor was beseeched by these vestiges. As early as 1300, the prestige of the site inspired Giovanni Villani with the resolution to become an historian. Petrarch, seated in front of the broken columns, perceived new perspectives on the fate and grandeur, and even the course,

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of the arts. Since that time, the transition from romantic meditation to history has been accomplished countless times. Every man of culture and sensibility had to experience the desire to reconstruct, at least in words or drawings, what could be seen there on the ground; hence the exact sketches of capitals and mouldings by Brunelleschi and Cronaca, the plan of the antique city conceived by Alberti, the descriptions by Albertini, the great construction projects since Leo X, the museums, the collections, the artists obsessed by antiquity, such as the painter Polidoro, the architect Sanmicheli, not to speak of the sculptor Michelangelo. Gradually the grottoes of the Esquilin, that is, the subterranean halls of the Golden House of Nero, ceased to be a hiding place for thieves; sketchers slipped in, not without a shudder, and returned with astonishing fantastic motives, which the decorative arts adopted. And Rome was not the only center of interest; everywhere, the "dead had to be resuscitated," according to the words, in the first half of the Quattrocento, of Ciriaco of Ancona, who travelled throughout Italy and Greece for this purpose. Florence, which had no important Roman antiquities, consoled itself by "resuscitating" the Etruscans and by accumulating their medals, gems and bronzes in its collections, thus imitating the cities of the North. The greatest joy for Lorenzo de' Medici was to receive a mutilated bust, which, he was assured, was extracted from the ruins of Athens.

The ruins—now regarded with new eyes—were endowed with a general human significance and lent themselves to symbolism: in the Nativities for a long time they had merely shown the shabbiness of the manger; they now grew in importance, occupying, in the form of a temple or a triumphal arch, the entire scene, and thus introducing a precise allusion to paganism "breaking down" at the coming of Christ. A whole history of irrecusable grandeur is to be read on a pile of stone fragments covered with reliefs and signs; and vague regret was mixed with a sense of the fragility of things human. These vestiges were examined more closely; painters composed "landscapes of ruins," even when the subject itself or concept did not require them. Thus in the Botticelli panel in the Sistine Chapel, Coreus, Dathan and Abiron prostrate themselves in front of a giant arch, similar to the arch of Constantine; and Pintu-

ricchio uses the same monument for the *Disputation of St. Catherine of Alexandria* (Borgia apartments).

The frame of antiquity thus became more than decoration, it was the indispensable mantel for the expression of sentiment. The sculptured reliefs and statues, one by one unearthed or imported from Greece, were like samples from a catalogue, in which grief, violence, happiness and voluptuousness appeared to be portrayed without effort. A sort of disguise "Roman style," not only of political realities (like actors, imbued with their parts until death, the tyrannicides and conspirators of Rome, Florence and Milan reenacted the role of Brutus), but also of all activities, love as well as wisdom, became thus desirable. The mythical sages of antiquity lent themselves all the better to this kind of knowledgeable game, since they were represented on the model of the imposing Byzantine theologians, who could be met at the Council of the Union of the Churches at Florence in 1434. In pursuance of their dream to its end, neo-Platonic philosophers borrowed for their conferences the model of Plato's Academy as a pleasant and stimulating trapping for the mind, reinvented like a Botticelli scene. Thus history could be relived as a sublime or charming game under the most unexpected conditions.

But the abundance itself of these more-or-less theatrical sidelines was a sign that for the first time since antiquity, mind was confronted with its past as a precise reality, which could become an object of study. This "distance," without which there is no history, was suddenly defined the day when Petrarch stopped identifying the Holy Empire with the Roman Empire. Antiquity became a foreign civilization; one was separated from it by an abysmal gap, which soon was to be called the "Middle Ages," and which was ideally cut up, and one whole made out of it, so that it might be permissible to conceive of a "*Rinascimento dell'antichità*." Thus the possibility appeared of judging men and events of the past, no longer from a moral point of view, Christian or chivalric, but following properly historical criteria: that of the maturity of societies and institutions. Hence finally, side by side with the more than half esthetic, fabulous historiography, came the late birth of critical history, practicing a new form of "objectivity," the *prise de conscience* of Comynes

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and Machiavelli. Both authors certainly owe the patrician intellect more than they admit; Machiavelli, who boasted of understanding nothing about economy, yet judged a campaign or a law as a banker would an investment. He was without doubt, on the other hand, a prisoner of the humanist system, and notably of the prejudice of the "foundations and origins;" his attempt is infinitely more valuable because of its orientation than by its execution, and he also never wins over by his reasoning, but by his tone and "attack." It is remarkable that both wrote in the vernacular, such as was often the case with non-ecclesiastic chroniclers. The reason they sought in history would hold an ever-growing place in its explanations as historiography came to be understood better as a *prise de conscience*. These two pragmatists, the empirical Frenchman and the systematic Florentine, mark the limit of the humanist historical mind.

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The ancient states—just like the new ones—needed noble legends, inspiring chronicles and ideologies; outside of the inexhaustible mine of folkloric tales and grandiose genealogies, which the Burgundian rhetoricians, for instance, managed to use so well, humanism was the main facet capable of imparting a certain dignity to national sentiment. But everywhere, in almost all countries, it was imported from Italy, or at least strongly marked by the Italian example; it made no sense outside of its antique reference, particularly to Latin antiquity, that is, it was a national past foreign to the country of adoption. Finally, Latin was used as a common language. Hence there was a certain difficulty in reconciling its universal call and its national function. No discourse on the incompatibility of the humanist allegiance and the national allegiance is better expressed than the answer of Erasmus to Zwingli, who in 1522 invited the former to establish himself in Zurich: "I am extremely thankful for the affection of your city and yours toward me. But I want to be a citizen of the world, a man of everywhere, or rather of nowhere."

The first great bursts of nationalism, in Bohemia with Hussitism and in France at the time of Jeanne d'Arc, were not of humanist origin; no more than the ideology of the "re-

conquista" in Spain. Except for Italy, where since Petrarch, the national sentiment had been identified with the Roman past, every country under the influence of humanism was obliged to construe it for itself, in order to retain its national cultural autonomy, a sort of spare antiquity, which was generally found in the Middle Ages; and they had to attribute a dignity to it that on the other hand, within the context of humanist culture, was being refuted. Everything likely to reconcile both preoccupations was exploited to the last, for example the reign of Charlemagne, in which the Roman Empire could be found again along with contemporary cultural preoccupations. The Carolingian period furnished a great articulation of history to the North as well as the South. Even romanesque or pre-romanesque architecture, with its forms corresponding to the taste of the Renaissance, was adopted: Jan van Eyck, not being familiar with Italian or antique architecture, liked to paint buildings in romanesque style, in order to give the pre-Christian world a shape distinct from the "gothic" of the present. Returning to their original sources, the Florentines considered San Miniato and the 11th century churches as worthy of being imitated—which was done by Brunelleschi. In the same way Bramante in Milan took his model from an ancient Christian basilica, San Lorenzo. The first humanists, primarily before the invasion of the Grecian influence, respected Carolingian culture, and the manuscripts from this period—embellished with a magnificent script—were always and in advance considered the best.

The Parisians made use of Charlemagne from the 14th century to affirm that intellectual activity had moved from East to West and that thereafter Paris was the cultural center of the world. Petrarch, having loudly declared that all those who were worthy of a place in literature were either Italians or disciples of Italians, the French retorts followed one after another until the 16th century: Jean de Hesdin, Nicolas de Clamanges, Jean de Montreuil, Robert Gaguin, Symphorien Champier, Guillaume Budé.⁹ The evident weakness of all these replies was manifest in the fact that their disciples came from Italy. It was difficult to oppose the Italians in anything other than what had been

⁹ Franco Simone, *Il Rinascimento francese*, Turin, 1961, pp. 47-54.

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learned from them, unless to praise scholasticism, a "Parisian" specialty which humanism rejected. Symphorien Champier had the idea in 1514 of invoking the Druids and of placing them next to the philosopher-priests so dear to Ficino, as guardians of primitive wisdom: a vague and gratuitous thesis—the Druids not having left any writings—but which enchanted a few poets. The true emancipation of French humanism took place only with masters such as Budé, who could stand the comparison with the Italians and who could venture to correct Valla or Poliziano; above all, with the general orientation of erudition in France toward domains less familiar to the Italians, biblical antiquity and non-Latin antiquity in general. Under Francis I, French humanist culture demonstrated an originality and advanced alone, as the foundation of the College of Royal Lectors wished to stress.

Not much was to be expected from the solemn discussions on the "dignity" of a nation. Christophe de Longueil, a student from Malines, presented at the University of Poitiers a panegyric on St. Louis, in which he praised Paris, the "new Athens," at the expense of Rome and the Italians. Ten years later, in Rome, he gave a series of lectures on the Eternal City and received as a recompense the title of Roman citizen. The writings of his youth were then brought to light against him; and on June 16, 1519, a great public debate was held in the Capitol; finally Longueil won his cause. A long time afterwards, in 1528, Erasmus took this pretentious young man for a target in *Ciceronianus*, in which he unloosed a great attack against the degeneracy of Italian humanist literature. Among the angry responses, which this book of "the beer-filled Batavian" aroused among the scholars of antiquity, two are best known: the author of one was the Frenchified Italian, J. C. Scaliger, and was dedicated to the University of Paris, the traditional *bête noire* of the Italian humanists; the other was the work of a Frenchman, Etienne Dolet.

These exchanges confirm that humanism was not the propitious field for nationalist debates. It is true that *Ciceronianus* attempted to go deeper into the problem and to discuss the values in the name of which Italian humanism scorned foreigners; it repeated the accusation of paganism and hidden

impiety against the antiquomanes of literature, which under the pen of Erasmus makes rather painful reading. He introduced a very interesting and lively history of neo-Latin literature in Italy, but deduced from it only this rather simple conclusion: only those who freed themselves from Cicero's literary yoke were good. Finally, he recaptured the brilliance of his celebrated irony in discussing the principle itself of imitating a canonic author, and opposed to it the principle of personal and original expression: a banal and outmoded subject today, but one that was not so at the time, although some critics, Italians in this case (Poliziano and Giovanni Francesco Pico, the nephew of the philosopher) had already said the same thing at least as well.

The element of truth, in all these overlapping discussions, was the understandable irritation of all the "barbarians" in face of the calm assurance with which the Italians denied any cultural competence to foreigners. One reacted against Italian arrogance the same way the Italians had reacted to Byzantine arrogance; in humanist circles one does not like to be in debt. By contrast, the complete humility of foreign artists is significant. In a few years, Vasari could consider all mediaeval art as "gothic" or "Greek" aberrations, treat the Hungarians as brutes, deplore the uncouth German character even of capable artists such as Dürer; he merely confirmed the judgement then current throughout the West. Dürer himself seems to have accepted the dogma of Italian superiority. Francisco de Hollanda was happy to recognize it, ready to improve: in the *Dialogues* where he describes a discussion between himself and Michelangelo and Vittoria Colonna, he ardently defends the honor of his nation, but finds it quite natural that the Italian *maniera* should be considered as the sole good one, contesting even the foreigners' capability of acquiring it. The acquiescence of foreign artists may be understood for career reasons: they knew that, at home as well as in Italy, the most "Italian" was considered the best, and they had to give in to this common prejudice. In the Republic of Letters, the situation was different, and all of Europe was highly exasperated by Italian overweening conceit.

In fact humanist susceptibility was allied with national susceptibility, which did not need humanism in order to rouse itself—somewhat the same way that humanist religiosity had

grafted itself onto the piety of Windesheim. When the Spanish communes revolted, in the name of old-Castillian nationalism, against the Flemish court of Charles V, the University of Alcalá was on the side of the rebels. In Germany, before the anti-Italian and anti-Roman sentiment had yet been canalized by the Reformation, local humanism provided a valve for it, as paradoxical as this may seem; Tacitus had been discovered; his *Germania*, so eulogistic of its forebears, his history of Arminius, the victor of Augustus' legions. C. Celtes and Hutten became enthusiastic about this glorious past, at the same time more or less when Symphorien Champier, to give glory to France, invoked the greatness of the Druids, attested to by Caesar. Aesticampianus held the first course on *Germania* in Leipzig in 1509, and Arminius became the national hero, which he has remained since. Without being the least of all troubled by the bad reputation of the Goths, Celtes planned an epos on Theodoric of Ravenna and published in 1507 a poem in Mediaeval Latin on the glory of the scourge of the Italians, the Emperor Barbarossa. Hutten writes, still in Latin verse, a sort of discourse, "That our people have not sunk below the ancient glory of the Germans" (*Quod ab illa antiquitus Germanorum claritudine nondum degeneraverint nostrates*), in which he also calls attention to the invention of printing and gun-powder.

It was current, among erudite poets, to show that their country was as great and as glorious as Rome, as advanced as Italy, but that it was so after "its own fashion." The fable chroniclers from the high Middle Ages, who had endowed the "founders" with a Trojan ancestry, such as that of Romulus, were again in honor; Jean Lemaire de Belges, always called the "first" French humanist poet, wrote the *Illustrations de la Gaule* and the *Antiquités de Troye*, from which Ronsart only had to follow example to write his *Franciade*. Just as the Italian humanists, the foreigners also wrote the modern history of their country in Latin: Alfonso de Palencia and the royal historiographer Lebrixa in Spain, Robert Gaguin in France, Cuspinianus in Vienna. *L'Italia illustrata* by Biondo is countered by Celtes in a project for *Germania illustrata*, which gave birth to *Germaniae descriptio* by Sebastian Münster in 1530. The discovery and publication by Celtes of the works of Hruoswitha,

a nun of the 10th century, could be exploited at the same time both as a proof of the innate literary gifts of the German people, as an argument in favor of the calomned Middle Ages, and as a symbol for the cultural vocation of the Germanic Emperors. From the two engravings attributed to Dürer, which were drawn to be inserted in the Celtes publication, one shows Hruoswitha offering her manuscripts to the Emperor Otto III, and the other shows Celtes presenting his publication to the Elector, Frederic the Wise.

When the Emperors Frederic III and Maximilian crowned poets of German nationality (and, naturally, of Latin expression) in the midst of ceremonies that recalled the famous coronation of Petrarch at the Capitol, the imitation was confounded with the tacit claim of a priority of right—and the Italians, somewhat irritated, soon understood it as such. One of the authors, Heinrich Bebel, a laureate in Innsbruck, thus rewarded by Maximilian, in 1501, presented for the occasion a poem in the form of a vision: Germania, great and beautiful but in rags, mourns her decay and begs the emperor to reestablish her to her ancient dignity, using force against those not yet subdued. The paradox of the national humanisms is here found in its entirety, with this particularly banal mediaeval literary scheme, the exhorting discourse in the style of humanist rhetorics, nationalism formally enslaved by the Latin tradition and by its Goth propagators.

The situation of Hungary, where humanism had been introduced at the same time from the Empire and from Italy, is even more curious. The imperial chancellery at Buda did everything, from the time of Sigismond, to “humanize” the country. A native Hungarian and friend of Pius II, János Vitéz, could succeed there in 1444 to a Paduan. From the neighborhood of Vienna also comes an account of the following strange circumstance; that the works of Hruoswitha figure among the first translations into Hungarian: Conrad Celtes had great prestige. But from Italy came Masolino, following in the steps of the Florentine *condottiere* Pippo Spano, and introduced modern painting. János Pannonius, the bishop of Pécs, who was the first complete humanist of his country, was educated in Italy, at Guarino’s; he translated from the Greek, Plutarch, Plotinus, Homer; he was polemist, letter-writer, something of a free thinker, suspected

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of having sympathy for the Cathar heretics of his diocese, a "republican" admirer of Brutus, so much so that he fell into disgrace, along with János Vitéz, with king Matthias Corvinus; he was strongly influenced by neo-Platonism and by Ficino, but sufficiently *Lucianist*, however, to write an elegy *To his soul*, in which he said he preferred the fate of any beast to that of men. Hence, he represented a true synthesis of all the currents of international humanism; it is enough to add, to complete the picture and not to contradict him, that Pannonius also dreamed of writing a national epic.

Only Italy could be spared these difficulties; for the distinction between Latin and Italian culture was not necessary. When an Italian humanist referred to "our people," he naturally meant the ancient Romans as opposed to the Greeks. Valla established entirely in good faith his famous comparison between the Latin language and the Roman Empire. The notion of "Italian grandeur" evokes the image of ancient Rome, and cultural nationalism thus eventually rendered a political nationalism impossible. Machiavelli knew well enough that the drama was not to be able to make the actual structure correspond to the dream of the great past. The famous last chapter of his *Prince* finally clearly establishes the unification of Italy as a national task, which was to end in something different from the ancient Empire. But this involved an exceptional effort: to depend on the antique "myth" with the purpose of illuminating an occluded present.

At least in one domain, Italian national sentiment since the beginning of the Renaissance separated itself from the "Roman" or Latin sentiment: that was in literature. The relationship between humanism and the national literatures was in Italy, as frequently in other European countries, a cultural collaboration between two distinct, not incompatible cultural sectors. To translate a classic was to "vulgarize" it; in principle, a non-Latin text addressed itself primarily to the untutored, whatever the difficulty might otherwise have been; even Dante was, to the Renaissance, a popular writer, dear to the Florentine artisans. Prose written in the vulgar language, when it was not to serve as pure entertainment, comic or fabulous, was meant to serve education. It was part of the technique, especially in the treatises

on art, such as the *Commentaries* by Ghiberti, the *Della pittura* by Alberti, the *Four Books* by Dürer, the German and French manuals on perspective, the Italian texts on architecture; it was also frequently used to disseminate moral teaching, either through treatises on family or civic life (Alberti, Palmieri, Piccolomini in Italy; Elyot and Ascham in England), or through manuals on courtesy (the *Cortegiano* by Castiglione and the *Galateo* with their numerous translations and imitations in all languages), or writings on political philosophy (Sir John Fortescue, Antonio de Guevara, Machiavelli and Guicciardini). The discourses on moral philosophy, which frequently were simple transpositions of humanist discussions on these subjects into the vulgar tongue (Juan de Lucena), produced at least two significant and original genres: the dissertations on love, mainly Italian, on the one hand, and the German *Narrenliteratur* (Brant, Fischart, Murmer) on the other. The chronicles, very numerous, and writings on religious edification, including sermons, should be added to the above. Finally, on the lowest level, was peddling. The association between the vulgar language and the lower public was so close that even in 1542 Roger Ascham, the first royal professor of Greek at St. John's College, Cambridge, publishing a *Toxophilus* (instructions on shooting with bow and arrows) in English, still considered it necessary to apologize for his choice of language; though his cause was quite easy to defend, since this sport, favored by the English nobility, had once, during the Hundred Years War, constituted the strength of the English Army.

Only poetry in a national language was an exception, despite the competition of Latin poets, which was rarely formidable. Poetry benefited almost everywhere from the prestige of the great masters, past or present. It is true that not everything was accepted, and if Marot made allowances for the *Roman de la Rose*, the Pléiade made the earlier writers recede into a most unjust oblivion, beginning with Villon, who seemed not to have been entitled to consideration by the humanists, despite some of his "rhetoric" accents, and despite the tendencies to burlesque of humanism itself in the following century. On the other hand, Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio were well received, and not only in Italy. The cultural dignity of the great poets of the Trecento was defended by the most purist Florentine humanists, from the beginning of

the 15th century.¹⁰ Dante was “neo-Platonized” by Landino, as Vergil; the Petrarchist sentiment or love was coopted by the highest philosophy, that of Ficino. Poliziano, one of the best poets in both languages (in three, if one takes into account a few epigrams in Greek), wrote, in the name of Lorenzo de’ Medici, a celebrated letter on the Tuscan poets; common Italian acquired all its dignity from the linguistic and critical work of Bembo, who had extended his curiosity to the point of making a comparison with Provençal, as well as from the discussions “on the language” which followed (Speroni, Varchi, etc.); elegant, non-didactic genres, which for a long time had been banned in Tuscan, gradually became open to it—from letters (since *Il Miniatore*, 1485) to the “Vergilian” epos in learned style (Trissino, *L’Italia liberata dai Goti*, 1547). An inferior genre, such as the chivalric novel, acceded by virtue of its form and spirit, with Boiardo, Pulci and Ariosto, to an unsuspected literary dignity.

This broad revolution was in an anti-humanist sense; its importance became evident when Alessandro Piccolomini dared to write, about 1550, that nothing was lost through the translation of classical texts into Italian. But this recovery would have been impossible without humanism itself. Literature in the vulgar tongue had gradually appropriated the ideas and genres that had been the guarded preserve of humanism and Latin, with at first the most unlikely results in the way of style. The Greco-Italo-Latin jargon of the *Dream of Polyphilus*, and the development of the “macaronique” in the burlesque vein, were the most memorable among them; the rhetoricians and Rabelais made their fame with these forms in their time. Pedantic attention to the precision of style and the imitation of Greek and Latin meters in poetry—and even the quantitative rhythm—were aberrant obsessions which accompanied the immense volume of work in the vulgar languages. To point up the paradox of national values within the Renaissance, which was dominated by humanism, it is enough to recall that the *Défense et illustration de la langue française* was simply adapted by Jean du Bellay from the *Dialogo delle lingue* by Sperone Speroni. Humanism matured precisely within the national cultures, and was one day to permit them not to forget it but to go beyond it.

¹⁰ Hans Baron, *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance*, Princeton, 1955.