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REVERSE ACCULTURATION:
A LITERARY THEME

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The concept of "acculturation" is closely linked to the history of European colonialism.¹ In spite of all efforts to endow it with a "neutral" or "positive" meaning, the term has never meant anything other than the subjection of indigenous cultures to Western civilization in all its forms.²

In speaking here of "reverse" acculturation, I intend to examine cases in which the flow of exchange is inverted, cases in which Westerners succumb to the seduction of "primitive" cultures. By speaking of "forward" and "reverse" movement, I in no way mean to insinuate that one type of culture is superior to another. I mean to say simply that in the historical conditions of colonization, and

Translated by R. Scott Walker

¹ The history of the term "acculturation" is given in the book by Gérard Leclerc, *Anthropologie et colonialisme*, Paris, Fayard 1972.

² The most complete indictment of the devastating effects of European colonialism was made by Aimé Césaire, *Discours sur le colonialisme*, Paris, Présence Africaine 1955.

given the power relationships of the period, acculturation of the non-Europeans is the rule while that of Europeans to non-European cultures is the exception. Moreover, I will limit myself to several examples drawn from the beginning of the Spanish conquest in the 16th Century and from African literature in European languages in the 20th Century.

I

The Europeans who discovered the Indians of the New World manifested an unconscious desire to subject them to their own culture, and Tzvetan Todorov rightly defines their behavior with regard to the native peoples as “naive assimilation”.³ “The Colonist wanted the Indians to be as he was, and like the Spanish...; his feelings toward the Indians were manifested quite “naturally” in the desire to see them adapt to his own customs”. From the very beginning a desire for “spiritual development” accompanied material conquest.

The first examples of acculturation—in both directions—that we know of are linked to the conquest of Mexico by Cortez. In his advance Cortez benefited from the inestimable aid provided by two interpreters: the Indian woman Malinche (also called Doña Marina or Malintzin) who understood and spoke the Aztec and Mayan languages and who quickly spoke Spanish as well, and Geronimo de Aguilar, who had survived a shipwreck off the coast of Mexico in 1511 and who had adapted himself to the Mayan culture and language. Although Malinche represents the first example of a mixture of cultures by being completely converted to Spanish culture, Geronimo de Aguilar returned to his Spanish origins as soon as the opportunity to do so arose.

An altogether different case is that of Gonzalo Guerrero, a Spaniard who survived the 1511 shipwreck along with Aguilar. He so totally adapted himself to Mayan culture that he no longer wanted to return to the community of his fellow countrymen, representing the first example of what we are terming “reverse

³ Tzvetan Todorov, *La conquête de l'Amérique—La question de l'Autre*, Paris, Ed. du Seuil 1982, p. 48.

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acculturation". His story is recounted by Diego de Landa in his *Relación de las Cosas de Yucatán* (quoted from Todorov):⁴

Since he had learned the local language, Guerrero went to Chectemal, the Salamanca of the Yucatán, where he was received by a chief by the name of Nachancan. He was assigned responsibility over matters of war, an area in which he was quite expert, and he brought about many victories over his master's enemies. He taught the Indians how to fight and to build forts and strongholds. In this way, and by living like an Indian, he acquired a great reputation. They married him to an Indian woman of high rank, and he had children by her. For this reason he never attempted to escape like Aguilar. To the contrary he painted his body, let his hair grow long and had his ears pierced in order to wear earrings like the Indians. It is possible that he became an idolator like them as well.

Guerrero was so totally assimilated to Indian culture that he refused to return to his own people. Bernal Diaz relates the answer he was said to have given when the opportunity was presented to him (or when he was ordered) to reconvert to the faith of his fathers:

They have made me a chief, and even captain, in time of war. Go away. My face is tatoored, my ears are pierced. What would the Spaniards say if they saw me like this? And look at my little children, how nice they are.

Guerrero's example seems to me to be a telling one, and I will attempt to extract the essential elements from it which should allow us to construct a framework for analyzing other examples of men or women who crossed over the line.

1. At the beginning we find pure chance; an accident (the shipwreck) tosses the travelers up on land. Crossing over the line of demarcation between the two cultures is, consequently, not the result of a decision taken in total freedom.

2. With regard to integration into the other culture, two conditions must be fulfilled: the foreigner who arrives must have a

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 201.

desire to be initiated into the culture of the Other, beginning with the language. The society receiving the foreigner must offer something of interest and value to the foreigner, because of the knowledge he brings to it and his place in the society. In the case of our hero, his name is already most indicative: Guerrero, the warrior, he who brings with him knowledge of the arts of war, whose trade is in arms.

3. Once these two conditions have been fulfilled (learning the language, social usefulness), the foreigner can then gradually be integrated into the culture providing him asylum, "living like an Indian". Unfortunately we understand the steps of this acculturation only vaguely. Apparently there is a point of no return ("Go away!") beyond which it would be shameful to return to one's own. ("What would they say if they saw me like this?"). The reasons for this may be social in nature (a higher social standing in the new culture), private or emotional (love for one's spouse or companion, love for the children issued from this union).

4. To complete this cycle of "reverse" acculturation, it seems important that the refugee one day have the opportunity to rejoin his original culture, and this is a moment filled with dramatic intensity. How does this decisive (in both senses) moment arrive? Which decision will the European make? How will this decision be justified? And how will this decision be accepted by those he leaves behind and by those he joins? What will be the consequences of this decision?

Should the fact that Guerrero took up arms against the Spanish, and was eventually killed while fighting against them, be seen as a chance episode in the history of the Conquista, or should this ending be taken as the key to our paradigm? In the latter case, should this be taken as an unconditional condemnation of the deserter by his own culture and an anticipation of the fate awaiting all cultural refugees in the centuries to come? In any case the event could not leave those involved on either side indifferent. For the Indians the lesson to be learned from such an example might be that the Spanish were human beings after all and not gods, that is, people who could surpass them in certain areas, such as warfare, but who for the rest felt the same emotions, the same feelings that they felt themselves. For the Spanish the lesson was no doubt a more bitter one if we consider what it implied for the maintaining

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of the colonial ideology. Suddenly the culture of the Other appears fundamentally equal to our own. In the words of Bishop Diego de Landa, the Mexican city Chectemal was the "Salamanca of the Yucatán". Certainly the Indians were less strong than the Spanish in terms of warfare, but the differences between them were not great, and they learned quickly. Finally the structures of Mayan society seemed to be comparable to those of Castille in every respect. Guerrero offered his services to a chief; he married a woman "of high rank"; he attained the dignity of chief, "and even captain in time of war". The children born of the union with his Mayan wife are "nice".

Todorov, to whom I owe the example of Guerrero, emphasizes the exceptional nature of his case.⁵

Although there are abundant examples of identification in the other direction (such as that of Malinche) ... the example of Guerrero has no great historical or political significance. ... His example was not followed, and it is clear for us today that it could not have been for it in no way corresponded to the prevailing power relationships.

However, I would assign greater force to Guerrero's example, and I would see in him "a historical and political significance", which in fact was only evident later. I also see other human actions in this first phase of European colonialization that can be compared to this extreme example of "reverse acculturation". I am thinking of what Todorov calls the "much more controlled partial identifications". These were the missionaries who, in order to bring Christianity to the Indians, adapted themselves to their way of life. In particular these were the Franciscans who (and I once more quote Todorov), "without ever renouncing their religious ideal nor their evangelizing objectives, easily adopted the Indians' way of life. In fact one aspect served the other, and the initial movement facilitated a more profound assimilation".

The (facile!) adoption by the missionaries of the Indian way of life encouraged a more profound assimilation of the Christian

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 202. The following quotations are taken from the same work, chapter entitled "Typologie des relations à autrui" (pp. 191-207).

message by the native. I am not certain that here we are not victims both of a prejudice holding that the essential resides in the superstructure (faith, the Christian religion), while material culture is but an epiphenomenon. The temporary adoption of an exogenous culture then appears as simply a concession made in order to achieve a profound and definitive conversion of the Other.

At first glance the example of Diego de Landa, he too Franciscan, seems clearer. He had Mayan books burned and began in turn to write books about the Mayan culture. This paradox, again according to Todorov, "is dissipated when we observe that Landa refused the slightest identification with the Indians and, to the contrary, demanded their assimilation into the Christian religion; but at the same time he was interested in knowing these Indians". The question I raise at this point is, can we so clearly separate the desire for power from knowledge? Is there not a sort of initial identification (or even acculturation) in this indiscreet curiosity, this determination to appropriate for oneself the word of the Other, this substitution of one discourse for another discourse? By acting in this way, does one not give proof of a desire to take the place of the Other—to *be* this Other?

II

I see this idea confirmed in examples drawn from contemporary literature, dealing with an experience analogous to that of the Spanish conquest, although four centuries later and taking place on another continent. I would like to talk about novels written in English and French by African authors from 1950 to the present. They feature white missionaries who, for generations, attempted to convert the Blacks to Christianity before realizing at the end that their efforts were wasted and that their instructions had not taken root. Only the white missionaries had changed, becoming different persons. Is this simply an admission of failure or the phenomenon of reverse acculturation?

I am thinking of novels like *Le pauvre Christ de Bomba* (1956) by Mongo Beti⁶ or *Un Sorcier blanc à Zangali* (1970) by René

⁶ Ed. Robert Laffont. Re-edition. Présence Africaine 1976.

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Philombe.⁷ Both describe the fierce but vain struggles of a white missionary against “pagan” morals and “savage” customs—or those judged to be such, but which ultimately prove to be stronger than the Christian message. The reverend fathers must recognize that their meager successes, obtained at the cost of so much effort, were due only to the military and police presence of the colonial power. Without indulging in excessive psychoanalysis, it is possible to believe that the struggles of the missionaries in these two novels—struggles made up of persecution and resistance, of anguish and refusal, extending over many years—these struggles are also a form of reverse acculturation in that they totally possess the missionaries’ minds to the point of assuming a veritably obsessional nature, as is stated explicitly. We need only think of the war Father Drumont wages against “unwed mothers” (in *Le pauvre Christ*) or his destruction of African musical instruments. The main difference separating these 20th-Century missionaries from Spanish missionaries of the 16th Century can be found in the fact that their underlying intentions have become more transparent in our times. Elements long hidden under the veil of official colonial ideology are brought out into the open by the non-European 20th-Century authors. Although the older stories must be read between the lines, and often understood in a manner opposite from their authors’ seeming intentions, contemporary African authors are determined to demystify the official European discourse in order to substitute their own version of history.

Although the resistance of non-European peoples to assimilation is increasingly strong, a growing number of Western artists, authors and intellectuals are succumbing to the attraction of exogenous cultures. African literature written in French in the 20th century could be analyzed from the point of view of acculturation—in both directions. I will only give a brief sketch. Closely linked to the colonization of Africa (its military “pacification” and economic upgrading), there can be found a literature of propaganda, which focuses on the model African who is one hundred percent assimilated to French culture. When such acculturation has been achieved, the model African becomes a fervent zealot of this culture.

⁷ Yaoundé, published by CLE.

One example among many others is *Mamadou Keit—Sénégalais Moderne* (1933) from the pen of a former commander of the colonial army, Noël Maestracci. This is the edifying story of a model Senegalese, which the author himself summarizes in these words in his preface.⁸

Raised according to the principles of the Koran, Mamadou was sent to the French school, despite his parents. When he returned to his family, this young black was no longer able to adjust to his ancestral customs and engaged in the French army. There he observed, was instructed, analyzed French methods and came to understand that the Marabouts of his land were unjust in their criticism of the French. His feelings grew stronger, and Mamadou finally became indifferent to the teaching of the Marabouts.

Summoned to continue his service in France, Mamadou was totally won over by what he saw; when he returned to his own country in retirement, he used every opportunity to defend the cause of the French among his fellow citizens.

Here we find the three steps of positive acculturation, as seen by the colonizer: 1) deculturation, that is denigration and rejection of the indigenous culture; 2) assimilation to the exogenous culture; 3) acceptance of this acquired culture and active propagandizing in favor of it. But let us not forget that we are dealing here with a "model Senegalese", that is the ideal Senegalese according to the colonizer.

The first African authors writing in the French language adopted this ideal, or rather this discourse; nevertheless, they allowed a certain reserve to pierce through, establishing a certain distance from the imposed cultural model. *Force Bonté*⁹ (1926) by Bakary Diallo can be read first of all as an unconditional praise of "French goodness". But upon closer examination, one notes that only with difficulty can the events described be brought into harmony with the explicit ideology.

The second generation of African authors in this century, the one

⁸ Paris, Alexis Redier 1933, p. 18 ff.

⁹ Nendeln (Liechtenstein), Kraus Reprint 1973. See my article, "Von der Kolonialliteratur zu den ersten afrikanischen Romanen in französischer Sprache—Das Problem der Authentizität", in *Französisch heute* 2 (1985), pp. 113-125.

which corresponds roughly to the *Négritude* movement, attempted above all else to exalt African culture and to present it as equal to Western civilization. Anti-colonial novels of the 1950s go even further. They can be classified under the heading "The Failure of Acculturation". In the three novels by the Senegalese writer Abdoulaye Sadji, the three protagonists have deserted their native land or renounced their African roots and are severely punished. The mulatto woman Nini attempts to imitate the way of life of the whites, thereby losing her honor, and dies as a result.¹⁰ Modou Fatim flees his village for the big city and kills his wife who had mutilated her husband in a fit of mad jealousy. The young Maïmouna, dazzled by the fascination of Dakar and its European ways, is also dishonored and disfigured before returning to her village where she reconverts to the simplicity of the African way of life near her mother. The boy in *Une vie de boy* (1956) by Ferdinand Oyono¹¹ is a domestic servant of the Whites before becoming their victim. The aged Méka in *Le Vieux Nègre et la médaille* (1956) by the same author¹² is only healed after he turns away from the Whites and reconverts to his ancestral values.

The fictional denouement of these novels brings out clearly a reversal of values in comparison to writings inspired by the colonial era. Adopting Western values in most cases signifies defeat or death; the return to Africa promises healing and deliverance. The novel that goes farthest in this return (in terms of our topic of "reverse acculturation") is *Le Regard du roi* (1954) by Camara Laye,¹³ describing the conversion of a White to the black world. The story recalls certain parallels with the first examples of reverse acculturation, from the period of the Spanish Conquista we discussed earlier.

1. At the outset there is a disaster, a catastrophe: the white protagonist of the novel, Clarence, has lost all his money gambling and no longer dares appear among the other Whites. His debts have made of him an outcast.

¹⁰ *Nini, mulâtresse du Sénégal*, in *Trois écrivains noirs*, Paris, Présence Africaine 1954 (Special issue of the review *Présence Africaine*), pp. 291-426, 2nd ed., 1965.

¹¹ Paris, Juilliard 1956; Presses Pocket 1970.

¹² Paris, Juilliard 1956; Coll. 10/18 1974.

¹³ Paris, Plon 1954; Presses Pocket 1975.

2. But this White burns with the desire to be useful to Others: he wants to become a servant to the King. Before being accepted, he must undergo a long period of initiation—and acculturation. In the meantime he is already employed by black society, although he is unaware of this.

3. The complete assimilation into this new culture is formalized by a mystic union with the young king, the final goal of Clarence's long pilgrimage.

The procedure for passing from one culture to another is transformed, in this novel about the fate of one individual, into a symbolic evocation of the complex relationships between Europe and Africa. Clarence does not know how to pay off his debts to the white hotel owner and is thrown out into the streets by his creditor. Not knowing where he can go, he suddenly remembers his first contact with the continent of Africa:¹⁴

The barrier that cut off the African coast, a large line of agitated foam. "Why did I want to cross that barrier at any price?", he asked himself. "Could I not have remained where I was?" But remain where? ... On the ship? Ships are but temporary shelters!... "I could have jumped into the sea", he thought. But was that not exactly what he had done? When he had agreed to play cards, even though he so detested gambling, he had jumped into the sea!

But Clarence did not jump into the sea. He set off on the long path of initiation into the culture of Africa. Along the way he continuously encountered difficulties of understanding (p. 20, p. 37); he experienced anguish (p. 36) and fear (p. 39); he was put back in his place (p. 87) and chastised (p. 120); he had to unlearn all that he had acquired in his White past (p. 20) and take on new values like hospitality (p. 57) and a different concept of justice (p. 81, p. 168, p. 191); he became like a child "led by its parents through the streets of the outskirts of the city on a Sunday evening, coming home from a stroll" (p. 91). At the end Clarence had become "another man" (p. 143). "If someone who had known him before (in his past life) could have seen him under the bridge, smoking and drinking, squatting like the Blacks do, wearing a

¹⁴ Quoted from Presses Pocket edition, p. 37.

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bombou like the Blacks, he would not have recognized him" (p. 144). What precisely was this metamorphosis? "The people of Aziana ... took life easily. Clarence took life easily" (p. 151). At the same time he understood how he had been used throughout that entire time, without his having been aware of it. Under the influence of intoxicating perfumes and in the darkness of night, he had not realized that he was being used as a stud to impregnate the entire harem of the Naba. His assimilation into black culture ultimately culminated in an identification, in a union, which I would qualify as "mystical", with the young king. When drawing nearer culminates in this way in union with the object of the quest (for knowledge? for love?), *understanding* becomes synonymous with *living*—a life enveloped in love, like Clarence sheltered under the king's mantle.

The evolution in the history of Black-African literature in this century that we have just retraced—from assimilation with European civilization to a re-appreciation of African civilization followed by a questioning or denunciation of Western cultural hegemony—has its counterpart in European literature. Belief in the cultural superiority of the West has been shaken bit by bit. At the beginning of the century, first by what is called the primitivist movement:¹⁵

Belief in the existence of prime forms of a given culture and an accompanying belief that these archaic forms can constitute a model, or at least can contain solutions to the problems facing modern societies. Primitivism is an act of faith in humanity's past, an act of defiance in face of progress.

Jean-Claude Blachère has made a particular study of what he calls *Le Modèle nègre*, a form of literary primitivism, the expression of "a belief in the virtues of black civilizations to provide solutions for the crisis of the European spirit".¹⁶ The principal representatives of this black primitivism in French literature, who are the focus of Blachère's studies, are Guillaume

¹⁵ Jean-Claude Blachère, *Le modèle nègre—Aspects littéraires du mythe primitiviste au XX^e siècle chez Apollinaire—Cendrars—Tzara*; Dakar-Abidjan-Lomé, Nouvelles éditions africaines 1981, p. 3 ff.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 11.

Apollinaire, Blaise Cendrars and Tristan Tzara. But in the first phase of this primitivism, at the turn of the century, the decisive example was that of Paul Gauguin. Passages taken from his Tahiti diary appeared as early as 1897 in the famous *Revue Blanche*, and, as Blachère notes, "the ongoing presence of the message of Paul Gauguin no doubt provides the missing link between the primitivism of the 18th Century and that of the first thirty years of this century".¹⁷

Along with artist and writers, ethnologists and anthropologists were especially subject to the fascination of so-called "primitive" cultures, and they frequently "went over the line". I will mention only the names of Victor Segalen, Pierre Clastres, Carlos Castaneda, Michel Leiris, Marcel Griaule and Colin Turnbull.¹⁸ All of these writers have attempted to analyze their experiences. They offer us a reverse image of the usual social relationships between civilized and primitive peoples, in which:

The White Man, the foreigner, the explorer are no longer the omnipotent subjects of a history that they create and write as they will. They are the children, the students, the poor and sickly members of a generous, capable and hospitable community that welcomes them, educates them, takes care of them. They come away healed of the illness of higher civilization; the savages are the truly civilized people.¹⁹

A literary illustration of this "crossing over the line" is given in the novel *Los Pasos perdidos* (1953)²⁰ by the Cuban author Alejo Carpentier. This novel is the story of a North-American musician and musicologist who has been sent by his university to the virgin forest of Venezuela to search for "primitive" musical instruments. His journey becomes a voyage of discovery in the double sense of the term. The hero distances himself from his previous life and

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 13.

¹⁸ Many similar accounts are being published in pocket book editions in the collection "Terre Humaine", directed by Jean Malaurie (Presses Pocket).

¹⁹ Benoît Verhaegen, preface (p. 6) to the autobiographical account by Maximilien, prince of Béthune-Hestignoul, *Un Eden africain*, Brussels, Edition Complexe (distr. P.U.F.), 1978.

²⁰ *Le Partage des eaux*, translated from the Spanish by René L. F. Durand, Gallimard, coll. folio, No. 795.

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undertakes a reflection, not only on the constraints weighing down on the individual but also those determining the totality of our culture and our civilization. His journey is a voyage into time, moving back to his childhood and adolescence, but also a return to the sources of humanity, even to the most remote eras.

In his explorations he draws nearer and nearer to nature, to a prior state of being, "like the peasant returning to his father's farm after living several years in the city, who begins to weep with emotion when he smells the breeze filled with the odor of dung" (p. 150). He discovers that there still exists in the world "huge areas whose inhabitants have remained foreign to the fevers of the moment" (p. 166). As guides into these unexplored lands he has, first of all, his wife, Rosario (who takes the place of Monche, his pseudo-intellectual mistress who had brought him to the threshold of this "other" world), and Adelantado, the only one who knows the way to move back and forth between the two domains.

The lesson he learns from his experience is similar to that of many other explorers, missionaries and researchers. He summarizes it in these words: "The Indians ... in their milieu, seem to me to be the perfect masters of their culture. Nothing could be more foreign to them than the absurd concept of "savage"..." (p. 233). We, the "civilized" people, "we are the intruders, ignorant foreigners, the new strangers coming into a town that was born at the dawn of History" (p. 241). The wandering musician is willing to settle in this city, Santa Monica de los Venados, founded by Adelantado, with no thought of returning, to learn anew how to live according to another system of values.

And yet once he has emerged victorious from all the trials he had to face in order to earn access to this new world (the trial of nocturnal terrors, the trial of a tropical storm), he ultimately gives in to the temptation to return. Unable to overcome his working habits, he once again takes up an old dream from his adolescence, that of composing music for Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*, which seems to him to prefigure his own existence and to correspond to the new concept of music resulting from it. What a paradox! Just as his creative forces are finally liberated, he has no paper! The plane that lands to rescue him thus finds him ready to renew his ties with the world he had thought to have left behind.

He understands the reason for his failure, for "new worlds must

be experienced before they can be explained". He knows that man can escape his times but also that "the only sector of the human race that cannot detach itself from its dates is the class of creative artists" p. 370. Is it not then true as well that, inasmuch as we all participate in the creation of "art" in this world, it is impossible for us to escape our times, our "dates", to leave our story, our History, behind us?

III

And so we reach the third stage of our subject which I would entitle "the rehabilitation of Friday". For more than two centuries, Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* was the literary model that best incarnated the myth of European cultural superiority, where the "savage", Friday, is the target of acculturation—naturally in the role of servant. For more than twenty years this model underwent profound modifications, going even so far as to undergo a reversal of roles. Now it is Robinson Crusoe who learns from Friday how to lead a life worthy of man. This is explained to us by, among others, Michel Tournier in *Vendredi ou les limbes du Pacifique* (1967) and in the theoretical essay in which he provides a commentary on his novel. There he retraces the development of the myth of Robinson, in which he sees "one of the constitutive elements of the soul of western man".²¹ At the same time he acknowledges his debt to ethnologists and anthropologists, without whom "the idea that Robinson would have had something to learn from Friday could never have occurred to anyone".²² Tournier defines the subject of his novel and the various difficulties of deculturation and acculturation, which his protagonist must undergo, in these words:²³

... the destruction of all traces of civilization in a man subjected to the wrenching experience of inhuman solitude, the complete

²¹ Michel Tournier, "Vendredi", in *Le Vent Paraquet*, Paris, Gallimard 1977, coll. folio, No. 1138, pp. 211-237.

²² *Ibidem*, p. 227.

²³ *Ibidem*, p. 229.

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exposure of the very foundations of being and of life. And then, on this *tabula rasa*, the creation of a new world, in the form of trial and error, probing, discoveries, proofs and ecstasy. Friday ... serves both as guide and midwife for the birth of this new man. In this manner my novel is meant to be inventive and prospective, whereas Defoe's tale is purely retrospective and limited to describing the restoration of civilization by whatever means were available.

The rediscovery of our shared past, in the light of a revised and amended version of *Robinson Crusoe*, becomes a means for asking questions about the future of humanity. Only a better understanding of this past, seen from the point of view of the present world situation, can guarantee our common future.

But a re-evaluation of the relationship of the West to the rest of the world in the past is not restricted to literature; it has also invaded cinema. If we compare the three versions of the film *Mutiny on the Bounty* (1935, 1962, 1984),²⁴ we see that the focus of interest in the film has shifted. In the 1962 version, the accent is placed on the resistance to an inhuman exercise of power and the prospect of a free form of existence, with no social constraints, appears but fleetingly. In the 1984 version of the film, however, this vision of another kind of life becomes the central focus of the film. Lieutenant Christian Fletcher (Mel Gibson) no longer revolts against Captain Bligh (Antony Hopkins) because he is contesting his hierarchical authority but because he has fallen madly in love with the daughter of the Tahitian chief. He wants to stay on the island in order to try a new way of life. In conformity with the rules for this genre, it is a beautiful love story that pushes him across the line, a fact that in no way diminishes the beauty of his action. Even in this somewhat watered-down version of "reverse acculturation" offered to us by the film, it is clear that our knowledge of the word has been expanded and that our tranquil certitude concerning the superiority of our own culture is considerably shaken as a

²⁴ See the article by Michael Kötz, "Meuterei gegen sich selbst—*Die Bounty*, der neue Film und der mit Marlon Brando von 1962", in *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 10 mai 1985, p. 21. The literary model for the film is the novel by Richard Hough, *Captain Bligh and Mr. Christian*.

consequence. The cultural refugee is no longer a renegade; he appears more and more to be a possible behavioral model.

* * *

And so we arrive at the end of a path that has taken us across more than three centuries. Not satisfied with imposing its colonial dominion over other continents, Europe sought to impose on them its own culture, assimilating them into its own substance, "acculturating" them and totally eliminating their otherness. This process has entered into its final phase for two reasons. On the one hand non-European peoples have, for better or for worse, adopted the western way of life and are continuing to attempt to accommodate themselves to it. On the other Europeans of today are less certain of the uncontested superiority of their culture. In this dubious conflict, Europe's "victory" over the rest of the world remains an uncertain one.

The choice between these two aspects of acculturation is a difficult one. This is illustrated in a short story by the Argentine author Jorge Luis Borges, *La Historia del Guerrero y de la Cautiva*, written in 1949.²⁵ This story brings together the destiny of two persons separated in time by more than a thousand years—the Langobard warrior Droctulft, from the period of the barbarian invasions in Italy in the 6th and 7th Centuries, and a blond Indian, an English woman captured by Indians in the Argentine pampa. Borges borrows the first figure from the *Poesia* of Benedetto Croce,²⁶ and takes the second one from memories of his English grandmother who had told the story to him. Droctulft had come with other warriors to destroy Ravenna, but in the end he abandons his own men to die, weapons in hand, defending the city. On his tomb can be read the following inscription:

*Contempsit caros, dum nos amat ille, parentes.
Hanc patriam reputans esse, Ravenna, suam.**

²⁵ *Histoire du guerrier et de la captive*, in J. L. Borges, *Labyrinthes*, translated from the Spanish by R. Caillois, pp. 67-79.

²⁶ Benedetto Croce, *La Poesia*, Bari, Laterza 1966, p. 81, p. 269 ff.

*He renounced his beloved family, so much did he love us, esteeming that this land of Ravenna was his own.

Reverse Acculturation

Dazzled by the city, "he knows that, within its walls, he will be like a dog or a child and that he will not even be able to understand it. But he also knows that it is worth more than his gods and his sworn oath and all the foundries in Germany" (p. 71). The story of this barbarian "converted" to Roman culture fits in well with our vision of the world, both historically and poetically. (Droctulft's presence in the gallery of poetic characters dear to Croce is no accident.) On the other hand, the fate of the blond Indian woman runs counter to our customs. While still a child she was kidnapped by Indians during a raid. She became the wife of the chief by whom she had two sons. The grandmother is both moved to pity and scandalized by this story. "A little English girl, fallen victim to such barbarians!" But the girl not only refuses to return to civilization, she claims—the height of tragedy—to have found happiness in her new situation and prefers to return to the desert.

It took a poet's genius to grasp the relationship between the two cases, apparently so distant from one another—the barbarian warrior converted to Roman civilization and the young captive fallen into the hands of savages. And yet, "a secret desire filled both of these persons, a desire more profound than reason, and both of them obeyed this desire, which they would have been incapable of justifying". The two stories "are perhaps one and the same story. Both sides of this coin are perhaps, for God, identical" (p. 78 ff).

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