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# Literature and the Rise of Brazilian National Self-Identity\*

Antônio Cândido

To draw a parallel, pure and simple, between the development of Brazilian literature and the social history of Brazil would be not only tedious but also, perhaps, dangerous, for it could be construed as an invitation to approach reality in a somewhat mechanical way—as if literary facts were predetermined by historical facts, or as if the meaning and *raison d'être* of literature depended on its relationship to historical events. In fact, literary creation bears a burden of liberty which makes it in some respects independent, so that the explanation of its product is to be found first and foremost within the work of art itself. Literature, considered as a collection of works of art, is characterized by this extraordinary liberty which transcends our bonds.

But, to the degree that literature is a system of works which are also instruments of communication between men, it possesses so many links with social reality that it is always worthwhile to study the relationship and interaction between the facts of history and the products of literary creation.

In this essay, the literature of Brazil will be approached more as an historical fact than as an esthetic one, for we will attempt to show in what ways it is linked to fundamental aspects of Brazilian mentality and culture at various stages of their formation, without attention to strict chronological sequence, but coming and going from the sixteenth to the nineteenth

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centuries, the period during which the country became aware of its own identity.

The technique which we shall adopt could be called "the method of contraries"—for we will try to discover in each tendency an opposing component, in order to perceive reality in a more dynamic way, dialectically. The discussion is limited to the following topics:

- (1) Cultural imposition and cultural adaptation.
- (2) Transfiguration of reality and a sense of the concrete.
- (3) The ideological use of the past.
- (4) The general and the particular in the forms of expression.

### *I. Cultural imposition and cultural adaptation.*

For the historian, the most interesting aspect of the literature of the American nations is its adaptation of European aesthetic and intellectual patterns to the physical and social conditions of the New World through the process of colonization.

First, let us begin by acknowledging that our literatures are essentially European, continuing the investigation of soul and society which arose in the literary tradition of the mother countries. These traditions were carried to America during the period of Humanism when western man was intensifying his contact with Graeco-Roman sources and was displaying a great receptivity vis-à-vis other cultural forms, so that we inherited relatively little from the folkloric, magical and religious elements of the literature of the Middle Ages; and a great deal, on the other hand, from the erudite tradition, full of formal requirements, open to a vision of human life which was, at one and the same time, realistic and allegorical.

This type of literature was transferred to unknown regions, inhabited by primitive peoples different in color and tradition, to whom other primitives brought over from Africa were immediately added, increasing the complexity of the panorama. Literature was obliged, in consequence, to give to the inherited forms of expression certain inflections which would enable it to express the new natural and human reality. Thus, from within Western culture itself was born an experimentation whose results are our national literatures in their continuation and innovation, imitation and invention, automatism and spontaneity. And little by little they began evolving into variants to such a degree differentiated from the mother literatures that they have come, in some cases, to exercise during the last hundred years a decided influence upon the European literatures from which they originated.

In the case of Brazil, these observations, although obvious, are necessary, since our naturalistic criticism, continuing the Romantic tradition, has sometimes broadcast the false view that Brazilian literature is the

result of the encounter of three cultural traditions: those of the Portuguese, the Indian, and the African. In fact, the influence of these two latter groups made itself felt (albeit intensely) only in the area of folklore. Upon the evolution of the written literature the Indian and the African cultural traditions worked only in an indirect manner, in that they brought about a transformation of Portuguese tastes, favoring a new approach to life which, in turn, came to influence literary creation. What occurred, then, was not an initial confluence to create a new literature, but rather a widening of the universe of a pre-existent literature, imported so to speak with the conquest and undergoing during the colonial period a general process of adjustment to the New World.

If we carry this line of reasoning to its ultimate consequences, we will see that literature was, in Brazil, to such a degree an expression of the culture of the colonizer and, later, of the Europeanized colonist, heir to his values, that it actively served in the effort to impose those values, to counteract the initially powerful influences of the primitive cultures which surrounded the colonists on all sides.

Let us begin by recalling the regulations of the colonial administration opposed to any eventual expansion of the defeated cultures. Consider the example of the Captaincy of São Paulo, where the presence of the Indian was relatively strong and effective, thus establishing a competition between cultures which was only resolved, on the one hand, by racial and spiritual fusion, and, on the other, by strong repressive measures on the part of authorities. So the Town Council of São Paulo established penalties for any white man, and any man who passed for white, who participated in or helped to promote native festivals. Even more drastic was what happened to the Tupí language in the form adapted by the Jesuits (the so-called "língua geral"), widely spoken by this bilingual population from the sixteenth century on but prohibited during the second half of the eighteenth century, thereafter to disappear rapidly in a cultural milieu becoming more and more stabilized within the norms of European civilization.

In this process of cultural imposition, literature fulfills an obvious role; suffice it to say that the chroniclers, historians, orators, and poets of the first centuries are almost all priests, lawyers, functionaries, soldiers, and landholders, identified with the values of the metropolitan civilization. For them, *belles lettres* should reinforce the religion being imposed on the primitives as well as the political norms symbolized by the Monarchy; and even when lacking any ostensible ideological content, the practice of literature constituted a European form of mental discipline which had to be imposed upon the rustic milieu, as a form of instruction for the defense of civilization.

This effort at social control is expressed in the cultural activity of Church and State, when literary activity is promoted to commemorate religious festivals, dates of special significance for the royal family, the comings and goings of high authorities, and political and military events. These were the principal pretexts for sermons, theatrical presentations, and the composition and recitation of poems. In the correspondence of the Governors of the Captaincies there is an abundance of orders to teachers, corporations, and councils, commanding them to encourage such activities.

From these commemorations some documents of importance to our knowledge of the literary life of the past have come down to us to witness to the ideological function of literature—such as the anthology drawn up in 1749 upon the occasion of the appointment of the first bishop of Mariana, in the Captaincy of Minas (*Áureo Trono Episcopal*), or the book in which a poetic tribute to the Governor of Rio de Janeiro, Freire de Andrada, was published in 1752 (*Júbilos da América*).

On a higher and more systematic level, something similar is found in the Academies founded during the eighteenth century in Bahia and in Rio de Janeiro, with the purpose of promoting important studies. Their members were persons of eminence in society, their founders and protectors were viceroys or magistrates. It is not surprising, then, that they encouraged in literature the frank glorification of the established order, works praising the norms of civilization, defending the efforts of the colonizers, and echoing the words of the authorities. At the same time, they displayed a spirit of historical and, subsequently, scientific inquiry, striving to transform themselves into the living memory of the past and agents of intellectual progress.

Finally, on the plane of literary works of some importance, we find the same phenomenon, though somewhat more subtle and complex in its manifestation. It is rather significant that the more ambitious and lengthy works of the eighteenth century, lyric poetry excepted, are dedicated to the same celebration of the dominant ideological values. Such is the case in the curious moral fiction *O Peregrino da América* of Marques Pereira (1728); in the *História da América Portuguesa* of Rocha Pita (1730); of the poems *Uraguai* of Basílio da Gama (1769), *Vila Rica* of Cláudio Manuel da Costa (written before 1776), and *Caramuru* by Duílio (1781). In all of them we find predominating the idea that the task of colonization was just and fecund, that it should be accepted and praised as the implantation of moral, religious and political values which did away with barbarism for the benefit of civilization. In fact, the three poems have as their theme the encounter of civilization and barbarism.

But it is necessary, now, to have a look at the other side of the coin,

at indications that the Portuguese colonial process was, as is inevitable, creating its own contradictions, as it changed in order to adapt itself and consolidate the dominant classes of the colony. The interests of these classes began at some point to diverge from those of the homeland, and representatives of these classes began also to give literary expression to their changing points of view and their changing sentiments. This intellectual reaction was not impeded by the literary forms imported from Portugal, as the nationalistic critics during the Romantic period were later to think; on the contrary, the adaptation of these forms to the American milieu had made them adequate for the expression of these new currents of thought. So much so, in fact, that the activities and literary works which we have just cited can be viewed from a different and even contradictory—but equally valid—perspective. Precisely because it is in contact with social reality, literature incorporates its contradictions into the structure and meaning of the work of art.

The Academies, for example, as they pursued their investigations of the past, exalted the role of certain Brazilians, drew attention to the importance of their achievements, accented the particular characteristics of the country, and thus prepared the way for nationalistic attitudes. It is curious to observe, in fact, that they went on slipping little by little in this direction, until the last of them, the Sociedade Literária, had to be closed down in 1794 and its members brought to trial for having transformed the organization into a sort of political club, full of admiration for the French Revolution and openly debating the legitimacy of colonial rule.

Of the books cited, it is easy to observe that the *História da América Portuguesa* achieved a certain degree of nativism which made it useful as an instrument to measure the differentiation of the country and, therefore, its “distance” from the homeland. The poem *Uraguai*, while praising the actions of the state in its war against the Jesuit Missions in the south, displays such interest in the natural order of indigenous life and in the plastic beauty of the American world, that it founded Indianism and became one of the models for the aesthetic nationalism of the nineteenth century. The same occurred in *Caramuru*, in which the natural order of the Indian is contrasted with the politico-religious institutions of the whites. Thanks to the great artistry of the author, the poem is expressively ambiguous (for our colonial society was itself ambiguous), and can be read at one and the same time as a glorification of the Portuguese and as a glorification of the country in which the Brazilian was already beginning to feel himself coerced and inhibited by the colonial system.

Summing up, we may say that the decisive eighteenth century represents a coming of age in the process of literary and cultural adaptation.

We observe in this century the occurrence of new themes, of new ways of treating old themes, including a very significant preference for certain forms of composition in prose and verse which permitted the more adequate handling of an increasingly differentiated physical and social reality, born of the internal dynamics of colonization. Therefore, the works which most seek to accentuate and reinforce the dominant political and cultural order are at the same time those which make use of local material with so great a care and discernment that they end up seeming to posterity to be defenses of our own peculiarities and sentiments against those imposed from abroad. For in fact the literary patterns imposed from abroad had in large part undergone a process of adaptation; literature, along with the rest of the Portuguese cultural inheritance, was passing into the control of new dominant groups, while remaining a factor making for unity, continuity, and an awareness of reality.

## II. *Transfiguration of reality and a sense of the concrete.*

In a learned book titled *Visão do Paraíso* the historian Sérgio Buarque de Holanda demonstrates that the colonization of Brazil was influenced by a series of ideal images regarding the beauty, wealth, and miraculous properties of the American continent—images well represented by the famous legend of El Dorado which for many became an obsession.

This movement of the imagination can also be considered an unconscious means for bringing about the realization of the Conquest, for it not only helped to stimulate the exploitation of natural resources, but also, indirectly, promoted the exploration of the vast unknown continent, bringing it under the control of the norms and culture of the homeland.

In much the same way, literary imagination transfigured the reality of the land, but at the same time subjected it to an objective description, as if true knowledge depended upon this contradictory process. The Portuguese of the era of discovery saw no contradiction in this, for they were at once credulous and critical, dreamers and practical men. And in truth the dimensions of the country encouraged the mind to magnify reality in idle day-dreams, while at the same time calling the dreamer to earth with the pragmatism of the tasks to be performed.

For many writers of the seventeenth century, metaphor, allegory, and the subtle word-play of the then predominant baroque constituted the normal way of communicating their impressions of the world and of the soul; and this tendency could only be encouraged by Brazilian conditions, characterized by striking contrasts between the intelligence of the cultivated man and the reigning primitivism, between the grandeur of the tasks to be performed and the meagre resources at hand, between appearances and reality. As disproportion generates a sense of the ex-

tremes and of conflict, these writers adapted themselves easily to a literary style which permitted them to make daring use of antithesis, hyperbole, and the most violent distortions of forms and concepts. For them, the baroque style was a providential language, and it therefore produced modalities of thought and expression so tenacious that, despite the succession of other literary fashions, they remained, in part, as something especially congenial to our country.

In Brazil, above all in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, this style was the equivalent of a "vision," thanks to which it was possible to extend the dominion of the spirit over reality, attributing allegorical meanings to the flora, magic to the fauna, and superhuman greatness to human deeds. As a powerful ideological factor, it compensated to some degree for the meagerness of means and achievements. By giving transcendence to things, facts, and persons, it transferred local reality to the level of dreams.

The above-mentioned *História da América Portuguesa* by Rocha Pita, in spite of its informative content, crystalized this extension of reality. Somewhat earlier, in a book which appeared in 1705, the poet Botelho de Oliveira published the first of a kind of poem whose exaggerated nativism became a constant theme in Brazilian literature almost up to our days. A curious example from this long sequence is the passage in the epico-religious poem *Assunção* by Francisco de São Carlos (1820), where Paradise is described as a garden planted with those species of trees typically found in Brazilian orchards.

A similar attitude is revealed in the old predilection of our poetry for prosopopoeia, that is, the humanization of nature, which speaks to man. It is as if the enormity and inhospitality of the land were accommodating to the desires of the colonizer, who fraternally incorporates it by this method into the universe of his dreams. *Prosopopoeia* is, in fact, the title of one of the first poems of Brazil, published in 1600, in which prophecies are uttered by the Ocean in the form of a marine divinity. Later, the pompous amplifications of Rocha Pita in prose, and of Itaparica, Durão and others in verse, are a sort of animation of nature, making of the whole country an oversized living body. From the middle of the eighteenth century, this tendency is found also in the Ovidian genre of the "metamorphosis," as in several parts of the lyric work of Cláudio Manuel da Costa (which appeared in 1768), where we encounter the natural surroundings of the Minas Gerais region coming to life through a legendary transformation of cyclopes into mountains, of nymphs into gold-bearing rivers. Cruz e Silva, who was Portuguese by birth but passed a large part of his life in Brazil, transforms several aspects of our landscape by the same process; and in the beginning of the nineteenth century Cunha Barbosa



fancies, in a long poem, that the Bay of Rio de Janeiro was formed during an episode in the war of the Titans. Later on, during the Romantic period, Gonçalves Dias likens the profile of a cordillera to the gigantic form of a sleeping Indian, who, symbolizing the land, witnesses the clash of races and the destruction of his own. And it is well to remember that, at the end of the nineteenth century, the poem chosen by the Republic to accompany the old tune of our national anthem has, as one of its central images, the country reclining by the shore of the sea, a giant ready to leap into action through its sons.

These ways of perceiving, which foment a sense of nationality through the exaggeration of reality, occur at times in works free of poetic pretensions either in subject matter or purpose, such as reports concerning customs, the economy, and everyday happenings. It is true that some chroniclers, such as the modest Frei Vicente do Salvador in his *História do Brasil* of 1627, limited themselves as far as possible to making objective reports in simple language—as the Jesuit Anchieta and the plantation owner Soares de Sousa had likewise attempted to do during the sixteenth century. But others let themselves be carried away by hyperbole, and while not abandoning the domain of the concrete in their writings, they give to things the unreal brilliance of the legendary and the epic. Such is the case, for example, in the writings of the Jesuit Simão de Vasconcelos.

Proof that this “vision” was not incompatible with a certain fidelity to reality is given by one of the most astute and accurate observers of the colonial economy, the Jesuit Andreoni, who published in 1711 under the pseudonym of Antonil a fundamental work on the subject. In this work the figures and dry reports are frequently caught up in stylistic flights which help to broaden our comprehension of the facts by means of allegory. Such is the case in the admirable description of the process of sugar manufacture—presented as a torture chamber in Hell where the black slaves are subjected to the voracity of the machines which mutilate them, and are singed by the heat of the furnaces, while the cane is cut, pressed, ground, and burned to extract the syrup. In this one eloquent page ablaze with metaphor, an allegorical vision which makes one understand, more profoundly than through statistical tables and technical accuracy, the cruel iniquity of the economic process.

But we should not forget the direct representation of reality which not only coexists with these transfigurations, but even dominates in other works, following the example of the chroniclers just cited. They contributed greatly toward establishing in our literature a realism which became a tool for understanding our society and our soul.

By the same token, we find in our poetry during the second half of the eighteenth century a tendency toward the didactic and toward social

criticism. Under the influence of the Enlightenment, then at its height, there appeared the first important moment of true national self-awareness on the part of literary men. The Latin works of Prudêncio do Amaral on sugar and Basílio da Gama on mining are pure didactic works. But the humorous poems of Silva Alvarenga and Melo Franco concerning the plight of instruction in Portugal are already a form of ideological criticism, while the scientific poem about birds written by Sousa Caldas and those of Silva Alvarenga concerning the forms of knowledge betray a certain nonconformity. The most brilliant example is perhaps the satirical poem *As Cartas Chilenas* (attributed to Tomás Antônio Gonzaga), which exposes the corruption of the colonial administration.

These writers, and others, were for the most part supporters of the reform policies of the famous Portuguese minister, the Marquis of Pombal, who did much for Brazil and represents, in his way, an attempt at enlightened despotism. Nevertheless, some among them, expressing both the utopian vision of the nativists and the critical mind of the precursors of nationalism proper, managed to put into words some of the demands and complaints of their country as it began to see the contradictory qualities of Portuguese rule. When they met to discuss these problems, they were imprisoned, tried, exiled, and made social outcasts, as in the repression of alleged plots in 1789 and 1794. These poets, learned men and priests, were only giving voice to the thoughts of a maturing Brazilian mentality applied to the description and knowledge of the country; and having taken a stand which cost them so dear, they can be said to have given the first concrete signal of the movement which was to end in political independence in 1822. Hence we see that literature was, first, a positive element in the incorporation of cultural patterns and, later, a yeasty criticism which would make manifest the disharmonies of colonial rule.

Following the separation from Portugal in 1822, a clear conception of independence as a form of national affirmation spread among men of letters—and this made possible the continued survival of the two opposing but complementary tendencies which we have indicated above. It is worth while to point out that the more realistic trend found a powerful instrument with which to undertake a veritable survey of society in the new genre of the novel. From its very beginnings, Brazilian fiction had a tendency toward the documentary, and, during the nineteenth century, it undertook a great exploration of life in the cities and the countryside, in all regions, in all classes, thus revealing the land to its inhabitants as if its intention were to produce a complete and meaningful portrait of the nation. That is why the reality depicted in the works of fiction of that period is so alive to us today—both in the novels of the Romantic period, as with those of Macedo, Alencar, Manuel Antônio de Almeida, Bernardo

Guimarães, Távora, and Taunay, and in the novel of the Realistic and Naturalistic periods, as with Machado de Assis, Aluísio Azevedo, Inglês de Souza, Oliveira Paiva, Adolfo Caminha, and dozens of others who bring us up to the beginning of the twentieth century.

### III. *Ideological use of the past.*

That we take so many of our examples from the eighteenth century is by no means by chance, for it was during this period that our spiritual profile began to take shape with some clarity, with the configuration of values which would influence the entire subsequent evolution of our society and culture. In literature we find symptoms of maturity and of certain intellectual and artistic preferences among which we may draw special attention to what we have elsewhere called the "genealogical tendency"—taking the adjective in its broadest sense as an attempt to understand and justify the present situation.

This tendency is related to the emergence of self-awareness among the dominant classes which, once stabilized, had of necessity to elaborate their own ideology. We have already seen how the intelligentsia of the colonial period chose themes adequate to "create" a natural milieu, a picture of life represented in literature and sentiment. By the same token, the men of letters "invented" or "created" a type of history, by means of a special evaluation of miscegenation and contact between cultures. The paradoxical element—from the logical point of view, although normal from the sociological point of view—was the simplified self-representation, based upon European patterns, of a pioneer and rough-and-ready society produced by cultural syncretism and race mixture.

In fact, the "genealogical tendency" consists of selecting from the past those elements which support a world-view which is to a certain degree nativist, although as close as possible to the ideas and norms of Europe. In view of the limitations imposed upon us here, a single example will allow us, perhaps, to illustrate this fact in the areas of sociology and literature: the idealization of the Indian.

By this time, the Indian was definitively neutralized in the more civilized areas, pushed aside, destroyed, and partially eliminated through miscegenation. Several factors now contributed toward the formation of a positive image of the Indian, among them the following: the human dignity which the Jesuits had always attributed to him; the definitive abolition of Indian slavery by the middle of the eighteenth century; the custom of the Portuguese kings of conferring nobility on certain chiefs who, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, had helped the Portuguese in the conquest and defense of the country; and, finally, the vogue of the "noble savage." All these forces contributed toward the elaboration of a

favorable view, not of the “everyday” Indian with whom some still came into contact, but of the Indian of unknown regions and, above all, the Indian of the past, who could be molded freely by the imagination until an idealized model was perfected.

This attitude is clearly to be seen in the Academia dos Renascidos which, in 1759, in ordering the production of biographical sketches of the most illustrious men of colonial history, included, for the first time, the chiefs of indigenous tribes along with governors, bishops, magistrates, warriors, and landholders—thus promoting the most prestigious Indians to the level of the tutelary patriarchs. Even more significant was the acceptance of the Indian as a source of pride of ancestry, at the very moment in which the most important families were beginning to establish records of their forebears. Since these families approached the matter from a point of view which was formally European, the delicate problem of miscegenation gave them some difficulty, introducing as it did factors in conflict with the concept of nobility, since “purity of blood” was an official concomitant of caste. In order to resolve this problem, the genealogists created the fiction of “the princesses of the Brazilian blood”—that is, the daughters of the chiefs who had formed unions with the first colonists. Hence, as occurs in all new societies, the irreconcilable aspects of the situation were recast to fit the dominant pattern, through a “correction” of the past. Among the works frankly dedicated to this deception are included those of Borges da Fonseca in Pernambuco, and that of Jabotão in Bahia, as well as that of Pedro Taques in São Paulo.

The positive result of all this was to make of the Indian a national symbol and thus to affirm our particularity. Later during the nineteenth century, not only the most important families but the whole nation began to see in the “native” a sort of ancestor, an eponymous hero. This eventually contributed to yet another deceit, more commonly practiced, of attributing to indigenous blood (as a new status symbol) the effects of miscegenation with the African who, for several reasons—above all the fact of his being a slave—was rigorously denied or concealed and in the end forgotten.

Associated in this way with the civilizing process, rooted in the self-identification of ever more numerous social groups, the Indian encountered no difficulty in becoming a literary “persona.” In three of the poems cited above—*Uraguai*, *Vila Rica*, and *Caramuru*, above all in the first and the third—the Indian has a role as a picturesque human element. In other less important works he appears more and more as a symbol of reality and, consequently, of local values. For the men of letters of the second half of the eighteenth century, most of whom practiced the conventions of pastoral poetry and therefore proclaimed the dignity and beauty of

rustic life, the recognition of the Indian as a sort of "noble savage" was an almost inevitable logical step. This fact appears in most concrete form in certain writers of the final phase of neo-classicism, such as the poet and patriot Antônio Joaquim de Melo, who wrote formally correct eclogues, in which the shepherds were simply replaced by Indians.

The Romantics, following 1840, made Indianism a national fad, which at flood tide swept beyond the circle of the literate public to spread across all regions and sectors of the nation, remaining with us today in the custom of naming our children after the indigenous characters of the poems and novels of that period. The two most eminent Indianist authors of the Romantic period, the poet Gonçalves Dias and the novelist José de Alencar, were considered by their contemporaries to have achieved, at long last, a national literature which would serve as a vehicle for our sensibility and our view of reality.

The triumph of this partisan opinion signals the height of the "genealogical tendency" during the Romantic period, when it was reinforced by the politically opportune objective of denying the values of Portuguese colonial rule. The desire for complete independence extended from the spheres of high policy to the habits of the common man. Several individuals substituted indigenous terms for their family names, as if this would suffice to change the origin and tradition in which they had been formed.

The two Emperors, in creating titles of nobility, had a preference for indigenous toponyms, which gave rise to those curious Marquises and Counts whose names had such a shocking sound to European ears—as in the case of the very founder of the Romantic taste in Brazilian letters, the diplomat Gonçalves de Magalhães, who was named Viscount of Araguaia. It was in much the same fashion that, a thousand years before, Latin titles had been assimilated by another primitive hierarchy, that of the Germans, and associated with their nomenclature, barbarous though it might sound to Mediterranean ears.

The young nation's desire for complete differentiation explains the increased effort, during the nineteenth century, to "invent" a purely national past which would trace back the separation from the mother country to the earliest period of colonial history. Literary criticism, inspired in part by certain French authors, now began to establish the doctrine that describing nature and the customs of the country, above all those of its primitive races, was the true task of literature, and the only criterion for the recognition, out of the past, of those who had most contributed to literary creation.

This narrow and restrictive idea was to some degree balanced by a change in literary aesthetics; for since the advent of the Romantic school coincided with national independence, everything which was written in

the Romantic mold came to be considered genuinely Brazilian. Not only the new themes but also the traditional ones suddenly appeared more "ours," more authentic, upon being treated in the personal style which then came into vogue, with its delight in the sentimental and the pathetic, with its new-found confidence.

Besides, since all were engaged in building a nation, intellectual and artistic activities were looked upon as a contribution to this effort—which conferred upon the poet, the novelist, the orator, and the journalist a greater importance than might have been expected in such a backward country. It is possible that in this we see partly a result of the influence of the second Emperor, Dom Pedro II, who looked upon himself as an intellectual, and who in fact evidenced, throughout his long reign, an unceasing love and support for literature, arts, and sciences.

#### IV. *The general and the particular in forms of expression.*

For the apologists of Romanticism, therefore, Classicism was a form of expression imposed by the Portuguese colonizers, and had only served to inhibit the growth of originality in Brazilian letters, in spite of the efforts of a few writers. Conversely, Romanticism represented the national spirit, making possible, with its creative freedom from formal restrictions, the manifestation of the Brazilian style, inspired by the particular characteristics of the land, its society, and its ideals.

This view, with its clearly ideological content, coincided with a stage of unmitigated euphoria in the nation's self-appraisal; and as it had its grain of truth, it took root so firmly that even today we encounter critics and teachers speaking of the importance of authors of the colonial period "in spite" of the classicist imitation to be found in their works; the implication being that to be Brazilian is to be more or less what the Romantics were.

But nothing could be more doubtful and prejudicial to a good understanding of our literary history than this anachronistic opinion which apparently presupposes, at the very least, that our colonial authors should have refused to have anything to do with the literary fashion then dominant throughout the western world, and should have, on the contrary, miraculously behaved like Romantic nationalists long before the time.

The other erroneous pre-supposition is that the norms of the classic style were inadequate for expressing the natural and social reality of the country. What we have written above should have already made clear that our opinion is quite the contrary; and our reasons for this are at the same time historical and aesthetic.

Historically, the literature of the colonial period was something imposed, imposed inevitably, as was the rest of the Portuguese cultural

equipment, for it was organically linked with the other phenomena which went to make up cultural life, and this fact has no negative connotations, once we accept colonization as the process by which the nation was created. In Brazil—in contrast with what we find in those countries which knew great pre-Columbian civilizations—it is not possible to imagine a development of civilization that does not have its starting point in the European Conquest. It would not be admissible, in the case of Brazil, to say, as does for example the Bolivian writer Jesús Lara in speaking of the Quechua poet José Walparrimachi Maita, that the Conquest destroyed the possibility of the development of an original literature equal in quality to the literature which was imposed from abroad. Brazilian nationality and its varied spiritual manifestations only took form as the result of processes of cultural transfer and cultural pressure from abroad.

Going further, and developing a view expressed above, we can even say that classical molds were quite effective for several reasons and in various different forms: the Italian-influenced humanism of the sixteenth century, the Spanish-influenced baroque of the seventeenth century, the French-influenced neo-classicism of the eighteenth century. In each of these cases there was a firm intellectual discipline, which demanded rigorous use of the mind. This gave intellectual consistency and resiliency to the backward and at times chaotic society of the colonial period. Graeco-Latin conventions were, besides, a factor making for universality, a sort of common language throughout Western civilization; thus, to the degree that they employed these conventions, Brazilian writers integrated their experiences in this new land into the common stream of Western civilization.

Hence, certain characteristics which have always been condemned in classicism can, in fact, be considered positive values, such as the so-called “artificiality” of certain neo-classic tendencies, that is, the strongly conventional character of neo-classic forms of expression. Perhaps these did, in fact, interfere at times with the enthusiastic, unbounded expansiveness of literary personality. But in compensation, by establishing a flagrant contrast to the reigning primitivism, they made it possible for the intellectual to create a world of spiritual autonomy and liberty, which assured the survival of literature, neutralizing the temptations of vulgarity and the potential danger of absorption into the universe of the folkloric. And by making the writer a citizen of the universal republic of letters, they made him a civilizing influence in the building of the nation. They reinforced his capacity for criticism, at times for rebellion, as we see in several aspects of the work of our greatest poet of the seventeenth century, Gregório de Matos, or in the works of the so-called Arcadians of the second half of the eighteenth century. Hence, whatever there was of the “artificial” in the classical style was amply compensated by these

other factors—thanks to which the majority of the important writers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries seem less provincial and more open to the great problems of mankind than the romantics of the nineteenth century.

But even if we accept the reasoning of traditional criticism, we can see that the classical style lent itself well to the description of a new world, enormous and unknown. We have already noted how the use of allegory and of myth facilitated the discovery and aesthetic classification of nature, while the use of special devices, such as periphrasis, hyperbaton, ellipsis, and hyperbole, made it possible to mold linguistic form to an astounding or unknown reality. When Cláudio Manuel da Costa transforms the rocky outcroppings of the Captaincy of Minas into Polyphemes, and the gold-bearing streams into Galateas, he is giving a name to the world and incorporating the reality which surrounds him into a system which could be understood by all the cultivated men of his time, in any Western country. The very possibility of adapting the tradition to the milieu brought with it, not only discipline, but also a considerable new freedom; and the combination of these two tendencies contributed to the development of forms of expression at the same time general and particular, universal and local, which colonial literature passed on to posterity as its own unique achievement.

To demonstrate the plasticity of forms reputedly so rigid, let us remember that Gregório de Matos was able to fit, with great beauty, within the rigorous limits of the sonnet, not only the story of his love-sufferings and of his sense of personal guilt and sin (that is, something perfectly to be expected within the tradition), but also the customs of a society in the process of formation, with its prejudices, its quarrels, and the sonority of its Tupí names. The notion of “conventionality” is a relative one, and when the Arcadian poet writes of the shepherds and the Vergilian peace of the fields, he is no more artificial than the Spanish or English poet writing in the same vein. However, he is notoriously original when, employing this bookish convention, he manifests implicitly the contrast between the civilization of Europe, which attracted him and in which he was formed intellectually, and the rusticity of the land in which he lived, which he loved and wished to praise in his verse. As we have already seen elsewhere, here too, in the essential sphere of literary expression, the imposition and adaptation of cultural patterns permitted literature to contribute to the emergence of a national self-awareness.

Equally fruitful in this process was the Romantic spirit, which made possible a greater exteriorization of sentiments and attitudes. Proclaiming what they were doing while they were doing it, Romantic authors clearly set forth their affective or social objectives, gaining a greater



power of immediate communication. Whereas classical literature presupposed in the reader a certain cultural equipment, Romantic literature was accessible to those of more modest educational attainments.

The forms of expression of Romanticism were undoubtedly more plastic. And this greater plasticity seems providential, looking back—if only because, in a society like that of the nineteenth century, which was already formed and oriented toward its own destiny, rigor and a rigid sense of spiritual and aesthetic order were now less essential. And although literature, like all art, is a discipline and a norm, the more facile forms which were then adopted favored not only the investigation of the problems most vital for individual and social self-discovery, but also a greater mobilization of the reading public. It is sufficient to compare the dialectic rigidity of a baroque sonnet, the conceptual sleight-of-hand of an ode, or the rigorous formal structure of a classical play, with the comparatively amorphous open universe of the novel, or the insistent musicality of Romantic verse expressing a more communicative sensibility.

Nevertheless, this aesthetic discontinuity between the two periods implies no historical discontinuity, for Romanticism was oriented by the same historical tendency, the double process of integration and differentiation: the use of the general, that is, the norms of the learned West, for the expression of the particular, that is, the new experiences and attitudes which grew out of the process of civilizing the country. This circumstance gives continuity and unity to our literature, as an element in the formation of a national awareness of self, from the seventeenth century through the nineteenth century. From then on, not only literature but also Brazilian nationality and society itself can be considered matured and consolidated—because capable of consciously formulating problems and consciously attempting to find solutions.

### V. *Conclusion.*

As always happens with ambitious and rapid syntheses, I conclude with a feeling of dissatisfaction. In an effort to show what was the function of literature in forming Brazilian national identity, I have been obliged to ignore the specifically aesthetic aspects of the problem. I omitted the names of authors who merit our interest, and I did not even approach the period in which Brazilian literature begins to produce those works which are at one and the same time the most characteristic and most important—that is, from the time of Machado de Assis, around 1880, up to the present, including the great generation of the Modernists, who made their presence felt on the national scene from 1922 on.

But even within the general framework I have established, I feel that I was inadequate and perhaps unjust. To be fair, it would have been

necessary to show how certain tendencies, here seen only from a positive point of view, also had their negative aspects. How, for example, baroque transfiguration established in Brazilian mental habits a permanent, irrational love for grandiloquence pure and simple. How the transformation of reality through imagery and allegory often led the human spirit to deceive itself, and action to languish, lost in Utopian sterility. It would have been necessary, also, to show more clearly how the mythological idealization of the Indian was used, during the Romantic phase, as a pretext to conceal the more serious problem of the Negro, so that Indianism too became, in a way, a tool for maintaining prejudice against the black man, in spite of the efforts of a few intellectuals and writers, above all the youthful and ardent Castro Alves, poet of the slaves and of their downtrodden humanity.

In Latin American countries literature has always been profoundly committed to the building of nationhood, so that the historico-sociological point of view is indispensable for the study of these literatures. Among us everything is steeped in literature, from juridical formalism to our humanitarianism and the expression of everyday sentiments. Although it is difficult to find the boundaries of this omnipresent, multiform universe, the task is prerequisite to an understanding of literary reality.