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# Europe as Fiction

Our goal is to speak about the advocates of European unity. It is quite surprising that in the United States, where, doubts notwithstanding, one can surely acknowledge the existence of a distinct and well-formed political state, the threat of disintegration is nevertheless being very seriously considered in recent times[1]. Many authors indicate the danger of a "Balkanization of America"[2]. And yet, a common (administrative) language exists in America. Even though it may be true that the famous American *melting pot* has already become history, common practices constitute a solid basis for integration. A certain unity of lifestyle is always present. Moreover, Americans are united by an attitude of respect for the constitution. Unity in a retrospective sense, that is, the common political tradition, also plays a role which should not be underestimated. The myth of a new beginning still holds its charm. Much has been said recently about the erosion of the American "civic religion," but the notion still has not lost its meaning. The face of American patriotism continues to be clear and distinct[3]. Yet, despite all these uniting factors, Americans are experiencing a profound uneasiness. In Europe it is just the opposite. The unifying scaffolding which is clearly evident in America does

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[1] Cf. e.g. A. Schlesinger Jr.: *The Disuniting of America. Reflections on a Multicultural Society,* W.W. Norton, New York 1998 or A. Schmidt: *The Menace of Multiculturalism. Trojan Horse in America,* Praeger, Westport 1997.
[2] A. Schlesinger: *op. cit.*
[3] Cf. M. Walzer Jr.: *What It Means to Be an American,* Marsilio Publishers, New York 1992.

not exist, but there is no shortage of optimists who are already taking unity for granted and readily speak of a "common Europe." Common…? In what sense?

And now some reflections on fiction. After all, this concept is to play a key role. Fiction is a word which should be treated with care. At first glance everything seems obvious. Fiction as defined by the *Dictionary of the Polish Language* (edited by Mieczysław Szymczak) is "something imaginary, made-up, a fantasy, fabrication, an illusion" ("coś urojonego, wymysł, fantazja, pozór, złudzenie"). So, if we want to recognize fiction we should simply distinguish illusion from reality? Exactly. Our notion of fiction is to a large extent defined by what we perceive to be true. But here everything gets complicated, especially if we take into account tendencies which are acquiring increasing significance these days. Is it still at all possible to distinguish fact from fiction? "The fundamental belief of metaphysicians is the belief in antitheses of values," remarked Friedrich Nietzsche[4]. Because of this, they believe it is impossible that something could "originate out of its opposite." For example: "the will to truth out of the will to deception."[5] Nietzsche believed differently. The will to deception permeates the will to truth. Is it at all possible, then, to distinguish truth from fiction? What value could entertain such a distinction if, following Nietzsche, we "recognize untruth as a condition of life"?[6]

Of course, we need not agree with Nietzsche's views, but we cannot altogether ignore them either. Democracy's *libido* (so to speak) encounters its expression in a way of thinking which blurs the boundaries between reality and fiction. Its quintessence can be found in pragmatism. Pragmatists (at least when the question of truth is concerned) are close relatives of Nietzsche. Pragmatism linked the concept of truth to the concepts of usefulness and efficiency. "Truth," according to William James,"

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[4] F. Nietzsche: *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future,* translated by Helen Zimmern, Plain Label Books, New York 1917, p. 10.
[5] *Ibidem,* p. 9.
[6] *Ibidem,* p. 13.

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is but the incarnation of utility in our mind."[7] He explains: "Truth **happens** to an idea. It **becomes** true, is **made** true by events. Its verity is in fact an event, a process."[8] Therefore, we cannot speak of an absolute distinction between truth and fiction. In the end, everything depends on the set of circumstances. What appears to be fiction can easily become truth. Fantasy is the true source of truth. Pragmatism glorifies change and adulates novel approaches. It sees the guarantee of progress in the questioning of accepted, yet stagnant practices. It treats respectable "truths" with disdain. For James the Absolute "grants us moral holidays."[9] Hope is to be found in experimenting, which creates a counterweight to the "desperate instinct of self-preservation" serving to increase the smothering burden of all "truths."[10] Today, Richard Rorty speaks of the "ethnocentric" understanding of truth and equates "objectivity and solidarity."[11] Ultimately, truth is that which is beneficial for "us" to believe. In this way fiction is deprived of its opponent, since the very concept of objective reality disappears and becomes an amusing anachronism.

Nevertheless, one can also consider fiction in a completely different manner. I am referring to the case when fiction is treated as an exalted expression of truth, when it becomes an overriding voice resounding from the heights. What is the essence of literary fiction? Hamlet is a literary character; yet can one say that he is unreal? Jaroslaw Iwaszkiewicz has this to say. Recalling an encounter with Zofia Nałkowska, he wrote, "Life was then a ruin. Just to think of that terrible time: November of 1944! And she was thinking about her characters, as Adolf Rudnicki was about his, and I about my *Fame and Glory* heroes, who

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[7] W. James: *Pragmatism. A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking,* (http://www.guten-berg.org/etext/5116).
[8] *Ibidem.*
[9] *Ibidem.*
[10] *Ibidem.*
[11] R. Rorty: *Solidarity or Objectivity*, in: *Objectivity, Relativism and Truth,* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1991, pp. 29–33.

demanded incarnation despite everything, despite the furnaces and the murders, the havoc and betrayal. There is something immeasurably comforting in this triumph of the fictional life over real death. Through this triumph the fictional life becomes truth; moreover, it becomes wisdom."[12] We have clearly found ourselves here on a Platonic trail. Invented heroes are more real than all the figures we see before us. There is a deeper truth in them. They penetrate reality more deeply. Their image is more powerful. Thus, fiction becomes a formula for observing a superior truth, a cryptonym of truth rising above the regular system of facts. It displays truth in a condensed form, a truth which the eye of the profane never perceives.

However, it is not my intention to speak here of fiction as a sort of initiation. The fiction tied to politics is of a much more prosaic and banal sort. It is a naïve and blustering fiction. A fiction which usurps great honors and imposes itself as a glorious wisdom. This is the meaning of the "Europe" of the "Europeans" who zealously promote the idea of unity. For unity is a truth created by the politicians and their court-adulators.

In a democratic society, truth becomes what truth is believed to be. The sophists noted this long ago. Therefore, everything depends on the cleverness and efficacy of one's efforts. Politicians have no need for an exhaustive knowledge of things. After all, they do not seek truth. Aristotle pointed out that public debates resolve matters of probability, and not matters of truth. These debates flourish through the art of eloquence. Rhetoric and the skill of persuasion are the decisive factors. "Enthymemes are the substance of rhetorical persuasion," Aristotle states[13] (an enthymeme is a syllogism based on probability). The foundation of political credibility – "persuasion" as Aristotle calls it – is

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[12] J. Iwaszkiewicz: *Portrety na marginesach* [Marginalized Portraits], Więź, Warszawa 2004, p. 101.
[13] Aristotle: *Rhetoric,* translated by W. Rhys Roberts, Dover Publications, Mineola, N.Y. 2004, 1354a.

thus probability. To his mind, probability is directly related to truth. "The true and the approximately true," he believed, "are apprehended by the same faculty."[14]

Nevertheless, truth is separated from probability by a clear span. It is within this distance that temptations arise. Fiction can seek a safe refuge within the gap which separates probability from truth. There are no high barriers to hold it back. It is difficult to see the the sophists and their conviction that truth can be staged as just an amusing fact. "People like to lie," declares Francis Bacon in his essay *On Truth*.[15] "Love of the lie itself," he continues, is "natural." The human mind is not finicky. It does not demand much. Truth trickles down as a barely perceptible stream. "Doth any man doubt that if there were taken out of men's minds vain opinions, flattering hopes, false valuations, imaginations as one would, and the like, but it would leave the minds of a number of men poor shrunken things, full of melancholy and indisposition, and unpleasing to themselves?"[16]

Thus, fiction is not just a creature of particular circumstances. It is common habit to succumb to the temptations which release one from the difficult task of searching for the truth, and does not require any special motivation. The will to truth is unstable. Fiction triumphs effortlessly. The imagination, that "dominating second-nature of man," is according to Blaise Pascal, "that deceitful part in man, that mistress of error and falsity."[17] Thus, the imagination essentially becomes the source of constant delusion. Pascal describes it as an "arrogant power, the enemy of reason, who likes to rule and dominate."[18] The imagination attains a superiority which makes men, "a great deal more pleased with themselves than the wise can reasonably be."[19] Its rule is

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[14] *Ibidem,* 1355a.
[15] F. Bacon: *Of Truth,* in: *Essays,* Little, Brown, London 1856, p. 49.
[16] *Ibidem.*
[17] B. Pascal: *Pensées*, NuVision Publications, LLC, Sioux Falls 2007, p. 27.
[18] *Ibidem,* p. 28.
[19] *Ibidem.*

not endangered because it always rewards its subjects without making demands. "Imagination cannot make fools wise; but she can make them happy, to the envy of reason, which can only make its friends miserable."[20]

All projects are obviously the work of the imagination. Their instigators cannot, therefore, avoid the trap of delusion about which Pascal wrote. They become stage-managers: the stage of their own imagination absorbs them more than the stage of the world. The author of the *Pensées* notes with particular emphasis: "The imagination disposes of everything; it makes beauty, justice, and happiness."[21]

There is no doubt that the idea of a united Europe is a project which affirms (and this has often been praised) the great, creative power of the imagination. Modernity has given birth to very strong temptations which glorify the imagination. Its distinguishing mark is, as Charles Taylor calls it, the "expressivist turn."[22] This is the popularization of the belief that any "sense of dignity has its source within ourselves"[23] and that "our access to nature is through an inner voice or impulse."[24] Thus, giving the truth within us a voice – expression – is of fundamental importance. Contemporary man should not be afraid of his own creativity. The "expressivist turn" means that it is man himself who has become the priority.

Making projects becomes the essence of modernity. "To be modern," says Zygmunt Bauman, "is to be in a state of permanent modernization. Modernity is, so to speak, a time of constantly starting something «from the beginning»: dismantling old structures and building new ones from the ground up. A tendency exists to speak of modernity *ex post* as a project: the project of modernity. Well, I don't believe," he adds, "that such a project of modernity

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[20] *Ibidem,* p. 28.
[21] *Ibidem,* p. 29.
[22] C. Taylor: *Sources of the Self. The Making of Modern Identity,* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1992, pp. 368–390.
[23] *Ibidem,* p. 384.
[24] *Ibidem,* p. 374.

has ever actually existed, but I think what distinguishes modern times from all others is the obsessive creation and undertaking of projects."[25]

The temptation which gave shape to the European project currently being carried out obviously has its roots in the Enlightenment. The Enlightenment proclaimed the "new man" and the creation of a "new world" through the accomplishments of reason.[26] This "new man," as Antoine de Baecque explains, "perceives the entire future as a realm of perfection."[27] The "new world" is supposed to guarantee happiness, to free man from the stigma of misery which encumbered him in the past, to implement "human rights," to unite all the just.

Yet the world walks its own paths. Of course, this will also be so in the 21st century, when these projects of unity receive concrete expression; reality does not have much in common with them. For the projects require that one leave the framework of reality and invoke fiction. As we have pointed out, however, reality is neither rejected nor negated. Therefore, these projects are not utopian. According to their creators, they are linked to reality. Unity would signify a historical transformation: a release of potential and an affirmation of this ideal which is the previously unperceived "Europeanness."

The problem is that neither when the first ideas of the "Founding Fathers" were born, nor when the *Treaties of Rome* were signed did a unitary and uncontroversial concept of European identity exist. Obviously, it still does not exist today. The notion has not been shaped by common experience. Europe was and is divided. How much so was made evident by the ominous power of distrustful and aversive stereotypes that surfaced in France and Holland, two

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[25] Z. Bauman, K. Tester: *Conversations with Zygmunt Bauman*, Blackwell Publishing, Oxford 2001, p. 95.

[26] Cf. J. Baszkiewicz: *Nowy człowiek, nowy naród, nowy świat: Mitologia i rzeczywistość rewolucji francuskiej* [New Man, New Nation, New World. Myth and Reality of the French Revolution], Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, Warszawa 1993.

[27] Cit. from *ibidem,* p. 7.

countries which rejected the project of the *Constitutional Treaty* by popular referendum.

Historiography has also been unable to create a unitary concept of identity. Historians' discourse has never become a basis for unification. Many differing interpretations and schools of thought exist. Only the politicians' command can give birth to a discourse glorifying fiction, extolling the "European idea." History, written *ad usum delphini*, is to reveal the "natural" potential for unification. However, there is no doubt that in such an approach retrospection becomes just another part of the project. The past is treated purely instrumentally. These endeavors initiated by politicians have nothing in common with the quest for historical truth. This is not a matter of a Diltheyean "understanding" of the past. It is rather a matter of weilding power and of an efficacious interpretation aimed to mobilize. "European" studies of the past are governed by political agendas. The goal here is not to gain a better understanding, but just the opposite: to hamper understanding, to create fictitious structures. Retrospection becomes, in essence, a projection of the political dogma of unity.

For when did a "united" Europe exist? Back when German emperors ineffectively tried to enforce their rule on a territory which was none too large anyway? Or when they were entangled in a dispute with the papacy? Or during the crusades against the Catharists? Or maybe during the Reformation or during the French Revolution when new coalitions of opponents arose? During the Napoleonic Wars which in themselves pay testimony to ruptures and conflicts? The 20th century alone brought two wars. The first already signified, as Jan Patocka once declared, the suicide of Europe. Perhaps, then, Europe does not exist at all anymore? Maybe the politicians' visions are less than credible? The results of a "European" education are incredibly problematic. This was made evident in the French referendum. The "Erasmus generation" voted against the constitution.

Of course, philosophy has not created a unitary concept of identity either. Quite the contrary. As it turns out, philosophy feeds doubt. Since the times of Socrates, reflection upon identity has placed fundamental difficulties before us, and accentuated the importance of paradoxes and tensions. The philosophy of history (a field in which we can directly ask questions about the shape and significance of historical configurations) is not a domain in which agreement has been achieved. We see Montesquieu next to Condorcet, Herder alongside Hegel. So maybe the politicians, inspirers of great projects, actually have a poor grasp of things. Perhaps they entertain grandiose convictions unaware of their true misery. And perhaps they deserve to be reminded of the words of Socrates, who, in making his apology before his accusers, presented this reflection on a conversation he once had with a "politician": "I could not help thinking that he was not really wise, although he was thought wise by many, and wiser still by himself."[28]

The reactions to the referendums on ratification in France and the Netherlands paid testimony to the impotence of the enthusiasts of fiction, to their bewildered surprise and to their helplessness desire to drift on following the same course. "Let us continue the process of ratification!" This encounter with reality turned out to be quite a disappointing experience. It did not, however, change the attitude of the politician-advocates. The Polish minister of the exterior, Adam Daniel Rotfeld, had this to say: "It is in our interest for the train of the European Union to continue to move ahead towards a new and solidary European unity."[29]A rather unclear expression, filled with generalities and strange phraseology. In the end, however, if we take a broader look, we can see that a certain type of argumentation repeats itself in the declarations made by the Euro-dogmatists: unity is what is expressed by the *telos* of European history, even if this is not apparent to the naked

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[28] Plato: *Apology,* translated by B. Jowett (http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/apology.html).
[29] "Gazeta Wyborcza" (11–12 June 2005).

eye. This unity actually makes up the more profound and hidden substance of the historical process. The potential of unity must be fully released. Unity is the truth which gives meaning to historical transformations. Karl Popper once called such views "historicism" and warned that the glorification of a historical necessity which reveals the power of a deeper hidden truth is not very beneficial to political intentions. The proponents of unity try to convince others that it is an indisputable goal, that it serves the realization of the most lofty values and principles. Their way of thinking is essentially normative. Little attention is paid to the facts. Jean Daniel, head of the weekly "Le Nouvel Observateur," commented after the referendum defeat that the constitution project in itself "represents progress for society: the constitutionalization of virtue."[30] The acknowledgment of "progress" as a sign of laudable necessity can provide the advocates of the idea with extremist-type arguments. Thus, Laurent Joffrin remarks that the French "non" is a sign of "utopia" and "intoxication with objection."[31] Opponents of the project are therefore "utopians." The project has become reality itself in an elevated form.

Everyday realities do not matter anymore. Ideas have become more important. There is truly something very "European" in this attitude. Frederick Nietzsche pointed out that the modern European "absolutely requires a costume: he needs history as a storeroom of costumes. To be sure, he notices that none of the costumes fit him properly - he changes and changes. We are the first studious age *in puncto* of "costumes," I mean as concerns morals, articles of belief, artistic tastes, and religions; we are prepared as no other age has ever been for a carnival in the grand style."[32]

These "costumes" are propitious for making a career. In a democracy, in fact, criticism does not play too large a role.

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[30] J. Daniel: *L'Europe blessée*, "Le Nouvel Observateur" 2005, no. 2117.
[31] L. Joffrin: *La France revoltée, ibidem.*
[32] F. Nietzsche: *op. cit.*, p. 216.

Panegyric thinking becomes emblematic. Alexis de Tocqueville pointed this out quite a long time ago. "The majority," he remarked, "lives in the perpetual utterance of self-applause."[33] Flattery takes the lead role. Those invested with power demand adoration. "Moliere criticized the courtiers in the plays that were acted before the court. But the ruling power in the United States is not to be made a game of. [...] everything must be made the subject of encomium."[34] Truths anointed by the gods of authority become untouchable. "I know of no country," writes Tocqueville, "in which there is so little independence of mind and real freedom of discussion as in America."[35] Thought becomes flattery primarily because thought must revolve around one axis. In a democratic society, Tocqueville continues, "there is but one element of strength and success, with nothing beyond it."[36]

Authentic meaning is given only to that which has been anointed in the sanctuary of authority. The democratic system for determining a hierarchy (elections!) makes leaders of those who have been chosen. It is they who incarnate the "moral power of the majority." In the end, the glorification of the majority leads to the glorification of its representatives. In a democratic society the politician becomes the most important figure. This corresponds also with the desires and expectations of the people. In adulating the politicians the "majority" adulates itself.

"In general, every one who rises without [the people's] aid seldom obtains their favor."[37] Desires, sentiments and thoughts become imprisoned in the mechanisms of politics: "In America the majority raises formidable barriers around the liberty of opinion. Within these barriers an author may write what he pleases, but woe to him if he goes beyond them."[38] Thus, flattery should not

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[33] A. de Tocqueville: *Democracy in America,* translated by H. Reeve, Sever and Francis, Cambridge 1864, p. 339.
[34] *Ibidem.*
[35] *Ibidem,* p. 337.
[36] *Ibidem.*
[37] *Ibidem,* p. 256.
[38] *Ibidem,* p. 337.

be understood as an inclination which deforms characters. Rather it is something which deforms the world view. Panegyric thought signifies the reduction and constriction of its borders. Essentially, only what lies in accordance with the "anointed" view is important; only that which has been validated by a way of thinking which has been elevated onto the pedestal of authority. It is only in such a world that opposition to the *Constitutional Treaty* could have been treated as a symptom of "utopian" inclinations.

*Translated by Paweł Janowski*

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