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## *Tertium non datur?* Wildness and Methodology

Of the two themes of this paper, i.e., wildness and methodology, the latter will come first. This does not mean that it will attempt either to tame or to dominate, or to eclipse wildness. I will start by highlighting a methodological issue and then will seek support from the wild *via* certain analogies. The methodological question that will be brought up surfaced at a departmental meeting with a paper on the marvellous, the feminine, and magic realism by Mary Macullan from the University of North London. During our discussion regarding the problem of the manifestation of the marvellous the discussants divided themselves into two opposing groups whose stances could be epitomized as the emphasis on *difference*, on the one hand, and the emphasis on *similarity* on the other hand.

According to the first group, the similar instances of the marvellous in different cultures are radically and irrevocably different in the sense of manifesting an incompatibility of the categories of those cultures. *Beowulf*, for example, cannot be a manifestation of the same *marvellous* which is embodied in the tales of the South American magical realism. We could say that this stance acts on the principle that no instances of similarity can overpower the differences that accompany them, to the extent that could allow generalizing claims of sameness. The other stance acts on a radically opposite principle, namely that the various instances of difference cannot thwart the fundamental similarity as the basis of systematizing generalizations. On this view, the various manifestations of the marvellous, despite the differences, are similar in the sense of manifesting some common pattern (what we called, by an operational metaphor, an archetypal similarity). Following this stance, the marvellous in *Beowulf*, or say in Ursula Leguin, and in magical realism of South American prose, shares something in common, however ineffable or sublime that something might be.

It is quite obvious that the first stance – the one emphasizing difference – does not renounce similarity as a critical principle. On the contrary, we see the exponents of this stance move between the most distant textual lands for the sake of engineering a bricolage of analogies and similarities. There is one condition, however, which must be observed. These similarities have to be *contingent* and not *necessary*, i.e., they must be incidental, annulling a hypothetical underlying system to prove that globalizing systems do not exist. In other words, they must not be generic similarities which confirm the existence of a totalizing systemic force. Just like the first stance does not renounce similarity, so the second stance – the one emphasizing similarity – does not renounce difference, but uses it as the principle of semantic discrimination within its grids, typologies, and genealogies. Unlike in the case of the first stance, however, these differences must be ruled by *necessity* and not by *contingency*, i.e., in the Saussurean manner they must represent the system itself.

Now, there are two kinds of error which both these stances may commit. First, that error could be primarily ethical, i.e., it could consist in the totalitarian imposition of the globalizing necessity by those who believe in the System, and of the hypocritical pretence of those who denounce all truth (or the possibility of truth), the System including, and at the same time claim that their opponents are wrong. Secondly, the error could consist in the denial or neglect to acknowledge that both positions find their ultimate semblance in the Kantian predicament, i.e., that in *both* cases the structures of mind, of perception, of cognition and recognition (or whatever more or less technical or poetic way one chooses to call them) determine the constitution of the constructed object. The result of these errors is a polarization of stances leading to their incompatibility and incommensurability. If those errors are avoided, however, the impending polarization will give way to a contestation of the logic of duality.

Let us briefly reiterate. Of the two methodological positions I described at the beginning, the first relies on necessity while the second on contingency. Yet, unless the exponents of the two stances stand by the errors mentioned above, no radical contradiction between them is established. For the opposition between them is not the opposition between extremities of *the same* qualities or values, like that between the necessity of difference and contingency of difference, or between the necessity of similarity and contingency of similarity. On the contrary, while their strong principles, which are the necessity of difference (systematicity) on the one hand, and contingency of similarity (fragmentation, incidentality) on the other hand, remain as central methodological determinants of two extreme poles, there remains a whole spectrum of floating relations of difference and similarity between those two poles. It happens so because the assumption of the former stance (i.e., the necessity of difference) does not in fact exclude the contingency of similarity, even though it relegates it from the centre of its attention; and *vice versa*, the assumption of the second stance (the contingency of similarity) does not exclude the

necessity of difference, but likewise relegates it to the margins of its vision. And it is: exactly this slight deviation, a slight curve, an oscillation within the opposition of the two stances – consisting in a clash of necessity and contingency, but a clash relating to two different values – that contests the *tertium non datur* principle and circumscribes an area of common inquiry.

Two interim observations suggest themselves at this stage. First, on a microscale, one notices that – despite appearances – the relation between the two stances is not based on mutual exclusion or incommensurability. While they remain in opposition on many levels of reference, they also share an area of potential consensus. Rather than as a polarized dichotomy or a binary opposition we should look at those stances as determinants of a *methodological spectrum*. Secondly, on a macroscale, if one were to risk a generalization, the floating relation between the two axes of the opposition (necessity–contingency; difference–similarity) accounts for the continuity, or what Barthes calls *glissement*, between structuralism and poststructuralism (the former, roughly speaking, relying on the necessity of difference, while the latter on the contingency of similarity), and explains why these two discursive formations cannot, in fact, be seen as separated by radical breach.

What has been said so far seems pretty civilised, and it is only here that wildness comes in by way of a certain analogy. This analogy is neither directly conceptual nor directly structural, but is based on the ability of the wild to resist the regime of the *tertium non datur* principle, which, as we have seen, was also overcome by the floating relation of contingency and necessity in our methodological question.

The word “wild” is internally rifted and fissured from within in a way which suggests its particular usefulness for subverting the logic of duality. First, and paradoxically, the word Wild is more civilised than any other word: it not only tames reality, as does any other word, but also immediately, in one gesture, tames that which it proclaims untamed (the wild). To name a fragment of reality (to call it wild, for example) is first to isolate and identify it and then to subdue it to our linguistic will, to tame it, or as some of us would say, to colonize it. We might pastiche Heidegger’s “naming is calling”<sup>1</sup> into “naming is taming”. The wild existed truly only at the state of untamed, undifferentiated wildness before the existence of the word, i.e., before the possibility of the Other. But then, it did not know it was so wild, it did not know it was wild at all. Only naming made it knowingly wild, but unknowingly tamed. Naming is calling, naming is taming. Wild is thus also richer even than those words, which posit their oppositions only for the sake

<sup>1</sup> Martin Heidegger, “Language”, in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. A. Hofstadter (New York: Harper and Row, 1971).

of their own becoming, but then annihilate those oppositions as invalid (for example, in the poststructuralist discourse *metaphorical* posits *literal* in order to establish its own distinctiveness only to encroach on the semantic terrain of this posited opposition and to monopolize that terrain without exception, thus leaving *literal* empty). In the case of Wild the conflict occurs *within* the word, and wildness, albeit retained, is also re-tained. Wildness as a concept contains in itself its own contradiction and thus of itself contradicts the laws of binary logic.

Despite the doubts, or perhaps because of the doubts regarding its clear-cut nature, one feels the need to find a pivotal point which might become a point of reference for the distinction between the cultured/human and wild as the other. That point of reference could be memory, or teleology, or regularity, or in fact any of the connotative values that enter into semantic play within the opposition; none of those mentioned, however, seems to be able to perform that pivotal role. A factor capable of a radical and definitive insight must come from the utmost moment of existence, and that factor – which also touches other related concepts such as language, interpretation, or being – is *the invention of death* as a cultural caesura between two eschatologically separate domains.

A very strong impulse to posit the awareness of death as the pivotal indication of what is appropriately human as opposed to the other (or, metaphorically speaking, to the wild), comes, of course, from Heidegger. His concepts of *Sein-zum-Tode* (Being-towards-Death) and of the profound awe (*Angst*) the awareness of death evokes, determine the authenticity of human existence and differentiate it from OTHER ways of being. But there is an even stronger and more radical impulse which, given its essential dyadicity, comes from an unexpected direction, namely from the poetry of W. B. Yeats:

#### *Death*

Nor dread nor hope attend a dying animal;  
A man awaits his end  
Dreading and hoping all;  
Many times he died, Many times rose again.  
A great man in his pride  
Confronting murderous men  
Casts derision upon  
Supersession of breath;  
Man knows death to the bone —  
Man has created death.

This is primarily a political poem inspired by the assassination of Kevin O'Higgins, Vice-President of the Irish Free State. Let us, however, disregard its political and historical reference and concentrate only on the general judgements that Yeats makes, i.e., on the first couplet and the last line of the poem: "Nor dread nor hope attend a dying animal . . . Man has created death."

Here, it is not even the awareness (as in Heidegger), but the invention, the creation of death that distinguishes man from beast. By positing death as a human invention Yeats reinstates the perennial western dichotomy and introduces a radical opposition between the civilized (cultured, linguistic, semiotic) and the non-civilized, i.e., the wild, which does not differentiate between phases of the organic processes occurring in the world, supersession of breath including.

This anthropocentric and dichotomous attitude is confirmed in at least two other poems by Yeats ("The Tower" and "Vaccillation") and also in "The Death of a Hare" where death and wildness actually come together:

*The Death of a Hare*

I have pointed out the yelling pack,  
The hare leap to the wood,  
And when I pass a compliment  
Rejoice as lover should  
At the drooping of an eye,  
At the mantling of the blood.

Then suddenly my heart is wrung  
By her distracted air  
And I remember wildness lost  
And after, swept from there,  
Am set down standing in the wood  
At the death of the hare.

Here, the death of a hare is wildness lost. But the equation of death with the loss of wildness can occur only from the perspective of man: of the one who invented death as the ultimate moment of life. For man, the invention of death as finality entails the concept of necessity, while for the animal – if we impose our anthropomorphic categories again – dying is in a sense a matter of contingency which does not eliminate one from nature, even though it does involve a supersession of breath; organic processes continue to take place embracing the dying-dead organism, albeit differently. By pointing to the eschatological difference between man and beast, i.e., between the order of civilization and the order of the wild, Yeats draws the polar opposition between the necessary and the contingent.

Let us now take a brief look at another poem about man, death and beast, which, however, overpowers the polar duality established by Yeats' "Death".

*Kot w pustym mieszkaniu*

Umrzeć – tego nie robi się kotu.  
Bo co ma począć kot  
w pustym mieszkaniu.  
Wdrapywać się na ściany.  
Ocierać między meblami.  
Nic tu niby nie zmienione,

a jednak pozamieniane.  
 Nic nie przesunięte,  
 a jednak porozsuwane.  
 I wieczorami lampa już nie świeci.

Słyszać kroki na schodach,  
 ale to nie te.  
 Ręka, co kładzie rybę na talerzyk,  
 także nie ta co kładła.

Coś się tu nie zaczyna  
 o swojej zwykłej porze.  
 Coś się tu nie odbywa  
 jak powinno.  
 Ktoś tutaj był i był,  
 a potem nagle zniknął  
 i uporczywie go nie ma.

Do wszystkich szaf się zajrzało.  
 Przez półki przebiegło.  
 Wcisnęło się pod dywan i sprawdziło.  
 Nawet złamało zakaz  
 i rozrzuciło papiery.  
 Co więcej jest do zrobienia.  
 Spać i czekać.

Niech-no on tylko wróci,  
 niech-no się pokaze.  
 Już on się dowie,  
 że tak z kotem nie można.  
 Będzie się szło w jego stronę  
 jakby się wcale nie chciało,  
 pomalutku,  
 na bardzo obrażonych łapach.  
 I żadnych skoków pisków na początek.

*[A Cat in an Empty Flat*

To die – you don't do that to a cat.  
 For what should a cat do  
 In an empty flat.  
 Climb the walls.  
 Rub its back against furniture.  
 Nothing has changed – it seems,  
 but it has.  
 Nothing has been moved – it seems,  
 but it has been.  
 And the lamp is out at night.

One hears footsteps on the stairs,  
 but not the footsteps.  
 Nor is the hand that puts the fish on the plate  
 the one that used to be.

Something here does not begin  
 at the usual time.  
 Something does not happen  
 as it should.  
 Someone was here, and was,  
 and then suddenly was no more  
 and persistently is not here.

One has looked into the wardrobes.  
 One has run through all the shelves.  
 One has squeezed oneself under the carpet to check.  
 One has even done the forbidden  
 and scattered the papers.  
 What else can one do.  
 Sleep and wait.

But let him just come,  
 let him just show himself here.  
 He will soon find out  
 such things are not done to the cat.  
 One will walk towards him  
 as if one did not want to at all, -  
 very slowly,  
 feet sulking.  
 And no jumping, miaowing at the start.]

The strategy of the poem relies on an internally incongruent persona. Even though the monologue is in the third person, and in spite of its anthropomorphic tinge, the speaker in the poem is the cat describing its own experience of absence. The first line – despite an apparently impersonal tenor – is integrated into the monologue’s unity and reflects the cat’s awareness of death (“To die – you don’t do that to a cat”). As we proceed, however, that awareness of death is put into question, particularly in the third stanza and especially through its final stylization of naiveté (“Someone was here, and was, and then suddenly was no more”). Eventually, the last lines reflect the cat’s innocence of the knowledge of death (“But let him just come . . . etc.”). What occurs in the poem is an anthropomorphization of the cat through the projection of a human perspective (after all, as Yeats suggests, it is man who has created death) – a kind of a taming of the cat (wild) – and at the same time a rejection of that perspective. In effect, the dichotomy man–cat, or more generally: civilised–other, is broken and fuzziness retrospectively dominates the poem. The epitome of this fuzziness, and a foretoken of the contestation of binarity, are the four pre-final lines of the first stanza (“Nothing has changed – it seems, but it has”).

If the Yeats’ poem foregrounds death as the radical mark of humanity, Szyborska’s poem – while subtly confirming the anthropomorphicity of death – at the same time circumscribes a terrain common and undistinguishable to man and the other (the cat, the wild). Yeats establishes death as a binary logic of the



difference BETWEEN; Szymborska establishes death as a cojoining difference, a difference which not only demands, but also entails similarity, or in other words a difference WITHIN. When referred to the theoretical question posed at the beginning of this paper, Yeats illustrates the methodology of polarity: looking through his glasses at the two stances described earlier one would be determined to discern only oppositions. Szymborska, on the other hand, is a methodologist of the spectrum: while only subtly signalling the binarity of the poles, she most of all explores the illogical terrain between them. It is this wild terrain of the spectrum, which contests the *tertium non datur* principle, that I want to postulate as the area of our exploration.