

Vladimir Biti

**The Fissured Identity of Literature: The Birth of National
Literary History out of International Cultural Transfers
(Abstract)**

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The genre of national literary history was an invention of Friedrich Schlegel, who in his *History of the Old and the New Literature*, a series of lectures delivered in 1812 at the University of Vienna, presented the ethnolinguistic and historical singularity of German literature in the historical frame of other and older national literatures. It was born from a bitter political frustration ensuing from the recent collapse of the German Empire in 1806 and aimed to serve the consolidation of the shaken German national self. Offering resistance to Europe-wide cultural expansion of French culture throughout the eighteenth century and searching for international allies to strengthen that resistance, German »dominated nationalism« (Balibar) displayed a strong interlocking inclination. In the course of the international expansion and institutionalization of French »literary cosmopolitanism«, the hegemonic class universalism of the latter's inaugurators was dismantled, which the leading German intellectuals attempted to counter precisely by introducing national literary history as a new basis for international solidarity. That is to say, even though it was national, it reclaimed cosmopolitanism in the form of a peaceful coexistence of autonomous nations, as opposed to the French republican universalism that sells national values at the same time as it denies its national determination. It affirmed the right to self-determination of all nations put under similar assimilatory pressure. Hence contrary to Casanova's strong opposition of the bright-minded French cosmopolitan and the narrow-minded German national literature, her putative opposites are inextricably interrelated and captured in a mutually conditioned relationship.

Yet even if it offers a resource for effective collective action and mutual support among the less powerful, the advocacy of ethnic solidarity at the same time forges an instrument of the powerful exclusion or at least marginalization of others. While German national literary history, establishing a new ethnolinguistic basis, assimilates co-nationals diffused over foreign countries, it dissimilates non-national fellow-citizens at home. This equivocation forms the gist of its *trauma narrative* pattern (Alexander): Even if on the one hand it triggers significant repairs in the civil fabric, on the other hand it simultaneously instigates new rounds of social suffering. In becoming a multidirectionally connectable platform for collectivities established by traumatic experience that begin to support and enforce each other across social, cultural, and historical boundaries, the pattern of national literary history gradually develops huge symbolic power of its own. Invented by the »engineers« of social memory for the primary sake of reconciliation and consolidation its self-rescuing maneuver sets in motion horrific group conflicts. As a matter of fact, German Romanticists promoted German language as the platform of unification and consolidation of the homeless, »humiliated and insulted« individuals and nations at the beginning of the nineteenth century, trusting that it would become universal currency for all foreign spiritual wares and that Germans would concomitantly take over the command of the world partition of symbolic values. For a nation that pretends to set global terms for the huge diversity of other nations, limitless cosmopolitan adaptability to the changing international context is the most cherished property.

The pattern of national literary history thus paves the way for the gradual transformation of the German *Volksgeist* from the subservient local enabler into a self-propelling global agency in the relentless search for genuine distinction and comparative advantage in the international cultural space. To make Germany into the key agency of human history, German Romanticist intellectuals engaged in the huge mission of turning other nations into its enablers. The latter were, in the narrative pattern of national literary history, presented only as the continuous backdrop of the march of German emancipation into the future. German nationally oriented cosmopolitanism thus imperceptibly acquired the same profile that characterized its fierce opponent. Having accumulated national »symbolic capital« in an enormous acceleration of the opponent's speed as demonstrated throughout the 18th century, it raised an analogous claim for imperial domination. Inventing affinity between the German past and present as well as co-nationals at home and abroad, national literary history established an imaginary »community of fate« (*Schicksalsgemeinschaft*) urging all Germans to gain close acquaintance with its legacy. But some of them were unable to fulfill this task. This is how new schisms were introduced into a story written with a unifying intention, such as the division between the true and the false national spiritual tradition. The false tradition is, in Friedrich Schlegel's interpretation, significantly represented by literary works unable to qualify for the leading principle of Germanness because they are devoid of the sacred national memory that is »the most excellent business of literature«. In lieu of being united around the allegedly merely *reconstructed* genuine national spirit, the Germany forcefully *constructed* through literature was finally divided into proper and improper Germans.

Yet the fierce resistance of German national literary history to the universalist model of the French Republic of Letters was not an exclusively German enterprise, nor a completely pioneering one, as it was pre-designed by the French dissident Rousseau a good half-century earlier. As Rousseau's rebellion against the shortcomings of French »national cosmopolitanism« takes place within the French culture and not outside it, I take it as a welcome reminder that national cultures are never homogeneous and that an all-too-easy opposition between French and German concepts of the age has to be reintroduced into each of these alleged opposites. A continuous clash between the processes of *Vergesellschaftung* (the uniting diversification of society) and *Vergemeinschaftung* (the disuniting homogenization of its particular groups and communities), characteristic of all modern nations, inhered to both of them enabling alliances with remote and unknown foreigners along various axes. Contrary to its reclaimed consistency, French cosmopolitanism was torn apart by internal national antagonisms, not only between Rousseau and Voltaire but also between the two rebels Rousseau and Mme de Staël, as I try to demonstrate in some detail. Whatever its basis turns out to be – (inter)national, (inter)cultural or (inter)confessional – no cosmopolitan or national alliance is smooth, uncontroversial and permanent. Despite their systematically produced homogeneous appearance, all trauma narratives remain equivocal and conflict-ridden composites.

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