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RENE' WELLEK *

REMO CESERANI

In the following pages, *Theory of Literature*, Third ed. (New York : Harcourt Brace and Co., 1962), is quoted as *TL*; *Concepts of Criticism* (New Haven : Yale University Press, 1963), as *CC*; *Essays on Czech Literature* (The Hague : Mouton, 1963), as *ECL*.

This portrait— it should be said frankly from the very outset— will be very imprecise, and while it will try to delineate certain features of the figure, will leave others in the shade. This is mainly due to the fault of the writer who does not have the tools (not even the linguistic ones) to follow Wellek into the highly varied areas of his experience and knowledge. There is, however, another less manifest reason for the indeterminateness of this portrait. While reading Wellek's numerous writings and the many that speak about him (and also reading among the writings of Wellek some perfect "intellectual portraits" of philosophers and critics) the author of these pages has felt, more than on other occasions, the enormous difficulties that one encounters in tracing an intellectual portrait of a personage of our times who has lived at the center of a rich interlacing of cultural experiences, of relations with often very different environments, of ideological and emotional commitments, friendships, loyalties, polemics in the midst of profound tensions. And he has perceived that in order to fill the lacunae it is not enough to have approached his "subject," who have spoken with him, to have seen him living among his students and colleagues, to have felt cordial admiration and sympathy for him.

... ...

(Nine pages on the Italian reaction to Wellek are left out.)

* Translated from the Italian paper, published in *Belfagor*, Vol. XXV. No. 5, 30 September 1969 PP. 547-78.

Let us try to briefly delineate an "intellectual history" of René Wellek. He was born in Vienna on August 22, 1903, of parents who were not Austrian. His father Bronislav came from Prague; though an official in the Austrian administration, he felt himself to be strongly tied to his original fatherland and culture (among other things, he wrote the first biography of the composer Smetana and translated poems of Vrchlicky and of Machar into German), and he returned to Prague with his family in 1918 after the fall of the Empire. If from the side of his father the motif of attachment to national culture (accompanied by liberal and humanitarian sentiments), typical of much cultured bourgeoisie of the nineteenth century, prevailed, from the side of his mother, the motif of cosmopolitanism, corresponding more than to ideological choice, to the experiences of many members of the European aristocratic classes, seemed to prevail. The daughter of a noble Prussian (of Polish origin) and of a Swiss lady of Schaffhausen, René Wellek's mother was born in Rome in 1881. In Wellek's family the Protestant religion predominated, in conformity with the sentiments of his mother and grandmother (a fact of noteworthy importance, the family being Czech.)

After finishing his studies in a Prague *gymnasium*, the young Wellek entered the Caroline University of Prague, registering in courses of English and Germanic philology. Prague was culturally very much alive as a city and the Caroline University included among its professors some figures of considerable importance. There was the great critic F. X. Salda, professor of Western literatures, who had done much to renovate the study of Czechoslovak literature, going through its tradition with a modern taste, rearranging many values and contributing to encourage the new literature of the early twentieth century.[1] The germanist Otokar Fischer was there, author of books on Kleist, Nietzsche and Heine (besides being a good translator, poet and man of the theater). He was very much interested in psychological problems (and also, among the first in Europe, in psychoanalysis) and was concerned with the reflections which the convolutions and ambiguities of the psyche have on literature even on the formal aspects of literature.[2] Vilém Mathesius was there, professor of English and a brilliant linguist, founder a few years later of the Linguistic Circle of Prague. The young Wellek, attracted by the most "modern" among his teachers, already from that

1. Wellek writes extensively on Salda in *ECL*, pp. 179-87. 2. Wellek has written on Fischer and his works in Czech periodicals and, on the occasion of his death, in a profile for the *Slavonic Review*, XVII (1938), pp. 215-18.

time felt an instinctive aversion for those studies of a positivistic nature, cultivated in the more retrogressive academic sectors of the University. He also showed marked interest for the technical, linguistic and stylistic study of the literary work (following the powerful, inspiring example of Mathesius) and for the study of philosophical problems (the Kantian and Herbartian tradition was prevalent in Prague, but Masaryk had introduced some of the themes of Anglo-Saxon philosophy). He made two trips to England for research and study in 1924 and 1925, and, in June 1926, he received his doctorate, writing a thesis on *Thomas Carlyle and Romanticism.* In the meantime, he had already begun to contribute to Czech literary journals, with articles and reviews on Shakespeare, Byron, Shelley, Vrchlickly, Heine, Tennyson, and on the *History of English Literature* by Legouis and Cazamian.

Wellek spent 1927 in England, doing research in the British Museum on what was to become his Habilitation thesis: *Immanuel Kant in England.* In September of 1927 he left for the United States to become a Procter Fellow at the Princeton Graduate School. His aim was to specialize in English literature and to return to Prague as a professor of that subject. He therefore followed the courses of Thomas M. Parrott, Charles G. Osgood, R. K. Root, and Morris W. Croll. This latter man (who concerned himself with stylistics and metrics, had written a study on the prose of *Euphues* and a little later was to publish a very fine study on the style of English Baroque prose) made a most vivid impression on the young Czech. Still in 1960 Wellek recalled, with appealing irony, Croll's efforts to teach him the so-called musical theory of English metrics (today generally declining in popularity both with critics and with linguists) : "When I was a student at Princeton thirty years ago, one of my teachers, Morris Croll, who was, incidentally, one of the finest students of stylistics... (especially seventeenth century prose style), in this country taught me musical metrics. But I was always restive... ."[3] On the cultural atmosphere of the studious and secluded Princeton there blew the gentle breezes of the New Humanism, the literary movement of Babbitt and More, who had retired to live in his neoplatonic hermitage precisely at Princeton. An aristocratic vision of culture was typical of the New Humanism, together with a violent polemic against all of the literary movements of the nineteenth century, from romanticism, to

3. R. Wellek, "Closing Statement," in *Style in Language*, edited by Th. A. Sebeok, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1960, p. 414. Cf. also *TL*, pp. 224-26.

naturalism, determinism, and to scientific positivism. They had a classicistic— in Eliot's sense— and severely ethical conception of man and experienced a sense of revolt against the new industrial and democratic civilization, and a strong need to escape to a more serene and ordered world than the turbulent one in which they lived. The young Wellek, who had felt the touch of similar breezes in Prague (the Protestant and liberal tradition founded on a strictly ethical conception of education and self-control, but above all —in literature and in historical studies—a strong impatience with the pedantry and worship of facts typical of the positivists), showed some interest in the neohumanistic milieu.[4]

Since, for the moment, there was no opening for a professor of English at the University of Prague, Wellek decided to remain in the United States for two more years, as an instructor of German at Smith College (1928–29) and at Princeton (1929-30).[5] Then in 1930, he returned to his homeland. He left behind himself a country rocked by a very grave social, economic and ideological crisis and a literary milieu that was stirred by deep polemics ; the volume-manifesto of the neohumanists *Humanism and America*, edited by Norman Foerster and with essays by Foerster, Babbitt, More, T. S. Eliot, etc. came out precisely in the year 1930 ; and also the counter-volume, *The Critique of Humanism*, edited by C. Hartley Grattan, with essays by critics who adhered to Marxism or, at any rate, who were more interested in social problems, like Edmund Wilson and Lewis Mumford, appeared ; and in that same year the volume of the "Southern Agrarians," the first nucleus of the New Critics, *I'll Take My Stand*, was published.

After a new sojourn in London, Wellek returned to Prague in 1930, taking with him the manuscript of the book *Immanuel Kant in England* (published in 1931 by Princeton University Press), which permitted him to become Docent of the history of English literature at the University of Prague. During the preceding years, he had only sent to Prague journals a brief article on English

4. Later on, Wellek tried to indicate the bond that kept the various antipositivistic movements united (assigning to Croce a preeminent place, of chronological anteriority) in the Yale lecture of 1946: "The Revolt against Positivism in Recent European Literary Scholarship," in *CC*, pp. 256—81 (to be completed for the American part with certain pages of the esasy "American Literary Scholarship," in *CC*, particularly pp. 304-305. in which Wellek advances certain criticisms of the New Humanism).

5. "Comparative Literature Today," in *Comparative Literature*, XVII (1965), p. 326.

universities and another, also brief, on the differences between American and Czechoslovak universities. But now, he came back into full touch with the culture of his own country. At thê University, as a teacher of English, he presided over the instruction of that language; he published many articles on English and American literature in reviews and newspapers (on the medieval poem *The Pearl*, on the poetic theories of Wordsworth and Coleridge, on Blake, Oscar Wilde, Yeats, T. S. Eliot, on Joyce and on many contemporary novels;) he also translated into Czech novels of Conrad and D. H. Lawrence. But above all, and this was his most important intellectual adventure, he came into direct contact with the Linguistic Circle of Prague, founded by Mathesius in 1926, which was in full bloom at that time. Roman Jakobson had brought the ideas of the Russian formalists to Prague; Jan Mukarovsky had amply developed them in the domain of literary theory, conceived by him to be a part of the general theory of signs (semiotics), and had also faced the problem of the relations between literature and society and of literary history as being a working area which should be kept strictly distinct from criticism. Wellek followed all of those discussions with interest but greeted Mukarovsky's theories with some reservations,[6] and when he contributed to the *Travaux du Circle linguistique de Prague* (VI [1936], pp. 173-91) an essay dedicated precisely to the problem of literary history ("The Theory of Literary History") he tried to take a median position between the extreme demands of the formalists and the historiographical ideas of the historical tradition.

In 1935, after spending five years in Prague, Wellek moved to London, as a lecturer of Czech language and literature at the School of Slavonic Studies of the University of London. His studies on Czech literature or on the relations between Czech and English literature mainly date back to this period. His conference at the School on February 25, 1936, "The Cultural Situation in Czechoslovakia" (in *Slavonic Review*, XIV [1935-36], pp. 622-38), is important in offering an overall view of the culture of his country (the organization of schools, the formation of cultural *élites*, the diffusion of mass culture, etc.). He

6. An echo of these perplexities in *ECL*, p. 190; *TL*, pp. 200 and 339; *CC*, pp. 48--49, 279--80. As is known, Mukarovsky later embraced Marxism (eliciting harsh comments from Wellek; Cf. *ECL*, pp. 195--97). On the entire question of the Prague Circle Wellek has written a long article, "The Literary Theory and Aesthetics of the Prague School," in *Michigan Slavic Contributions* (ed. L. Matejka), Ann Arbor, 1969, recently published.

intended to remain in London for a few years to conduct research for his book *The Rise of English Literary History*, which was in preparation (a note on the subject : from a theoretical discussion on the possibility of writing a literary history, Wellek passes to an examination of the literary histories already written, beginning with seventeenth century England). Wellek's contacts with Prague periodicals continued to be very frequent, and in addition to the article on the *Travaux* he published essays and reviews, generally on English topics, in various journals of his city.

In England, Cambridge was the most lively center of literary discussions. I. A. Richards (*Principles of Literary Criticism*, 1924; *Coleridge on Imagination*, 1934) had already left Cambridge, however, and after a series of trips and a sojourn in China, he was about to establish himself in the other Cambridge, across the Atlantic. His young disciple, William Empson (*Seven Types of Ambiguity*, 1930; *Some Versions of Pastoral*, 1935) had also fallen victim to the *mal d' Orient*, and desired a change of air. Both, at any rate, had left profound marks on the Cambridge literary scene. And both, because of the importance they attributed to poetic language and to verbal analysis, had the power of attracting the interest of Wellek, who was fresh from the linguistic experiences of Prague. However, he could accept neither the experimental psychology of Richards nor the enthusiasm for Marxism and psychoanalysis which permeated Empson's second book. Moreover, there were F. R. Leavis (*New Bearings in English Poetry*, 1932; *Revaluation*, 1936) and the whole group gathered around the review *Scrutiny*, founded by Leavis in 1932. The new poetic taste elaborated by Eliot and the technique of verbal analysis developed by Richards were combined in the criticism of Leavis and gave excellent results, allying themselves with a strong ethical sense of Arnoldian provenience.

Wellek referred to the work of Richards, Empson, and Leavis (evidently the most interesting critics in the English panorama for him) in an article for the review of the Prague Linguistic Circle, *Slovo a Slovesnost*, III [1937], pp. 108–21. But he also had more direct contacts with Leavis. When *Revaluation* was published, he wrote a brief article entitled "Literary Criticism and Philosophy," which appeared in *Scrutiny* together with Leavis' answer (cf. *Scrutiny*, V [1937], pp. 375–83). While acknowledging Leavis' many merits, Wellek accused him of using terms without rigorously defining them and of expressing

unsubstantiated judgments. Leavis answered (Cf. now *The Common Pursuit,* London, Penguin Books, 1966, pp. 211-22) making a distinction between criticism and philosophy. He evidently intuited the presence of a *fahrender Scholast,* the subtle logician, in the young Czech, and he proclaimed : "Dr. Wellek is a philosopher." He added that "words in poetry invite us, not to 'think about' and judge, but to 'feel into' them and 'become'—to realize a complex experience that is given in the words." In spite of this polemical exchange, Wellek was later invited to contribute to *Scrutiny* with some reviews. One must not forget, however, that among the English critics who attracted Wellek's attention, next to those of Cambridge, there was the Oxford critic F. W. Bateson, author in 1934 of an important book, *English Poetry and the English Language.* Bateson's conception of a literary history marked by linguistic rather than social changes, and his reevaluation of Baroque English poetry must have appeared to Wellek in some respects closer (even if independent) to some of the experiences of the Russian and Czech critics.

The years of sojourn in England were also those in which Wellek felt himself to be most directly involved in political life. While Hitler fanned the flames on the question of the Sudeten, and German propaganda aired dusty nationalistic and racial myths, Wellek wrote an article for the journal *German Life and Letters,* II (October 1937), pp. 14-24, on "German and Czechs in Bohemia" now in *ECL,* pp. 71-80; cf. also the review to K. Bittner, "Deutsche und Tschechen," in *Slavonic Review* XVI [1937-38], pp. 481-84), in which he defended the peaceful and liberal policy of his country toward its racial minorities. There are other studies connected with the political atmosphere, of a literary though unusual, character for Wellek, such as the extensive one on "Bohemia in English Literature" (1937, now in *ECL,* pp. 81-147) in which he patiently reconstructs the image of Bohemia entertained by the English through the centuries.

The Munich episode (September 1938) was a serious blow for Wellek. Chamberlain's concession filled him with indignation. The myth of Masaryk had been brutally broken into pieces. "I could not think of returning to Prague," he says, "nor of staying in England after the Munich capitulation. In June of 1939, I emigrated permanently to the United States."

In America Wellek established himself, first as a lecturer and then as professor of English, at the University of Iowa, where Norman Foerster, the

neohumanist scholar, was the director of the School of Letters. Among his colleagues, there was a congenial friend, Austin Warren. A scholar of English and American literature, author of several fine essays (afterwards gathered in the volume *Rage for Order*, 1948), Warren had been one of Babbitt's students and had met More at Princeton, but had then moved to a position that was very close to T. S. Eliot's and to that of the New Critics (very much on the rise in those years and already established in some important universities). One of the advantages of being at the University of Iowa was that of having at one's disposal a good journal, the *Philological Quarterly*, which was published there; Wellek wrote many articles and reviews for it. The war was shaking the world and deeply upsetting consciences. But the School of Letters of the University of Iowa was an oasis of peace and study, "a real intellectual community."[7] As Wellek recounts:

> The conflict between literary history and criticism was very acute and even bitter at Iowa. I still remember vividly how I and Austin Warren met a highly respected member of the department, a good historical scholar, and tried to suggest to him that, in writing about Milton and the English essay in the seventeenth century, he had also written some criticism. He turned red in his face and told us that it was the worst insult any body ever had given him. I was, by conviction and in the academic constellation of the place and time, classed as a critic and I collaborated, under Norman Foerster's editorship, in a volume, *Literary Scholarship*, published in 1941 by the University of North Carolina Press,......Mr. Warren (author of the chapter on "Literary Criticism") and myself were somewhat dissatisfied with the volume. We felt that we sailed under false colors. We could not endorse the neo-humanistic creed of the editor, though we shared most of his objections to current academic practices and enjoyed teaching the humanities courses which he devised. Homer, the Bible, Greek tragedy, Shakespeare, and Milton were taught to freshmen and sophomores in compulsory courses long before the present vogue of far-ranging world literature courses. I myself taught a course in the European novel, which started with Stendhal and Balzac and reached Proust and Mann via Dostoevsky and Tolstoy......

7. Austin Warren, Preface to *Rage for Order, op. cit.*, p. 111.

Theory of Literature was thus born as an attempt to reach a synthesis between the literary conceptions that Wellek had brought with him from Europe and the American ones elaborated in the circles of the New Critics, of which Austin Warren acted as bearer. Notwithstanding common aims, the differences between the two existed and were perceptible.[8] They did not try to conceal them and specified in the preface which of the two was principally responsible for the individual chapters. But it is clear that of the two, Wellek held the predominant position, as is also indicated by the order in which the two names appear on the title page ; one might infer that the conceptual structure, the very ordering of the chapters (with the distinction between "extrinsic methods" and "intrinsic study" of literature that caused so many discussions), were his. The last chapter of the book (already published separately in 1947), on "The Study of Literature in the Graduate School," contained an analysis of the serious defects in the programs and methods of study of literature in the United States and a number of suggestions for reform. It is a sign not only of the success of the book, but also of its profound harmony with the preoccupations and conceptions that were victoriously spreading in America, that in the second edition (1956) the authors judged that they could now omit it, "partly because some of the reforms suggested there have been accomplished in many places.[9]"

In the summer of 1946, Wellek moved from the University of Iowa to the far more prestigious Yale University. From 1947 to 1959 he was Chairman of the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures, but also, at the same time, director of the comparative literature program. In 1952, he was nominated Sterling Professor of Comparative Literature; in 1960 he became chairman of the

8. The third chapter, written by Warren, has a strong "Eliotic" tone, which seems to distinguish it from the rest of the book. And it is not by chance that the eighth chapter, on the relationships between psychology and literature, was written by Warren (although it may contain much information obtained, almost certainly, by Wellek). To have proof of the differences between the two critics, it is necessary only to compare two of their essays on the same subject : R. Wellek, "The Criticism of T. S. Eliot," in *Sewanee Review*, LXXIV [1956], pp. 398-443; A. Warren, "Eliot's Literary Criticism," in *Sewanee Review*, LXXIV [1966], pp. 272-92; that of Wellek is an attempt to systematize Eliot's ideas and to carefully evaluate his work as a critic; Warren's article is a fragmentary discussion (also written in different moments between 1940 and 1966), fully conformable to the thought of its author ("I can no longer quote, from his criticism, without dubiety whether I am paraphrasing him or expressing my own views.") with the explicit denial of any systematization.

Department of Comparative Literature, newly founded as an independent unit, and this is the position he still holds today. To describe his activity at Yale, still extremely intense, would be a long undertaking. It is enough to mention Wellek's activity as a professor of research, the many comparative literature theses prepared under his direction, his formation and selection of many young scholars, the always increasing influence exercised on the organisation of studies at Yale and other universities, the ever more frequent visits to various places in the United States and Europe for courses, conferences, and congresses, the work of direction and consultation engaged in for many authoritative periodicals (*Comparative Literature*, *Philological Quarterly*, *PMLA*, *Studies in English Literature*, *The Slavic Review*, etc.), the part he had in the organisation of the "American Comparative Literature Association" (of which Wellek served as President from 1961 to 1964). The general educational climate, in the meantime, had decidedly changed ; many of the ideals propounded by Wellek had begun to be realized (if anything, there were new and different dangers) : " In my own experience of the American academic scene, the contrast between the Princeton of 1927-28, where even eminent scholars seemed hardly aware of the issues of criticism, and Yale of 1962, where criticism and its problems are our daily bread and tribulation, is striking" ("Philosophy and Postwar American Criticism," in *CC*, p. 317).

During this whole period, the best energies of Wellek as a scholar were dedicated to the composition of his imposing *History of Modern Criticism*, which has now reached the completion of the fourth of the five or six contemplated volumes. Again there occurs a shift of interest from "theory" to "history". The plan of the *History* is ambitious (the tracing of the history of criticism between 1750 and 1950, in Germany, France, England, Italy, Russia, the United States and Spanish-speaking countries) and is carried forward with great energy.

The evolution of Wellek's intellectual history seems to obey the influence of two contrasting forces, that of attachment to his own roots (Czechoslovakia) and that of attraction toward cultural traditions of other countries (cosmopolitanism). Let us attempt to follow the two trails.

Czechoslovakia for Wellek is first of all a place of private memories, life experienced, friendships, etc. And I will not attempt to penetrate into this

area. But Czechoslovakia is also something more than a private experience. Prague, his former university, the cultural circles and reviews, are the places and symbols of a corner of Europe which many Europeans in the years between 1918 and 1928 looked upon with admiration. It was a republic rebuilt after centuries of dismemberment and enslavement, a peasant country in the process of strong industrial development, an example of a bourgeois and social-democratic state in the midst of countries that had fallen or were about to fall under the rule of fascist dictatorships, a tradition of liberalism, a crossroad of cultures, a sort of second European center of the artistic avant-gardes, after Paris : and seated on the chair of the Presidency of the Republic, a good father for all, a philosopher like the one in the *Republic* of Plato. It was easy to make it into a myth, a myth which had the benevolent face of Masaryk.

It is interesting to read Wellek's essay on Masaryk ("Masaryk's Philosophy", in *Ethics,* 55 [1945], pp. 298-304, now in *ECL,* pp. 62–70), an essay, it should be noted, that was written in 1945, that is during a moment in which the history of Czechoslovakia was about to move forward again after the terrible wounds sustained, but in a situation now very different, from which Wellek was not merely physically removed. Having decided to stay in America (he obtained American citizenship the following year), in that moment of laceration, Wellek tried to evoke the youthful myth once again. (But see also the review of "T. G. Masaryk" by Zdenek Nejedly, in *Slavonic Review,* 14 [1935-36], pp. 456-62). The essay presents itself as an "objective" profile that wishes to describe with rigor the positive and negative aspects of the figure under examination. But one feels it to be pervaded by an unusual concurrence and sympathy. In the absence of more direct expositions—written in the first person—of Wellek's philosophical-political ideology, one is tempted to read the essay as an exposition of *his* ideology, to be conjectured in filigree beneath the exposition of Masaryk's ideology. Given the differences (which are both many and profound; one is still left with the feeling that there exists a basic common orientation between Masaryk and Wellek in terms of their conception of man and of society, an almost instinctive agreement.

In Masaryk's philosophy, in his peculiar mixture of empiricism and moral rigor, good sense and flexibility, paternalistic sympathy for the popular

masses and respect for elitist traditions, one may perceive many of the elements animating Wellek's secret loyalties and his basic choices. With regard to Masaryk, for example, he says that for him philosophy was "a fight against spiritual, moral, and political anarchy", (*ECL*, p. 64). In the field of the historical and literary sciences how can we avoid remembering the frequent occasions in which Wellek has taken a stand against the "anarchical" excesses of "relativism", against the "tower of Babel" of the many methodological proposals ? He has often acknowledged that literary judgments are invariably "relative", conditioned by historical and subjective reasons, but he has always maintained with energy that a scale of values exists, and that permanent aesthetic truths exist. The most insidious danger for literary criticism has often appeared to him to be that of relativism : "a general anarchy or rather a levelling of all values must be the result." (*TL*, p. 42)

Wellek presents the religious conception of Masaryk (a religion, it must be understood, which is substantially ethical and humanitarian, not identifiable with formally instituted religions even if nearer to the Protestant religion than to the Catholic) in the following terms :

> The ethical starting-point of his religion is obvious : the difference between right and wrong was something so absolutely clear and self-evident to him, something so immutable, independent of utilitarian considerations and inexplicable on such grounds, that he was driven to look for a sheet-anchor in religion. The concept of God and immortality is for him a guaranty of this eternal difference between right and wrong. (*ECL*, p. 64)

Having pointed out the necessary distinctions between philosophy and literary studies, one is tempted to compare the convictions, of Masaryk described above with a few statements made by Wellek, in polemic with the "relativism" of certain historicists such as Auerbach :

> Actually the case of knowledge and even of historical knowledge is not that desperate. There are universal propositions in logic and mathematics such as two plus two equal four, there are universally valid ethical precepts, such, for instance, as that which condemns the

> massacre of innocent people, and there are many neutral true propositions concerning history and human affairs. There is a difference between the psychology of the investigator, his presumed bias, ideology, perspective and the logical structure of his propositions. The genesis of a theory does not necessarily invalidate its truth. Men can correct their biases, criticize their presuppositions, rise above their temporal and local limitations, aim at objectivity, arrive at some knowledge and truth. The world may be dark and mysterious, but it is surely not completely unintelligible......
>
> ...... Relativism in the sense of a denial of all objectivity is refuted by many arguments : by the parallel to ethics and science, by recognition that there are aesthetic as well as ethical imperatives and scientific truths. Our whole society is based on the assumption that we know what is just, and our science on the assumption that we know what is true. Our teaching of literature is actually also based on aesthetic imperatives, even if we feel less definitely bound by them and seem much more hesitant to bring these assumptions out into the open. ("Literary Theory, Criticism and History," in *CC*, pp. 14 and 17)

Wellek presents Masaryk's struggle as being one that occurs on two fronts, on the one hand against a mythological and theological vision of the world, and on the other hand against an indiscriminate exaltation of the social sciences :

> Masaryk admits that science and the scientific view is a necessity both for a truthful mind and as a useful tool, but he does not admit its solution of all philosophical problems. He objects to naturalism because it undermines human personality, makes man a mere product of natural processes, explains consciousness and human ideals as merely biological functions, denies the validity of moral laws and norms, deprives man of his responsibility, and paralyzes his action by a false belief in fatalism. Masaryk then fights on two fronts : against both mythical religion and naturalistic science. (*ECL*, p. 66)

In the light of this interpretation, one is reminded of the many analogous statements by Wellek, typically "third force," and one thinks of *Theory of Literature*, built entirely on the hypothesis of a struggle on two fronts. When, furthermore, we read of Masaryk's rejection of Marxism, of his conviction, that "ideas are just

as influential as economics and are by no means dependent on them," of his attachment to the cultural tradition of his people, of his predilection, among the cultural traditions of other peoples, for the Anglo-Saxon, we perceive a very strong analogy with certain of the presuppositions of Wellek's cultural work.

There is a point on which Wellek differs distinctly from Masaryk, nevertheless, and it is the one concerning the autonomy of art. According to Wellek, Masaryk too often reduces literature to the status of a vehicle for and a means of propagating ideas and assigns pedagogical functions to it. He instead feels the need to safeguard the autonomy and specificity of the literary work, in conformity with the tendencies of the formalists (trying, however, not to espouse their extreme theses). In the greater part of his writings and critical disquisitions, which in fact are almost all concerned with the literary work, we feel that the humanitarian philosophy of Masaryk has faded into the background, has become the presupposition for his own private actions and loyalties (has become, in Marxian terms, "ideology"); whereas in the forefront we find literature, and theory of literature, and literary criticism, and literary history, and the history of criticism: this is the "profession" publicly chosen (in Marxist terms, the "piece" of work assigned to the scholar within the general "division of labor.")

In this regard. two more of Wellek's essays are very indicative, a more general one on "The Two Traditions of Czech Literature" (1943, now in *ECL*, pp. 17-31), the other, more detailed and closer to directly lived experiences, on "Twenty Years of Czech Literature : 1918-1938" (1938; now in *ECL*, pp. 32-45.) The "two traditions" of Czech literature are the pragmatic and rationalistic one on the one hand, and the poetic and aesthetic one, on the other. Masaryk, precisely in his endeavor to "syssematize" both literary history and the history of the whole of Czechoslovak civilization (in certain aspects similar to that of De Sanctis) had given preference to one of the two traditions, exalting the Hussite period, considering the sect of the "Bohemian Brethren" to be the most beautiful historical realization of humanitarian ideals, interpreting the Revival at the beginning of the nineteenth century as a direct continuation of the Reformation. Wellek recognizes the importance of Masaryk's reconstruction but he knows that many of the studies written in the meantime have corrected Masaryk's seheme and have revaluated the other tradition, the "poetic" one, which touched points of high realization in the fourteenth century, in the flowering of the

Baroque in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, in the poetry of Macha and in that of symbolists such as Brezina. The two traditions, Wellek observes, have a history which is not aligned with civil history : "the times of artistic creativeness do not coincide or coincide only rarely with times of intellectual advance and political good fortune." (*ECL*, p. 30) The consequences of the dichotomy are openly recognized : "Both traditions have achieved much, though there is little doubt that the empirical, ethical lineage has done more for the nation and humanity in terms of practical benefits. But we as literary critics as lovers of poetry, cannot forget the other tradition : the voice of literature as fine art, the voice of poetry, and imagination." (*ECL*, pp. 30-31)

In the other essay, which reviews the story of Czech literature between 1918 and 1938, the necessity of keeping the two levels and the two traditions distinct is confirmed and the exigencies of literature as art are forcefully made to prevail. The background social panorma traced by Wellek, above all for the first years of the Republic, is rich in positive data : the whole of society was pervaded by a new enthusiasm, by a faith in life and in progress, and there was a great diffusion of culture. However the reservations on the political movements, which found many followers among the young Czechs of the time, were not lacking : Wellek speaks of "naiveté" and "youthfulness" and says with regard to the "proletarian poets" that "their communism was rather an anticipation of a curiously idyllic earthly paradise than anything typically Russian." (*ECL*, p. 38) In any case, examining the poetic results of the period, Wellek never renounces the autonomy of critical judgements. His judgement concerning the "proletarian poets" is on the whole negative, even though he recognizes their contribution to the simplification and modernization of language, the utility of their rediscovery of certain "popular" genres, the fine quility of Wolker's poetry. Very severe, surprisingly, and full of reservations is instead his judgement on the *Svejk* of Hasek : "The book is not much of a work of art, as it is full of low humor and cheap propaganda; but the type of the foolish, smiling, cowardly Czech Sancho Panja, who goes unscathed through the military machine of the Empire is difficult to forget, however unheroic and uninspiring he may be." *ECL*, p. 41) One perceives a certain severity also in his judgement on the "poetism" movement, and this is still more surprising. Just think of what the "poetism" of Prague was,[9] that extraordi-

9. Cf. *Poetismus*, edited by K. Chvatik and Z. Perat, Odeon, 1960.

nary and enthusiastic crucible of Apollinairian and futurist suggestions and of exaltation for the Russian revolution, of celebration of the imagination as a revolutionary instrument; one might direct one's thought to the short circuit instituted between poetical experiments and the linguistic research of the theorists of the Circle, to the dense network of interchange between the arts, to the great season of the theatre, of the cinema, of the marionettes, of the Czechoslovak clowns, to the great taste for the festive and popular life. And read instead what Wellek writes on the poetry of Nezval, the "protagonist," the "extraordinary virtuoso in poetical fireworks": "a painter of little colourful pictures, an inventor of fantastic rhymes, illogical associations, grotesque fancies, whole topsyturvy worlds... The playful charm of Nezval's talent should not, however, conceal a certain vulgarity and bad taste which is most apparent in his fantastic novels. "Poetism" in Czechoslovakia seems less the refinement of an over-subtle society than the plaything for rather crude young men without intellectual ideas or traditions." (*ECL*, p. 39) This judgment reveals a taste in Wellek that one might be tempted to define as "Eliotic" in its tendency to measure every linguistic and poetic experimentation according to a fundamentally neoclassical or at any rate intellectualistic yardstick. Such a taste carries Wellek to reject the results of that epoch which, even with all of its limits, was perhaps the only time in the literary history of his country in which the "two traditions," in paradoxical ways, but with vigorous enthusiasm, tried to fuse. And I would say that from such an enunciation of taste there transpires an element which clearly separates Wellek from the most coherent of the formalists and structuralists of the Prague Circle. What he genuinely accepts from the teaching of such men as Mukarovsky is the invitation to a careful study of literary techniques and to the construction of a "theory of literature." After 1948, in any case, the break with the literary world of Prague is complete for Wellek. He continues to follow the studies of the critics of his country from afar, but the points of contact, which every once in a while reappear, are substantially less numerous than the points of divergence.[10] The only thing that is left him, melancholically, is the "Czechoslovak Society of Arts and Sciences in America" (of which Wellek was President from 1962 to 1966).

Let us try then to follow the other trait: Wellek and the United States. One is immediately reminded of the phenomenon of the emigration of so many European intellectuals to America in the 30's and 40's, and one thinks of

Jakobson and Cassirer, Borgese and Castro, Spitzer and Auerbach, and of the many philosophers, artists, musicians from Germany, Spain and from other countries. The affinities are there; but Wellek's case is different. Also in him one perceives some of the characteristics common to many of those emigrants : that of remaining European despite everything, the feeling of being rootless and errant, with ideas to defend but also to diffuse, and thus suspicious of and at the same time curious about their new environment : a whole story which has yet to be written. But in Wellek the reactions were less dramatic, without abrupt upheavals. The greater part of those men, with some exceptions, remained isolated in America, they were "different." (The books of Auerbach and Spitzer, for example, circulated widely only after their death.) Wellek, instead, (also because he was a professor of English literature and had studied at Princeton and in England) inserted himself more easily into and slowly became an integral part of his new environment, often assuming important directive functions. One must, indeed, recognize his merit in having often helped to disseminate the work of the "others," in having contributed to make them known, both by quoting them often in his own works and by reviewing their books in journals.[11] Moreover he speaks not only about the better known figures, but also about some of the more isolated ones, such as the Pole, Manfred Kridl, a follower of Ingarden and of the Russian formalists, or the German,

10. Cf. "Recent Czech Literary History and Criticism" (1962), in *ECL*, pp. 194-205, to which one must add the more benevolent "New Czech Books on Literary History and Theory," in *Slavic Review*, XXVI (1967), pp. 295-301. In both these studies Wellek's anti-communism appears very strongly. This phrase, in regard to a book on Capek by Alexander Matuska, is typical : "It seems to me to be patently absurd to speak of the 'opaqueness of human relations in capitalist society' (p. 197) or of the standardized, leveled face of men such as it developed under the pressure of bourgeois civilization" (p. 241), as if the world behind the curtain were less standardized and leveled than that of the West and as if human relations were more open where people look over their shoulder and lower their voices when speaking within earshot of a stranger." (New Czech Books, p. 298) This "retaliatory" reasoning is typical of that period of the cold war, but the denunciation of the capitalistic and bourgeois society remains valid despite the failures of the eastern European countries; and for the person who lives in the United States there is no need to institute comparisons.

11. On Cassirer in *Rocky Mountain Review*, IX (1945), pp. 194-96; on Auerbach in *Kenyon Review*, XVI (1954), pp. 299-307 (Italian translation by P. Longanesi, in *Il Verri* II [1957] pp. 13-24), and in *Comparative Literature*, X [1958], pp. 93-94; on Spitzer in *Comparative Literature*, XII (1960), pp. 310-34 (Italian translation by M. L. Spaziani, in *Convivium*, XXXIII [1965], pp. 238-51.)

Martin Schutze, author of a book strongly denouncing positivistic methods in literary scholarship, which appeared in 1933 and was republished posthumously in 1962 with a preface by Wellek : *Academic Illusions* (Hamden, Conn., Archon Books, 1962).

Besides the tendency toward integration into his new environment, however, there remains in Wellek the tenacious preservation of his original characteristics. What is certain is the fact that he received his philosophical, historico-cultural and literary bases in his native homeland and thus took an already organically structured outlook with him to America. For this very reason his position became unique and exceptional, that of the mediator between two different cultures, European and American, that of the "builder of bridges."

To a person who observes him as he lives through one of his full days he may appear, for example, as follows (we are however on the level of the anecdote, of the light profile etched with much affection and a touch of malice). "To his colleagues he seems to live completely in the region of books and ideas. His reading is wide in all languages...Yet he is more likely to have read the last novel of a visiting British lecturer than most other literary professors. He prefers conversation to all other recreation." The anonymous author of this "vignette" depicts Wellek while, engrossed in deep conversation, he entertains a visitor from Italy or another country at lunch, or as he attends to his voluminous correspondence, or when he gives proof of an "astounding" knowledge of the news of the academic world on an extremely wide front. According to this observer, Wellek's world rests on two poles : books and people. He also puts into relief Wellek's "interest in beginning scholars and their writings," proof of a cordiality of character and of a sincere humanistic ideal.[12]

These reasons and preferences which one might think of as being almost private concerns are not, however, really different from those concerns which

12. Cf. "Vignette" LXIX in *PMLA*, LXXVII (June, 1962), p. i ; a successive "Vignette" LXXXVI *Ibid.*, LXXX (March 1965), p. 46, added some retouches to the picture : "[Some of his friends]—point out that [Wellek's] enthusiasm for literature is matched by a deep concern for both European and American politics and a serious fondness for both music and painting."

on the level of literary theory and of cultural affairs have inspired and have been the mainstays of Wellek's battle in favor of comparative literature and, indeed, of general literature. This is a battle which he had continued and still continues to wage, which has had its evident victories (the foundation of departments of comparative literature in many American Universities, organised on the bases suggested by Wellek), but which has been accompanied, also in recent years, by many polemics. "Literature is one, as art and humanity are one; and in this conception lies the future of historical literary studies;" thus wrote Wellek in *Theory* (*TL*, p. 50). On the other hand, he does not ignore the historical reality of national literatures; general and universal literature is more than anything else an aspiration pertaining to the future. As far as education and scholarship are concerned however, an internationalism— the broadest possible— of perspectives must be decidedly encouraged from the present moment, it is a real necessity.

> The history of themes and forms, devices and genres, is obviously an international history... Even the history of metrics, though closely bound up with the individual linguistic systems, is international. Furthermore, the great literary movements and styles of modern Europe (the Renaissance, the Baroque, Neo-Classicism, Romanticism, Realism, Symbolism) far exceed the boundaries of one nation, even though there are significant national differences between the workings out of these styles. (*TL*, p. 51)

Thus the history of ideas, the history of critical conceptions, the history of literary movements, the history of styles, the history of forms, the history of themes, the history of metrics : all should have an international perspective. "What is needed in the whole area of literary studies [is] a thoroughly informed discussion of methodological problems which would ignore artificial political and linguistic barriers and bring new viewpoints and methods within the sight of the student." (review of S. Skard, "Color in Literature," in *American Literature*, XVIII [1947], pp. 342-43). And speaking of the *Autobiography* of Vico (in *Philological Quarterly* XXIV [1945], pp. 166-68) and of the difficulty in establishing the real extent of the diffusion of his thought in eighteenth century Europe, he writes : "A dictionary of unit-ideas on historical principles, comparable to the *OED*, with dated quotations, may be a dream for a distant future..." (but evidently for him a desire and a necessity). And on

another occasion, reviewing an anthology of Korean poetry compiled by Peter H. Lee (in *Comparative Literature*, XII [1960], pp. 376-77), he speaks of "that dreamed of ultimate, general poetics and history of poetry, in which all nations would be represented," and, even in the far removed Korean poetry, he finds "most instructive material for a study of poetic themes and forms."

Parallel to this persistent defense of a general literature, based on a common minimum denominator of "norms" and also of "values," is the assiduous condemnation of the old way of studying comparative literature, the one practiced for example, by the group of French scholars gathered around the ***Revue de littérature comparée***. Very severe criticisms of these "accountants" of literary study (which keep the "ledgers" of influences, exchanges, trips, sources, etc.) were first voiced by Wellek in 1952, in a brief article, "The Concept of Comparative Literature," which appeared in *The Yearbook of Comparative and General Literature*, II (1952), pp. 1-5, then, at greater length, on the occasion of the second congress of the International Association of Comparative Literature at Chapel Hill in September 1958, with a talk entitled "The Crisis of Comparative Literature" (now in *CC*, pp. 256-95). Many polemics followed,[13] above all from the side of French comparatists and those of the socialist world (the long battle in the Eastern countries, conducted sometimes with good reasons, but often with dogmatic obtuseness against "bourgeois cosmopolitanism" and in favor of a literature anchored to concrete national historical reasons, is well known). Lastly, Wellek's answer followed : "Comparative Literature Today" (in *Comparative Literature*, XVII [1965], pp. 325-37).

In this latter writing, many of the basic motivating reasons at the bottom of Wellek's work come once again to the surface: as, for example, the defense of

13. Cf. M. Bataillon, "Nouvelle jeunesse de la philologie a Chapel Hill," in *Revue de Litterature Comparee*, XXXV (1961), 290-98; *La litterature comparee en Europe Orientale* edited by I. Soter, Budapest, Akademiai Kiado, 1963 (particularly the contributions of I. G. Neupokoeva, Maria Janion, L. Nyiro and Rene Etiemble : the latter with some effective argumentation, advanced from a Marxist point of view, against the "superficial" concept of bourgeois cosmopolitanism); L. Nyiro, "Problemes de la litterature comparee et Theorie de la litterature," in *Litterature hongroise-Litterature Europeenne*, Budapest, Akademiai Kiado, 1964, pp 505-24 (who, despite the criticisms is very close to Wellek). But cf. also the paper, "The Name and Nature of Comparative literature," in *Comparatists at Work*, W. Stephen G. Nichol and Richard B. Vowles (Waltham, Mass., 1968), 3-27. Italian translation by Rosa Maria Colombo in *Belphagor*, XXII (1967), 125-51.