

Cassirer and Sartre on Enlightenment

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims at shedding some light on the Eighteenth-Century aesthetics. After examining two classical interpretations – Cassirer e Sartre – concerning this subject, I argue that both authors shares a common analitical presupposition. My main purpose is to show that without taking account of the the relationship between author and public, we cannot understand some esential characteristics of the literature in the Enlightenment.

Key-words: Cassirer – Sartre – Enlightenment – public – author

I – Cassirer’s view of the XVIIIth century as the discovery of taste

In the “Preface” of his *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*¹, Ernst Cassirer argues that the original contribution of the XVIIIth century *intelligentsia* is not the contents on them own, but the manner after which the traditional contents were considered. According to that, “the really productive significance of the thought of the Enlightenment (...) is revealed not so much in any particular thought content as in the use the Enlightenment makes of philosophical thought, and the position and task it assigns to such thought”². That is why Cassirer draws our attention to the attitude that, despite the variety of the Enlightenment themes, presided the period, and which he sums up in the very idea of “the autonomy of Reason”, made effective “in all fields of knowledge”³. Aesthetics is one of those domains; and according to that its “fundamental problems” are presented in the last part of *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*.

As we know, Cassirer presents in this the motives for finding the realization, in the context of art and literary production, of the enlightened ideal, which is its trust on “the original spontaneity of thought”⁴. Although they admit a variety of manifestations, those motives

¹ CASSIRER, E, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*. Translated by Fritz C. A Koelin. Princenton University Press, 1968, pp. v– xii.

² CASSIRER, ib., p. vii.

³ CASSIRER, ib., p. xi.v

⁴ CASSIRER, ib., p. viii.

converge on the same point, represented by the modern consciousness of the philosophical dignity of the sensible⁵. When Cassirer asserts that the XVIIIth century is the moment of the birth of aesthetics as a discipline which apprehends the sensible itself, his view of aesthetics in the Enlightenment diminishes the relevance of “aesthetics” before the XVIIIth century – so that we ask ourselves if we could carry on using the word aesthetics to refer to art and literature in the XVIIth century. Would it be correct to use the term if, according to Cassirer, before the XVIIIth century the “sensible” is completely submitted to the intellectual knowledge?

Before offering an answer to that question at our own risk, and oppose some aspects to Cassirer’s view, I shall consider his interpretation a bit more. Taking into account what has been said, it is clear that he sees in the Enlightenment the progressive emancipation of the sensible from the intellectual, the gradual acknowledgment that the sensible has its own dynamics – so that it is possible to claim the rise of a new set of problems, which cannot be reduced to questions regarding knowledge or ethics. There are many texts which add to that view. That is the way Baumgarten defines aesthetics, in 1750, the “science of the sensible knowledge” – it means that, further to the intellectual perfection of knowledge, the only one capable of distinction, there also is another perfection which refers to the beautiful. Opposed to the XVIIth century intellectualist tradition, which considered the sensible the domain of the obscurity, so that it must be transposed to the distinctiveness of the intellectual concept, Baumgarten institutes the idea of an “aesthetical perfection” – setting the limits for approaching the beautiful as a *Wissenschaft*.⁶ That novelty, as one knows, is not taken by Cassirer as an isolated instance; it is a variant of the attitude which the Enlightenment has towards art and literature. Related to that, there is Bouhours defense of *stile*, in the French classicism and against the Jansenists⁷. Announcing the idea of “aesthetical illusion”, which precedes the emancipation of the beautiful from truth, Bouhours provided the conditions to the construction of the “aesthetics of sentiment”, which would be further developed by Du Bos in the middle of XVIIIth century.

⁵ “This process is recognizable in all efforts, however divergent, to found aesthetic systems in the eighteenth century, and it forms their latent center and intellectual focus. Individual thinkers participating in this movement are by no means aware from the start of the goal toward which they are steering; and in the clash of various tendencies a really consistent line of reasoning, a conscious orientation to a definitely conceived fundamental problem, is nowhere to be observed. The aesthetic problem remains in constant flux; and constant variations take place in the significance of the basic concepts depending on the choice of starting-point and on the predominance of the psychological, the logical, or the ethical interest. But in the end a new pattern crystallizes from all these various and apparently contradictory currents of thought” (CASSIRER, *ib.*, p. 277).

⁶ BAUMGARTEN. *Aesthetica*. In: *Aesthetics – The logics of the art of the poem*, #1, #14 and #17. For Cassirer’s comment on it, see *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, p. 338. ff

⁷ “The real emphasis now falls more and more on the expression rather than the content of the thought. Seen in this connection, it is not surprising or paradoxical that Bouhours demands for all works of artistic value not merely truth, but especially an admixture of falsehood, and that for this reason he defends the ambiguous because in it the true and the false are combined to form a unity” (CASSIRER, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, p. 301-302).

(*Refléxions ciritques sur la poesie et la peinture*, 1755).⁸ The same tendency should be identified in the Anglo-Saxon debate, to which Cassirer drew a line of continuity. From Shaftesbury to Hume, considering Francis Hutcheson and Edward Burke, that line reasserts the conception according to which the main element of literature and of the work of art is not imitation, but the act of creation – whose subjective aspects, being the core of the analysis, enables the making of an aesthetics of the sublime and of genius which subverts the prescriptive character of XVIIth century “aesthetics”⁹.

Thus, according to Cassirer, during the XVIIIth century, one can see different efforts that go towards the “foundation of aesthetics”. That is the Enlightenment’s “latent center, and its intellectual focus”¹⁰. In a nutshell, it is not irrelevant: the “‘humanization’ of sensibility”, as Cassirer calls it¹¹, links the institution of the subject of the sensible to the movement of acknowledgement of man’s finitude – for it is through his own sensibility that man, being far from the infinite, has his specific mark. “While the foundation of systematic aesthetics sustains the autonomy of reason, it also maintains implicitly the fundamental prerogative of finite nature to an independent form of existence”¹². That is: the broader meaning of the foundation of aesthetics in the XVIIIth century is that it marks the birth of the idea of man. The project of a *philosophical anthropology*, developed by Cassirer elsewhere, is here supported by his view of the XVIIIth century aesthetics.

Meanwhile the other aspect of Cassirer’s praise for the Enlightenment becomes clear. If we had to wait the XVIIIth century for the acknowledgement of the sensible as something philosophically relevant, then, one should conclude, the French classicism, rigorously, *was not, and could not have been a form of aesthetics*. That can be reassured from what Cassirer says of its main voices– D’Aubignac (*Pratique du théâtre*, 1657), Boileau (*Art poétique*, 1674), Batteux (*Les beaux arts réduits à un même principe*, 1747). Claiming that in those authors the beautiful is connected to exterior ends, mainly to the discovery of truth, Cassirer says that the real significance of the sensible had not yet been uncovered. The recognition of that negative aspect of the classicism – it *is not* an aesthetics, for it *does not recognizes* the sensible – is grounded on its characterization as a set of prescriptions to the artists, whose imagination is domesticated and submitted to an edifying intention; more than that, the “rules” further the despise for the singular and the individual in favor of the universal and the timeless. Against the

⁸ According to Cassirer, Du Bos radicalizes the separateness of aesthetics and theory: “The nature of the aesthetic cannot be known by mere concepts, and the theorist in this field has no other means of communicating his insight to others and of convincing them of its truth than to appeal to their own inner experience” (CASSIRER, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, p. 303).

⁹ See CASSIRER, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, pp. 320-331.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 277.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 354.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 353.

taste, which requires the free development of subjectivity, the classical *mimesis* is, according to Cassirer, subsumed to the commitment to the discovery of truth¹³.

Therefore, Cassirer proposes complementary interpretations for the classicism and the Enlightenment: the moving from one to another is organized in terms of the pattern of discovery. The hypothesis that the XVIIth century had its own aesthetics, irreducible to those of the XVIIIth century is not taken into account. Cassirer's view is based on a different point: the classicism was blind to the things that will be illuminated by the Enlightenment. *Man* was already there, waiting for a "spirit of the time" capable of recognizing his unknown proximity, his secret presence, of which the sensible and its avatars in the XVIIIth century (passion, sentiment, the imagination free of cognitive purposes, genius) are constitutive parts.

The manner after which Cassirer considers the classical age incapable of recognizing aesthetics can be turned clear as we observe the relations between classicism and Cartesianism. The dependence of the beautiful on truth, in the XVIIth century, is a response to the exigency that the beautiful fits the rational and, then, be guided by the ideal of truth. That conformation displays the primacy of the "Cartesian spirit" in every domain of XVIIth century intellectual life.¹⁴ Hence Cassirer explains the rules of classical *mimesis* as the result of the transposition of Cartesianism into the realm of the reflection on literature and arts. The ideal of unity claimed by Descartes would be the original effort of classicism in order to reduce the poetical diversity to formulable principles of a theory; the irrelevance of the creative dimension and of subjective judgment for the classical *mimesis* is equally explained by the consideration that, according to the classicism, every subjective element is drawn towards the discovery of truth.

My modest aim here prevents me from proposing my own reconstruction of classicism. However, in order to propose an approach to the originality of XVIIIth century aesthetics, it is necessary to reconsider, even if it is done after a polemist manner against Cassirer, those terms which seem to me the proper ones to understand the passage from classicism to the Enlightenment – mainly because, as far as I am concerned, those terms do not refer to the progress that would have been represented by the discovery of the autonomy of sensibility and, after a broader manner, by the discovery of man. One cannot deny that classicism guides the production of a work through a set of rules, as it is undeniable that, due to that, imagination is submitted to a rigid discipline, which prevents the deviation and leads the author to canonic forms. It is also undeniable the interdiction of the burlesque and the affected stile, presented as a normative orientation for the French classicism, which is grounded on the commitment of art as imitation of nature. However, none of those elements make it necessary to find the ultimate meaning of classicism in the Cartesianism. In order to avoid any doubt about it, it would be

¹³ CASSIRER, *Essay on Man*, Chap. IX. See also *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, pp. 278-297.

sufficient to draw attention to the Horatian poetics as a counter-example to Cassirer's interpretative scheme. According to that poetics each literary genre has a proper domain and a certain tone, demanding of the artist a study which allows him to be fit to pre-established precepts¹⁵. Horace did not consider Descartes to say it, nor the institution of a prescriptive aesthetics means that it is necessarily committed to a *mimesis* of the objectivity of knowledge. Rigorously, there is no original incompatibility between the existence of a set of precepts and a certain *taste*¹⁶, as long as we take it to be something different from XVIIIth century taste. Cassirer does not take into account the relation between prescription and the beautiful (which is found in the ancient poetics and is reconsidered by French classicism) as he thinks that the comprehension of literature and art is inseparable of the history of philosophy. That is the reason why Cassirer sees in the prescriptive elements which were really present in the French classicism the result of an "objectivist prejudice", due to the transposition of Cartesianism into art and literature, instead of a choice of style grounded on things that have few or nothing to do with philosophy.

II – Sartre and the relevance of the public

The result of the fast confront with Cassirer can be summed up as follows: instead of trying to explain the existence of a theory of *mimesis* in the XVIIth century through the subordination of classicism to metaphysics, it would be better to examine whether the choice of style do not have other reasons. One knows that the effectiveness of a set of rules or maxims which directs the artistic and literary creation supposes, on the other side of the symbolic relation that underlies the work, a public whose capacity depends on the very same precepts that rule creation, and according to those precepts the public judges each single work¹⁷. In this context, the "theory", as it submits *ingenium* to a discipline, enables the author to put his work in a normative context presented by a set of maxims publicly shared. The regulation of the genius through what is expected from a certain genre to which he dedicates himself reveals a sociological rather than a metaphysical dimension: the hierarchy of genres and the ideal of conformation to them show the existence of a relation that links author and public after a

¹⁴ CASSIRER, *The Philosophy of Enlightenment*. For the notion of an age as system of values, see Cassirer's *Descartes, Corneille, Christine de Suède* and mainly *Das Erkenntnisproblem in der Philosophie und Wissenschaft der neueren Zeit*, in: *Gesammelte Werke*, v. II.

¹⁵ See HORACE, *Ars Poetica* (Loeb Classical Library, n 194).

¹⁶ The term is found in Horace's *Poetics* (Brazilian translation by J. Bruna, São Paulo, Cultrix, 1997, p.61).

¹⁷ "Prima ancora che in questi orizzonti critici, retorici o filosofici, nel XVI-XVII secolo francese il tema del gusto è una questione sociale, che si rapporta alla vita di corte o, più in generale, alla capacità dell'uomo colto e raffinato di costruire una 'arte della conversazione' che abbia nel gusto sua guida" (Elio FRANZINI, "Il gusto in Francia dal Grande Secolo alla Rivoluzione", in: L. RUSSO (ed.), *Il gusto – Storia di una idea estetica*, p. 35.

reciprocal manner. That is an important element to argue that the “objectivity” sought by the classical *mimesis* is not directly due to the XVIIIth century ideal of science, but it is the expression of the power of the rules in the court society – hypothesis that restore to our problem the stylistical nature (taken as something opposed to its speculative nature), and that also helps our interpretation of what is about to come. In fact, during the XVIIIth century, we see the breaking of the reciprocity between author and public, which was effective in the classicism, – rupture which, at the boundaries of romanticism, will enable the author to create his own public, at the fictional level.

That hypothesis, formulated after a general fashion, aims deliberately at schematic purposes, leaving behind the changes which occurred in the classicism on its own, which are actually relevant to the present problem.¹⁸ I shall present the contrast now. According to that, let us consider Sartre’s observation on classicism:

“Le public est actif: on lui *soumet* vraiment les productions de l’esprit; il les juge au nom d’une table de valeurs qu’il contribue à maintenir. Une révolution analogue au romantisme n’est même pas concevable à l’époque, parce qu’il y faut le concours d’une masse indécise qu’on surprend, qu’on bouleverse, qu’on anime soudain en lui révélant des idées ou des sentiments qu’elle ignorait et qui, faute de convictions fermes, réclame perpétuellement qu’on la viole et qu’on la féconde. Au XVII^e siècle, les convictions sont inébranlables: l’idéologie religieuse s’est doublée d’une idéologie politique que le temporel a secrétée lui-même: personne ne met publiquement en doute l’existence de Dieu, ni le droit divin du monarque. La ‘société’ a son langage, ses grâces, ses cérémonies qu’elle entend retrouver dans les livres qu’elle lit.”¹⁹

As we notice in the excerpt above, the materialistic orientation of Sartre’s analysis produces important elements to understand the movement from classicism to Enlightenment as a passage from certain aesthetics *to another one*²⁰ – and not, as Cassirer suggested, the passage from a *doctrine* of the beautiful, in the XVIIIth century, to the rise of aesthetics, in the XVIIIth century.

However, in Sartre’s analysis those elements turn out to be unfavorable to the writers (and also to the artist) of the classical age: “Nourris par le roi, lus par une élite, ils se soucient

¹⁸ The reference to the canon is a common thing in the classical French poetics, being matter for much controversy. A good instance for that is the fact that the reference to the rules was used also against Corneille, in the polemics about *El Cid*, and latter it was seen as an obstacle to the acknowledgement of Racine’s greatness compared to Corneille. Regarding that, one should read what is said by a spectator of *Berenice* at the beginning of the 1660’s decade. “Je veux grand mal à ces règles, et je sais fort mauvais gré à Corneille de me les avoir apprises dans ce que j’ ai vu *Bérénice* à l’ Hôtel de Bourgogne du plaisir qu’ y prenaient ceux qui ne les savaient pas: mais je me suis ravisé le second jour, j’ ai attrapé M. Corneille, j’ ai laissé Mesdemoiselles les règles à la porte, j’ ai vu la comédie, je l’ ai trouvée fort affligeante et j’ ai pleuré comme un ignorant” (MONTFAUCON DE VILLARS, “La Critique de Bérénice”, *apud*: RACINE, *Théâtre complet - I* (ed. Jean-Pierre Collinet). Paris: Gallimard, 1995, p. 514. Racine, in the letter to Colbert that opens *Berenice*, sums it up: “La principale règle est de plaire et de toucher” (Racine, *Théâtre complet - I, op.cit.*, p. 375). For the modern aspect of *El Cid*, analyzed in relation to the dispute between sages and public, see G. MACCHIA, *Il paradiso della ragione*, p. 48 ff.

¹⁹ SARTRE, *Qu’est-ce la littérature* <1^a edition: 1948> Paris: Gallimard, 1967, p. 118-119.

uniquement de répondre à la demande de ce public restreint”²¹. Because it kept them under “permanent control”, the classical public, says Sartre, realized its taste as “censorship”²². For sure. But that fact of the XVIIth century, which make me adopt the principle of reciprocity between author and public, does affect Sartre’s interpretation and it turns out to be an evaluation of the writer on him own. Indeed, classicism is considered by Sartre an example of the *situation* of the writer whose function is not to actively protect the social tenets, as it were the in the Middle Ages, but only to not criticize them²³. Therefore, Sartre easily concludes that the writer has an ill-consciousness. And Sartre goes on. The classical author, committed to the established ideology, has no doubts about the guiding ideal of the *honnête homme*, and he does not care for what Sartre thinks to be essential for the act of writing: the production of otherness from the inside of the relation with the real public²⁴.

Thus, the approach to Sartre’s view on classicism as an opposition to Cassirer’s view seems now to have a relative value, for what appeared to be an approach to the specificity of the classical *mimesis* and of a particular taste turn out to be, as it happens with Cassirer’s, a retrospective judgment. One demands the XVIIth century writer to be *engage*, something that even Sartre’s sometimes recognizes to be inappropriate, due to its extemporaneity: “il est impossible à cette époque de mentionner un public virtuel distinct du public réel.”²⁵ The classical writer is not considered guilty, but the social structure of his function is an obstacle to the exercise of his profession, previously defined by Sartre through some conditions that will only be present later, in the XVIIIth century. The result is this perplexing choice: either the classical author has an ill-consciousness or, what could be better, he is not a writer, for he is not capable of projecting at the literary universe the symbolic exigencies required for the political change of society.

What I have said does not weaken the analysis proposed in *What is literature*, neither makes them less interesting for our purposes. On the contrary, the weak point of Sartre’s view is of major importance for my perspective, and it would be sufficient to turn upside down the terms he presented. Grounded on the conviction that the writer is defined by his commitment to the political change of society and on the identification that, in the classicism, the relation between writer and public avoids that commitment, Sartre concludes with the impossibility of an authentic XVIIth century literature. Opposed to that, I shall examine whether it was not the changes of the relation between author and public which took place in the XVIIIth century, the

²⁰ See also R. ZUBER, which admires a *classical taste* (*La littérature française du XVII^e siècle*, Paris: PUF, 1993, p. 58).

²¹ SARTRE, *Qu’est-ce la littérature*, p. 112.

²² The idea, even if it is part of Sartre’s insights on literature, is quite known. G. Highet, for example, also said, in 1949, that “baroque conventions were social restrictions” (HIGHET, *La tradición clásica – II* <1^a ed. 1949>. México: FCE, 1996, p. 21).

²³ SARTRE, *Qu’est-ce la littérature*, p. 110.

²⁴ *Ib.*, p. 96.

breaking of their reciprocity, what (among other things) enabled the writer in the Enlightenment to take this commitment to *the fictional institution* of a society different from the real - the distinctiveness of the writer committed to the political change of society. That marks my distance from Sartre: instead of saying that in the classicism the reference to the otherness is forbidden, I shall say that it lacks any sense in its social system.²⁶ The reason is that the change of the addressed public into the “universal reader”, the “virtual public”, as Sartre says, depends on the *advent of the bourgeois public*, and they were absent in the XVIIIth century.

Aware of the risks of retrospection, Let me make some remarks on the change of the literary aesthetics, as the social composition of the public changes. The phenomenon which helps me measure the extent of that change took place in the first half of XVIII century England. As one knows, it was the rise of the bourgeois public which enabled the appearance of a popular literary form as the novel. Swift, Richardson, Defoe and Fielding were authors whose universality overcame any other at the time²⁷. Ian Watt, in his classical interpretation of the rise of the novel, talks about the change of the “gravitational center of the public reader”, when middle class acquires a predominant position²⁸. Heroes of a new genre, as Robinson Crusoe and Moll Flanders, says Watt, “placed at the moral level of day to day life”²⁹, provided the reader the opportunity to a transportation to their own situation.

The symmetry between the fiction and the social reality of the reader, which is established by Watt, provides precious hints to the problem I examine. For the “humanization” of the characters and of the plot – a “realistic” feature of the novel, which is something new compared to the classical *mimesis* – is the counterpart of a similar change, concerning to the operations the public stops doing as it comes to the literary work. The pleasure of reading, now, does not need to be guided by precepts of the canon nor to be referred to the classical tradition, it turned to be something like a “thoughtless, almost unconscious” reading, close to the reading of another rapidly spread literary form, the newspapers.³⁰ The reader has a different profile, far from the *honnête homme*: he does not want to control the writer, nor could he do it, as it

²⁵ *Ib.*, p. 114-115.

²⁶ “Age de l’Eloquence, âge de la rhétorique, le XVIIe siècle voit naître les Belles-Lettres: il n’est pas encore l’âge de la littérature”(M. FUMAROLI, *L’âge de l’éloquence*. <1^a ed. 1980>. Paris: Albin Michel, 1994, p. 31). One should notice that, on a sociological standpoint, the exclusion of otherness was not something related only to the writers, nor to the ones excluded from court life. As N. Elias observed, even Louis XIV could not act differently from what people expect him to act according to the court code. See N. ELIAS, *La sociedad cortesana* (1^a edition 1969). Mexico: FCE, 1996, p. 184 ff..

²⁷ See A. HUMPHREYS, “The Literary Scene”, in: Boris FORD (ed.), *The New Pelican Guide to English Literature: From Dryden to Johnson*. <1957>London: Penguin Books, 1997, pp. 53-98, p. 81.

²⁸ I. WATT, *A ascensão do romance* <1957>. Translated by Hildegard Feist. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1996, p. 44.

²⁹ I. WATT, *A ascensão do romance*, p. 71.

³⁰ *Ib.*, p. 45. As one knows, the importance of the reading public noticed by Sartre and Watt was largely reconsidered by scholars of the reception theory, whose debate would lead us astray. In order to have a view on he topic, see J. S. ALLEN. In: *In the Public Eye – A History of Reading in Modern France, 1800-1940*.

happened in the classicism. For that reason the clearness of style sought by an author such as Defoe does not have to do with the simplicity aimed by the classical *mimesis*, because now it is related to simplifications³¹ which enable a sort of pleasure of reading that is opposed to the criticism of the reader of the court.

Conclusion

It is enough to conclude that the change of style is due to the actual relation between author and public, resuming our initial doubt about the fact that the motives of a certain *mimesis* are not due to metaphysics, which would control it, but to the social aspects which it is embedded with. Even the literary form is partly dependent on that link, as the rise of novel gives evidence. Notwithstanding, the rise of the bourgeois public is related to the birth of literary forms which overcome a certain literary form as that one created by the British in the first half of XVIIIth century. In order to conclude I shall consider an aspect that exemplifies the manner after which the enlightened writer uses, as a literary device, the elements brought to light by the change in the social composition of his public.

I said that, in the classicism, the writer or playwright conducts his literary production aiming at the set of precepts and works from which his specialized reading public judges and criticizes his work. Sartre says that, in such a context, the writers “on pour métier de renvoyer son image à élite qui les entretient.”³² That is what I called the *principle of reciprocity*: the control of the production by the reception needs a public that is not a mass one, composed by individuals converged to style and class ideals.³³ Where is the place for the author in search of originality inside such a social structure? The claiming for authenticity do not suppose that the criticism is not anymore the ideal reiteration of the values of a leading group and turned to be indeterminate and abstract, as it will be from the Enlightenment on?

The change of the relation between author and public, with the rise of the bourgeois reader, has really furthered the advent of the original writer. In the classicism, the liberty of the author was the control “of expression and presentation”³⁴ of a content which, through the literary tradition and the division of genres, was largely predetermined. For that reason, the reader or the spectator was the one capable of anticipating the work, reaffirming his belonging to a restrict ideological community; he displays his ability to judge according to values shared

³¹ Here is the complete opposition of the simplicity of the plot and expression pursued by the French tragedy, explicitly grounded on the ancient authors, to the digressive processes and the syntactic disregard of Defoe's novels. Watt accounts for it in his *The rise of the novel*.

³² SARTRE, *Qu'est-ce la littérature*, p. 115.

³³ Further to good companionship and elegance, the *honnête homme* needs to be good at talking and must have read good books. See: N. FARET, *L'honnête homme*, 1630. Apud R. ZUBER. *La littérature française du XVIIe siècle*, p. 54.

³⁴ E. CASSIRER, *The Philosophy of Enlightenment*, p. 291.

by the members of his social position (the *grand monde*, represented by the court, whose public character is central, as it was noticed³⁵). That is the reason for the criticism to be grounded on institutions established concentrically around the king, whose decision on the success of the work was quite determining³⁶. With the new modulation between fiction and the social composition of the public produced by the novel, the correspondence between the work and the reality is renewed in the XVIIIth century, being changed into new terms with the novelty of the bourgeois reader. The realism of the novel is due to the fact that its hero is anonymous, as the bourgeois reader, and that is not enough. For, despite the anonymity which is the mark of his single and fragmented experience, the bourgeois longs for getting into a universal community, whose idea in the Enlightenment is “Humanity” (and that from literature to moral philosophy). The addressed person of the work changed: he is any reader that, being a citizen, is a man with “sentiment”, that is: with a *natural* ability for discerning, which does not need the critical apparatus that the *honnête homme* used to judge in the court society. The “universalization” of the social basis of the public does not admit anymore the work to be guided by exact principles; one can foresee the Kantian definition of taste as the “free play” between imagination and understanding³⁷. Now, the public, as single autonomous individuals, cannot anticipate themselves to the work, as the measure precedes the case; on the contrary, his belonging to a normative community hopes for an author who is able, by a natural gift of renewing the destination to a blind universality, nonetheless essential, which unites everybody in the same humanity.³⁸

That is the “virtual public” considered by Sartre: each one of us is part of it, with our best qualities, the most genuine, but also with what we ignore.³⁹ The sentimental literature is due to that possibility, and Cassirer is right when he associates it to the “discovery” of man by the Enlightenment. At the analytical level, I shall prevent from linking that process to a progress of an age represented by the abandonment of classicism in favor of the critical age – even if the humanity of man provides that retrospection, which sometimes underlies the claiming that the XVIIIth century saw the birth of aesthetics. Aware of it, new possibilities for the research are

³⁵ N. ELIAS, *La sociedad cortesana*, p. 77.

³⁶ “La tragédie de *Bérénice* triompha de toutes les critiques: et la Cour et la Ville se passionnèrent pour elle”. P. NICÉRON, *Mémoires* <...>, apud: RACINE, *Théâtre complet - I*, op.cit., p. 473. About this concentric organization, see also N. ELIAS, *La sociedad cortesana*, op. cit., p. 69.

³⁷ I. KANT, *The Critique of judgement*, § 9 (Ak. 32).

³⁸ One should read the excellent analysis of M. Fumaroli of the positive meaning of the notion of authorship, from modernity on. In: FUMAROLI, *L'âge de l'éloquence*, op.cit., 25.

³⁹ The self-unconsciousness, according to that branch of the enlightened aesthetics, turns to be a criterion for legitimacy, in such an exaggerated formula which reveals the paradox of the new sensibility: the less I understand why the work pleases me, the more I am convinced of the legitimacy of my adherence to it. That conclusion, which was not overlooked by Cassirer, is preceded by moral analyses carried on in the XVII century by authors such as Pascal – “The heart has its reasons of which reason knows nothing” – and La Bruyère (See E. FRANZINI, “Il gusto in Francia dal Gran Secolo alla Rivoluzione”, in: L. RUSSO (Editor) *Il gusto – Storia di una idea estetica*, p. 37; see of the same author, *L'estetica del Settecento*, p. 99 ff.).

opened. For instance, we shall examine if there is not a complicity of form – considered here the social form - between the realistic novel and the romanticist literature which is born in the second half of XVIIIth century. In both cases, the author addresses to a public whose identification with the fiction is dual: we are now drawn to the portrait of day to day life of the bourgeois world, whose heroism was to be invented far from the classicism, then we are drawn to the belonging to an original community, whose lack of reality justifies the rise of the extemporaneous author, capable of personalizing, in contrast to the reader, the utopian dimension of criticism.

Those two features correspond to tendencies which were developed in the Enlightenment, and would not be difficult to show that many plays, political pamphlets, moral writings and speculative meditations in the XVIIIth century share the very same sensibility. I shall conclude providing an instance, which sums up the aspects of those new possibilities. In the “Prelude on the Stage” that opens *Faust*,⁴⁰ Goethe summarized the implications of that duality, as it opposes the poet and the avoidance of worldliness of poetry, to the manager and the jester, both of them aware of the public expectancies – meaningfully called as *die Masse*. Thus, after the claiming of the poet to address only to an inexistent public – for “What gleams is born but for the moment's pages/ The true remains, unlost to after-ages” – the manager replies with this brutal question: “And those for whom you write, just see!” It is the jester, when he talks about the “poetical profession” (*dicht'rischer Geschäfte*), who provides the view of the new configuration of the relation author and public, which by Sartre has noticed:

“Then use these handsome powers as your aid
And carry on this poet trade
As one a love-adventure carries!
By chance one nears, one feels, one carries!
And, bit by bit, one gets into a tangle.
Bliss grows, then comes a tiff, a wrangle;
One is enrapt, now one sees pain advance,
And where one is aware, it is a real romance!
So let us also such a drama give!
Just seize upon the full life people live!
Each lives it though it's known to few,
And grasp it where you will, there's interest for you.”⁴¹

⁴⁰ As we now know, that text was written by Goethe aiming at the general institution of theater, and not at a single play – probably due to the opening of the new Theater of Weimer, in October 1798 -, and was latter added to the tragedy. See A. SCHÖNE, *Komentare*. In: Goethe. *Faust*. V.2,p.155.

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Translation from *Kriterion* [on line]. Dec. 2005, vol.46, n.º112. pp.199-213. ISSN 0100-512X.

⁴¹ GOETHE, *Faust*, vol. 1, p. 18-19. English translation by George Madison Priest.