



MIMESIS

Le immagini della musica

N. 4

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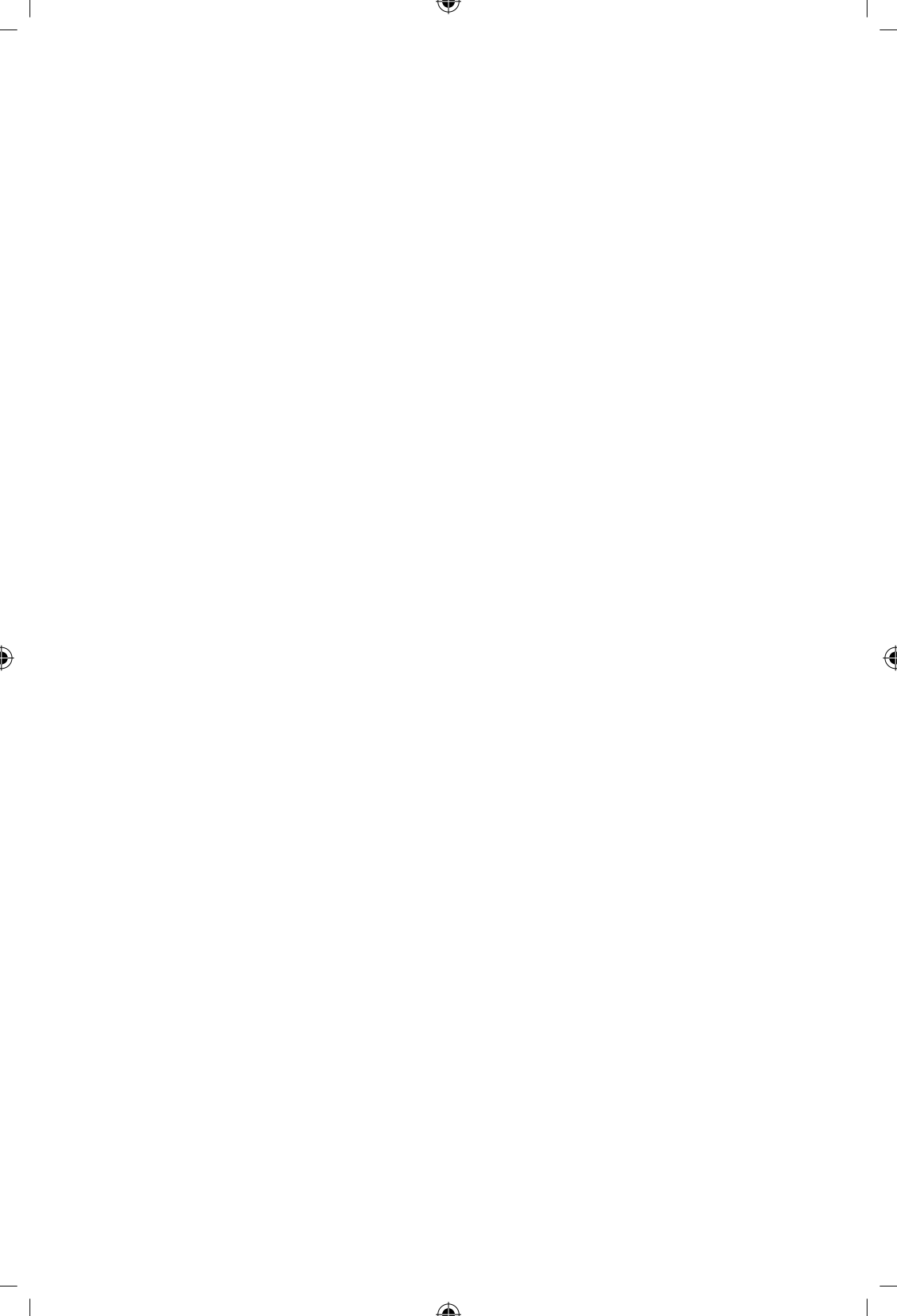
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NATION AND/OR HOMELAND

Identity in 19th-Century Music
and Literature between Central
and Mediterranean Europe

Edited by
Ivano Cavallini



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INTRODUCTORY WORD

Four years ago, in 2008, I was appointed by the Dean of Faculty of the Educational Sciences of the University of Palermo, professor Michele Cometa, with the charge to co-operate with both the Universities of Zagreb and Warsaw.

The aim of the project was to examine some examples of cultural ties of these three European nations: Italy, Croatia and Poland for which I have been supported by my renowned and dear colleagues, the Croat Stanislav Tuksar and the Polish Alina Żórawska-Witkowska. I aimed at getting free from those prejudices which, for a long time, have prevented a normal circulation of ideas from Central to Mediterranean Europe: in particular referred to those countries above mentioned, whose histories have been an exclusive patrimony of specialized Slavic studies or enclosed within the cultural frame of the German Mitteleuropa. At the end of the 1960s that of Central Europe became a subject *à la mode*, which contributed to develop a true but also standardized icon of the supranational K.u.K. Empire, administrated by the wise Habsburg crown, which allowed the official use of fourteen languages – including the vehicular Latin and German. However, in the light of some particular political events, after the catastrophic collapse of Communism in 1989, the subject acquired a new evidence but relegated to the consolatory role of an imagined Mitteleuropa, which could satisfy, for different reasons, both the progressive intellectuals and the conservative ones. Nowadays, one can admit that the idyllic 19th-century landscape of the Mitteleuropa was a way to reject the tragically authentic *Zwischeneuropa*, part of which under the Soviet Union's control. This depressive situation gave sometimes rise to an exaggerated idealization of the spirit and social tenets of the ancient Central Europe, while under the shadow of the German literature and art the Slavic and the North East Italian cultures began to be reconsidered in the light of the open cultural climate of Austria. In this turbulent period Polish civilization, which was submitted to the quasi-colonial policy of Russia, Prussia and Austria, survived under some impulses coming from Italy, France and Austria; instead

Croatia, as joint country of the Habsburg Monarchy, intertwined the Austrian and Hungarian traditions with the Italian literature coming from the Mediterranean Dalmatia.

The supranational trend of Austria, as an active ineluctable heritage also after the First World War, involved many famous writers like Franz Kafka. The native German Jewish novelist worked in the Czech Prague in a very alienating condition, in which the Jewish group represented a minority within the German minority (like a social explosive *matrěška* in which the biggest hides the smaller ones!). Similar is the case of Antonio Smareglia, an Italian-Croatian composer from Istria who studied in Vienna and Milan. He was always inspired by Wagner's *Musikdrama*, and it is interesting to underline how his reaction was negative towards the Italian fascist administration of the Venezia Giulia region, in which an exasperated nationalism tried to destroy the secular multiculturalism of Trieste and its littoral. After 1918, Smareglia spent his last years as an 'Austrian without Austria', like the great writers Joseph Roth and Stefan Zweig. Contrarily, Ivan von Zajc's biography, a Czech-Croatian born in Rijeka (Fiume), represents the identity goal of an Austrian who shifted from the Italian opera (he was graduated at the Conservatory of Milan) to the Viennese operetta, and finally to the Croatian opera during the 1870s, when he was appointed director of the National Theatre in Zagreb. This appealing mood came from the Viennese Velebit Society, which brought Zajc to renew the national music life in Croatia.

In front of this dualistic situation, in which two tendencies interact, namely the Austrian cosmopolitanism and the national movements, this book is intended to provide a short survey on the keywords of *people* and *nation*.

Following the Seminar lectures held respectively at the Universities of Palermo and Zagreb in autumn 2009 and winter 2010, the essays gathered here analyse some case studies on the functions played by music, literature and theatre in creating the image of a national art during the 19th century in Germany, Poland, Croatia, and in other Balkan regions, at the time when all European countries were defining their own modern identities on the basis of ethnicity, language, religion, art and popular/folk traditions.

The scope of the scientific meeting, titled "The Lexicon of Identity and Exclusion. On the Concepts of Nation and Homeland from Central to Mediterranean Europe during the Nineteenth Century: Literature, Music and Theatre", was to focus on the development of national consciousness elaborated around a series of different episodes, in which the words 'nation', 'homeland' and 'people' have been applied. This Romantic lexicon

identifies various meanings of the national movement in some countries dominated by Italian, German and Slavic cultures, and in some groups or minorities such as the Albanians, the Jews in the Mitteleuropa lands and the Vlachs in the Balkan boundaries (or *Militärgrenze*), as a phenomenon of self-description. In order to clarify the cultural framework, in which the political independence of the nick-named “nations without history” or nations without territorial unity played a fundamental role, the seminar has explored the construction of identity through folk tunes, poetry inspired by popular culture, opera and theatre in which the national myths or heroes appear (for example Lek Skanderbeg, Kraljević Marko, Nikola Šubić Zrinjski). In the self-making tradition, the national traits are sustained from one hand by the process of embodiment of any regional utterance, and also by the elimination of the ‘other’, in particular the minorities, on the other hand, by the smoothing down of the conflict between folk and learned traditions.

Theoretical perspectives have been shaped by the new approaches to this topic, taking into consideration the artistic issues as socio-historical events and subsequently evaluating them in their aesthetic quality. Particular attention is paid to the medieval paradigm, which includes both the ancient collections of poetry and the related modern unwritten songs. The symbols of the nation, as an achievement of the power that flourishes from the sense of belonging, are defined *per differentiam*. Any comparison is submitted to the incorrect claim of superiority that includes religion, politics, economy and culture. Indeed, from this invisible aberrant frontier grows a whole lexicon of co-habitation and rejection, which, at the same time, highlights the various degrees of difference. This lexicon is usually compounded as a need of a self-making inner character passing through local-national rites, often with the help of reinvented traditions. Unfortunately, it is also employed as a medium of race hatred or class hatred, deserving also a classification of negative peculiarities of the ‘other’ thus preparing its exclusion from the ‘regular’ society or its assimilation.

In this context any aesthetic discourse about national art, either music or theatre, casts a shadow over its authentic social value. The idea of national in music starts as a construct leading towards higher musical standards and continues with the pragmatic treatment of music as incidental to the words of rousing songs, supporting non-musical issues. For instance, the Illyrian songs of Croatia, associated with the ethnic tunes collected in the Balkan area at large, after the 1848 revolution are a repository or virtual museum which strengthens the South Slavic civilization menaced by Pangermanism. Likewise, the figure of the blind *guslar* who sings the ancient epic, shared by the Croats, Bosnians, Serbs and Albanians, is compared to the blind

Homer, whose poems are based upon the similar patterns or so called formulae. The romantic idea of the ancient Slavic peoples and their folklore is the red thread that connects the generation of Illyrian supporters and the Panslavism of Yugoslav oriented later generations. In other words, the anonym songs (*pjesme*) are the meeting point of local, national and supra-national Panslavic idea for the unity of the South Slavs.

On this regard it is not astonishing the re-reading of the Morlack's figure (*vlah* in Croatian), who inhabited the inland of Dalmatia. At first the Morlack became the model of the *bon sauvage* of the Enlightenment, as it is described in the travel books. Afterwards the exotic Morlack was transformed into the representative ancient Slav. Finally, during the second half of the 19th century, the Italian literature and opera forget the *vlah* and depict the South Slavic people as hospitable but wild and vindictive: a curious transfer that shows the traces of the Italian fear in front of a new Slavic antagonist besides the Austrian enemy.

Another question that emerged from the meeting is the treatment of national opera in the Slavic lands of Central Europe. To trace the history of opera on the basis of the stylistic thought could be very dangerous, as until today music historiographers have considered first of all Russian and Czech composers as the beginners of a new mainstream, including folk or popular elements, detached from German, French and Italian sources and their formal structures. From this point of view scholars should be obliged to omit any pregnant item of the previous music. While the 'rustic operas', composed at the end of 18th century, when the Polish Kingdom fell, invite us to re-think the relationship between drama and nation. The Singspiel structure of *Cud mniemany, czyli Krakowiacy i Górale* (*The Presumed Miracle, or Cracowians and Highlanders* 1794), music and libretto written by the Czech Jan Stefani and the Polish Wojciech Bogusławski, cannot conceal the metaphor of politic freedom. The Cracowians symbolize the Polish people, whereas the brutal Highlanders can be identified with the foreign invaders, i.e. the Russian army. Even though the music is not much innovative, some folk quotations of the cracowienne, polonaise and mazurka are not included like sample quotations of *couleur locale*. The authors have granted a political value of these dances, correctly perceived in the same manner by the domestic public and the Russian censorship, too. This is why after the première and two runs the first Polish opera was cancelled, as emphasizes Alina Żórawska's article.

The problem of ethnicity in music and literature, deriving from the national feeling, can be explained through a concept of Johann Gottlieb Fichte. In the last of five lessons held at the University of Jena in 1794,

printed in the *Einige Vorlesungen über die Bestimmung des Gelehrten* (see *Prüfung der Rousseauschen Behauptungen über den Einfluss der Künste und Wissenschaften auf das Wohl der Menschheit*), the German philosopher affirms that what we shall be is imagined through the idealization of what we were, this one depicted as a lost essential quality: “Es ist – im Vorbeigehen sei dies erinnert – überhaupt eine besonders in der Vorwelt häufig vorkommende Erscheinung, dass das, was wir werden sollen, geschildert wird, als etwas, das wir schon gewesen sind, und dass das, was wir zu erreichen haben, vorgestellt wird als etwas Verlorenes; eine Erscheinung, die ihren guten Grund in der menschlichen Natur hat”. Obviously, in the period of birth of national pride, this sentence could also be applied to various human sciences, too. For instance to the Italian literary studies, which draw the spirit of a national culture from the Renaissance, so that, consequently, also music historiographers emphasize the role of frottola and lute songs published in the 16th century. Even the Spanish scholars recognize in the ancient popular romance the roots of zarzuela, because, as asserted by the liberal musicologist Francisco Soriano Fuerte in the 1850s, the official music in churches and palaces of the nobility were the Flemish polyphony and the Italian opera, both used to the place of the neglected Iberian songs (*Historia de la música española desde la venida de los fenicios hasta el año de 1850, 1855, 1856, 1859*).

If the quoted Fichte’s *Prüfung* can be revised with the meaning of the historical canon for each nation – out of the original framework as suggested by Predrag Matvejević in a lecture of the 1981 – nowadays it is current the well known Herder’s national paradigm. Considering *Volkslied* the German thinker specifies that there are close analogies among different peoples concerning their creative process. Moreover, he relates to folk for his discourse on the genuine national behaviour stating that people should not mean the rabble in the streets, which mutilates true folk songs. Apart from the causes which stimulate poetry, any people express their own character and customs as national issue in the content of spontaneous verses. In view of the complexity of this topic it is necessary to reaffirm that nationality is always a condition, but nationalism is an attitude which develops a series of contradictory phenomena: at least some historical mystifications of the authentic value of literature and music of the past frequently provide and incite a political strategy of hegemony.

Ivano Cavallini

