Giants. Some notes on their origin

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The presence of these figures in 90 countries, and the diversity of their forms and of the societies and social settings in which they are found, make it impossible to believe that they had a single origin or, equally, a single purpose.

From the most remote islands of Oceania to the coldest places of northern Europe. From the countries of the Himalayan range to the North American steppes, by way of all their richness on the African continent, giants are present among us.

In simplified terms, even in remote times we find them mentioned in theatrical performances, as one more of their forms, since occasionally they also shade into platform shoes and stilts (which themselves have diverse origins).

But the most constant references are to their representation as the “gods” of the places where they appear, especially in connection with fertility in its broadest sense, from its “tree-like” representation to its female forms. And, incidentally, perhaps it was this side of them that influenced their presence in theatrical performances.

It is in both cases (theatre and gods) that the answer is found, in general terms, to the question: why are giants born?

And the answer (not a universal one) is as simple as it gets: out of the need to show and magnify the figure they represent above the heads of mere mortals. No society that respects its divine beings can conceive of a god being shorter than a person. A god must inspire fear or respect (as the case may be), and one way of achieving this is precisely through greatness.

It is later, with the arrival of the Catholic religion and the “invention” of the feast of Corpus Christi, that these figures, in an area initially limited to Europe (a very small space compared with their worldwide extent), are incorporated into that procession. Much has been said about the meaning of the first figures present, and little has been contributed on the matter, given the diversity of their origins, but it would not be logical to think that if the “people” already had them as their own (perhaps through an evolutionary process; in many European cases they already formed part only of more festive celebrations), they were incorporated, for no further reason, into the procession in order to draw the common people to this event, a mixture of ostentation and religiosity. Is it not more logical to think that their meaning within Corpus was a pretext

added later to justify their presence in the feast, like other “popular” celebrations that were incorporated into it?

Simply looking at their present forms, or those of recent decades, gives us a striking view of this diversity.