

A Harlequin's Dress

Reflections on Europe's Public Discourse

Anthony Molho

L'Europe n'est qu'un nom, qu'une 'expression géographique', comme disait Metternich de l'Italie, si elle n'est pas une conception d'histoire.

Ernst Robert Curtius¹

*I*l faut, dans nos temps modernes, avoir l'esprit européen.² One hundred and ninety years ago, when Mme. De Staël wrote these lines, *l'esprit européen* was perhaps easier to identify than it is today. How would we, today, wish to come to terms with this *esprit*? What exactly would we want to embrace or reject?

These are not new questions, of course. They were not new in the early nineteenth century. They have persisted ever since. There is no need, here, to survey the range of answers offered over the years by politicians, scholars, and intellectuals, a task admirably fulfilled in their weighty anthology, *Europes*, by Yves Hersant and Fabienne Durand-Bogaert.³ For each one of the dozens of views contained in their anthology – from Havel and Mitterrand, back to Hesiod and Horace – an historian would need to dwell upon texts and contexts in order to understand these writers' fears and aspirations for the Europes they described, imagined, or yearned for.

Rather, for the purpose of these preliminary reflections, one can refer to two of the authors included in this anthology. Both were famous historians, and belonged to the generation of our own teachers. They are Federico Chabod and Lucien Fèbvre. Within a year, unbeknownst to each other, each of them offered a university course devoted to Europe: *Storia dell'idea d'Europa* was Chabod's course, and *L'Europe. Genèse d'une civilisation* was Fèbvre's.⁴ The materials for both courses were gathered and published, but in both cases posthumously, a coincidence that has not gone unnoticed. Chabod offered his course at the University of Milan in the academic year 1943–4, Fèbvre, at the Collège de France, in the academic year 1944–5.

Obviously, context, here, is key. The politics of Europe's nation states and Europe's long civil war in the first half of the twentieth century frame both historians' exercises. A recently published essay raises the possibility that even Chabod's decision to stop his story with Guizot's ruminations about Europe and not to round it out to the mid-twentieth century is inexplicable aside from other, hitherto unexamined

dimensions of the contemporary context.⁵ Chabod's alleged urge to distance himself from the triumphalist discourses about Europe's *Neue Ordnung*, of Nazi and Fascist inspiration, is thought to have led to the interruption of his analysis. That may or may not be so. But this recent iconoclastic re-examination of Chabod's ideas forcefully underscores the importance of context. In his discussion of Fèbvre's lessons on Europe, Marc Ferro made very much the same point: Fèbvre's decision not to publish these lessons may not be unrelated to the echoes triggered by the term Europe during the Second World War. In 1944, when Fèbvre began his course, Pierre Laval's rhetoric on the *Nouvelle Europe* resonated through other, contemporary discourses on Europe, including Fèbvre's own.⁶ To publish a book on Europe ran the risk of giving a false impression.

It seems that always – or nearly so – the term Europe reveals as much as it conceals. The messages are not always decipherable, at least not before the term is subjected to the sort of semantic and contextual excavation recently undertaken in Chabod's case. This strikes me to be the case even with a seemingly anodyne statement about Europe as the one contained in Pius II's *Commentarii* whose meaning only a careful understanding of context can convey. For the term Europe, as in '*Europae imperium*', to which '*Mahumetes Turchorum imperator*' aspired following his conquest of Constantinople, surely refers not simply to a geographic region of the world but rather evokes a range of other meanings (or images) of peoples, religions, and cultures.⁷

So, we come to this book and to the meetings that preceded it. Twice over a rather short period – in autumn 2003 and in late winter 2004 – two dozen or so mostly European scholars found their way to the European University Institute to discuss, in the course of two workshops indirectly funded by the European Community, questions related to Europe's past. In the months before these meetings, a series of other gatherings, some conducted with the assistance of a group of secondary school teachers and young journalists drawn from nearly two dozen European countries, had also addressed comparable issues, setting the foundations for the two workshops. What, if anything, did these occasions have to do with Mme. De Stael's *esprit européen*? What might the repetition in the preceding sentences of the terms Europe and European – defining at once actors, patrons, subject matter, and location – signify? What Europe (more appropriately what Europes) did this group have in mind, and what meanings (images) did these Europes evoke? Answers to these questions varied among the workshops' interlocutors, as they no doubt will among this essay's readers.

Discussions and arguments about contemporary Europe, broader notions regarding Europe's past, as well as methods used to study this complex topic constantly impinged on our discussions. In more than a casual way, they helped to shape this book. They are basic elements of the context in which it was conceived and produced, and, in the conviction that, for our project as well, context is key, we start with these.

Contexts: Europe

Writing in 1943–4, Chabod had ruefully noted: ‘There is in these years a *gran parlare* about Europe and European civilization ... and of forces that are opposed to the *civiltà europea*’. And, reflecting on the meaning of the term Europe, he sceptically concluded: ‘The exact value of this term remains unclear; one could actually repeat that “everyone says that it exists, but no one knows where it is” (*che ci sia ognun lo dice, dove sia nessun lo sa*)’.⁸ Change the *dove* (where) in Chabod’s statement to *che cosa* (what) and the second part of his statement could easily fit our times. But the first part will do just as it is. Rarely before our day has there been so much talk about Europe. Rarely have so many people – not simply statesmen and government officials, but regular, ordinary citizens – been so directly engaged with Europe. Will Europe have a constitution? Will Europe’s governance limit the sovereignty of its member states? Has the *euro* benefited or hurt local economies? Will Europe have a foreign policy of its own? Should it? What about an army? A standardized university system? Every day, questions such as these fly back and forth, in all languages spoken in the European Union’s member states, in newspaper columns, television programmes, solemn or silly pronouncements made by scholars and politicians.

To those gathered in Florence, it seemed that while the entire discussion was likely to arouse deep passions among many Europeans, some of its elements had a more direct bearing on their own immediate, scholarly preoccupations. Two of these took up a good deal of time and generated much discussion: the nation state and Europe’s culture.

Participants in the current discussions on Europe’s future – whether they argue for the creation of a federated United States of Europe, or for a *Europe des nations* – continue to be inspired by a nineteenth century vision of the state. For the federalists, in its deep structures, their new Europe will bear a striking resemblance to the nation state. It will be unified and its parts integrated into an organic unit; it will have a clear centre of authority, from where the new Europe’s policies will be fashioned and enforced. At the spectrum’s other end are those who insist that, whatever the new Europe’s shape, the nation states that currently comprise it must occupy its core. For them, Europe will provide a broad institutional umbrella under whose protection economic interests, always carefully overseen by national governments, will be pursued by citizens of the Union’s nation states. Between these two positions, there is a range of other proposals, shaped, nearly all of them it would seem, by the weight of the nation state’s presence. Later in this Introduction, when our project’s direction is more explicitly presented, we shall return to the importance of the nation state in our own discussions.

Alongside politics and the nation state, Europe’s culture has received its share of attention in the broader civic dialogue about Europe. Right from the start, we were struck by a silence in this discussion. There is a weighty word that is hard to find in the current conversation on Europe, yet often associated with it until after the Second World War. This word is ‘civilization’. In their meditations and pronouncements, scholars, and commentators – from Voltaire to Husserl, from

Burke to Croce to Elias – did not hesitate to combine the term Europe with the term civilization. Often, it was simply assumed that the semantic fields covered by the two terms – Europe and civilization – complemented and reinforced each other. To be sure, the term has not disappeared from current use. But references to it are less frequent, and one wonders about the reasons for this shift. As we noticed, in the cases of Fèbvre and Chabod, it has been suggested that the reluctance of one to publish his lessons on Europe, and the decision of the other to stop his lessons in the mid-nineteenth century probably reflected the discomfort that the term Europe may have provoked because of its appropriation by extreme right-wing political movements. One wonders if the link between Europe and civilization was in some way eroded for the same reasons. The unity and coherence implied by the term civilization, its status as repository of the more refined and elevated qualities of a society's spiritual accomplishments, may have further accentuated the reluctance of commentators to rely upon it and link it with Europe. For how could one insist on the expression European civilization, at a time when the Holocaust had erupted onto centre stage of public discussion and post colonial studies were responsible for a radical shift in the traditional views of Europe's relations with other parts of the world?

Attention has now shifted: from Europe's civilization to its values. Talk about European values is almost endless. Of course, this is not new. It goes back centuries if not millennia, and has continued unabated through the twentieth century's disasters. One could even suggest that a discourse about Europe has itself been part of Europe's intellectual landscape at least since the Renaissance, and that one of Europe's cultural traits is precisely this quality of self referentiality, and the recurring variations on the twin themes of Europe and its identity. Clearly enough, recent pronouncements on the question of Europe's culture are themselves deeply coloured by this continuous, and continuously unfolding discourse. If not necessarily more profound and original, the current interest in Europe's culture has been more diffuse and persistent than in the past.

Scholars are not the only ones to join this wide conversation on European values. Impressive arrays of intellectuals have somehow felt the need to do so. Vaclav Havel has reminded us that 'Europe is a community of destiny', whose 'fundamental values are based on tolerance, humanity, and fraternity'. In his recent best seller, *Le nouveau désordre mondial. Réflexions d'un Européen* (2003), Tzvetan Todorov listed the *valeurs européennes*, which, according to him, are *rationalité, justice, démocratie, liberté individuelle, laïcité, and tolérance*. For his part, in a front-page article in one of Italy's most widely circulated newspapers (*La repubblica*, 31 May 2003), Eco enumerated the '*principi fondamentali del cosiddetto mondo occidentale: l'eredità greca e giudaico-cristiana, le idee di libertà e uguaglianza nate dalla rivoluzione francese, l'eredità stessa della scienza moderna ... la forma di produzione capitalistica, la laicizzazione dello Stato, il diritto romano o la Common Law, la stessa idea di giustizia che si realizza attraverso la lotta di classe ...*' Having first become *un patrimonio della sola Europa*, they are now shared by peoples in nearly all parts of the world.⁹

Contexts: Method

Many of the interlocutors in the public discussion on Europe's values often construct their arguments, without always acknowledging it, on an implicit teleology. According to their position, the values that define European culture have been expressed and applied with increasing clarity and force over time. On occasion, and in contraposition to this view, some thinkers have feared for the worst. Especially during the first half of the twentieth century, thinkers such as Valery, Husserl, Croce, Zweig and others thought that time, and a set of unhappy circumstances, had pushed into the margins of public consciousness the basic values of European culture. But on the whole, and perhaps more so among historians than among other scholars, there has often prevailed an idea that European values have developed teleologically. One need not go back to the proponents of the traditional view of progress in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to find expressions of this view. A very good example is contained in Jean-Baptiste Duroselle's *Europe: A History of its Peoples*, published simultaneously in several European languages in 1990. Duroselle was nothing but sanguine about Europe's past, even more so about its future. He was convinced that it was 'possible to discern in Europe's history a general if halting growth in compassion, humanity and equality'. The project of constructing a federated European Union 'is natural, realistic and legitimate, because there has long been a community of Europe – embryonic at first, but growing with time, despite centuries of war and conflict, blood and tears'.¹⁰

A variant of this view can be found in the work of some other scholars. Although they take their distance from teleological formulations, they often aggressively insist that a discourse on Europe is necessarily linked to its values. Theirs can be defined as the single track view of European culture. Its exponents single out *the* one intellectual or moral tradition with which they propose to associate the fundamental character of European history, and weave their account of Europe's past around that tradition. Time is also an important consideration in their discussions. But while for the teleologists time serves to give increasingly clear expression to a set of values, for those who embrace such single track views, time has a curiously neutral function. The passage of time notwithstanding, the value each of them singles out as the essence of European culture retains, over the ages, its full strength and importance.

In the recent fracas about the possible adoption of a European constitution, the place of Christianity in Europe's past received considerable attention, religious leaders insisting that this one tradition – Christianity – had to be especially acknowledged by the new Constitution's drafters. In their view, no other tradition could rival the cultural weight that religion had in Europe's culture. This argument is by no means new. Christopher Dawson wrote an important book on Christianity's capital contribution to the sense of a European community (a book, incidentally, that attracted some attention in Italy during the 1930s, and may have coloured Chabod's own thinking on Europe).¹¹ A little later, in 1943, Oskar Halecki argued that the Catholic Church expressed Europe's defining cultural value, a point that then entitled him to argue that Poland, firmly placed within the Catholic Church's

embrace, could claim its rightful place in Europe.¹² Variations on this theme have been heard in recent decades, especially from east European scholars and intellectuals for whom an evocation of what they take to be Europe's values represented a powerful weapon with which to resist various oppressive regimes. Single track arguments have not always been accompanied by the smell of incense. Lay scholars have had their own ideas about *the* European tradition or value to be singled out for special attention. Recently, democracy and republicanism have been presented as holding place of pride in Europe's culture.¹³

'Single track' claims do hold their own interest. Yet, in the end, it would be difficult to accept them at their face value. Quite beyond their imbalance in singling out one strand in Europe's complex cultural web, they seem to open themselves to a double criticism: their unbalanced treatment, and their silence on recent epistemological and methodological proposals made in the wider realm of the human sciences. Most importantly, whether by intention or not, many of these interpretations are tinged by a triumphalistic rhetoric, or, to be less critical, they more often than not leave unaccounted what one can only euphemistically refer to as the dark side of Europe's history. One of the most recent historical disquisitions on Christianity's unrivalled importance in European history leaves unmentioned Christianity's role in the Holy Inquisition, the expulsion of Muslims and Jews from the Iberian Peninsula, the various Christian churches' intolerance toward new scientific discoveries, or, even, any reference to the currently debated question of the Papacy's alleged acquiescence to the Holocaust. Rather, its author, Giovanni Reale, objecting to the omission of any reference to Christianity in the draft of the European Constitution, insisted that Christianity has been *l'asse portante spirituale da cui è nata e secondo cui si è sviluppata l'Europa* (the basic spiritual axis from which Europe was born, and according to which it was developed).¹⁴ More astoundingly, an impressive new collective book entitled *The Idea of Europe* and devoted to the history of republicanism from antiquity to the present contains no entry in its index for the Holocaust, as if such an event, with all its cultural and ethical implications, were extraneous to *the* idea of Europe.¹⁵

From the point of view of method, then, many recent discussions are striking for their conservative approaches. It is hard to find in them even distant echoes of the intense, epistemological clashes that, in the past few decades, have punctuated nearly all fields in the humanities and the social sciences. Schools such as the 'linguistic turn' and 'postmodernism' have injected a level of epistemological scepticism and a degree of complexity in nearly all fields of historical analysis. The metaphor of 'construction' has invaded nearly all historical inquiries, with scholars now intent on 'deconstructing' analytical categories that refer not only to political institutions and social categories, but also, and above all, to ideas and values. There is a paradox here. Although many historians and other social scientists have, since the 1970s, made capital contributions to epistemological discussions, they seem to forget ideas about 'construction' when they take up the subject of Europe. Then, in their pronouncements, past and present seem to coalesce into a seamless continuum, interrupted, to be sure, by wars, technological changes, and economic and political

transformations, but basically commensurate in their essences. Thus, a powerfully, often exuberantly anti-teleological current has been introduced into historical studies, all the while an equally powerful but often implicit teleology continues to define current discourses about Europe's history.

There is one notable exception to these observations. A group of social scientists among whom one finds an occasional historian have been careful to weave into their analyses lessons they draw from new epistemological insights. They have been receptive to the category of 'construction', especially intent upon pointing to the shifting valences assumed by the term Europe in the past few generations. Equally, they have been highly critical of traditional discourses on European values, suspicious, as they often intimate, of political and ideological motives behind such approaches. An excellent example of this approach is a collective book, *The Idea of Europe. Problems of National and Transnational Identity*, published in 1992, coincident with the Treaty of Maastricht and the establishment of the European Union. In their Introduction, Brian Nelson and David Roberts write that Europe, 'the creator and creation of modernity, cannot be reduced to a historical or geographical entity. It has always been a contested concept, a future-oriented project, the Enlightenment utopia from Leibnitz to Kant of a pacified Europe, based on the civil religion of reason and law'.¹⁶ The idea of construction has been picked up by several other scholars, for whom, as one of them recently wrote: 'Europe is not a fixed essence, but labile and in flux. European – and national – identities are always fluid and contextual, contested and contingent, and discursively shaped under various forms of inclusion and exclusion'.¹⁷

Although he is not mentioned by name, Chabod's shadow looms large over the work of these scholars, especially in their definition of the chronological limits they more often than not impose on their work. Chabod had insisted on one point. It was difficult to refer to a consciousness of Europe before the Enlightenment. Denys Hay, one of Chabod's principal Anglophone admirers, and translator of his ideas to English, had presented a variant of Chabod's views in a small book published in 1957: *Europe: the Emergence of an Idea*. There, Hay wrote that during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, Europe was often identified with Christianity. Later, 'Christendom slowly entered the limbo of archaic words and Europe emerged for its peoples as the unchallenged symbol of the largest human loyalty'. Later still, the Enlightenment philosophers supplanted Christianity for Europe, as the universal civilization project, to which they juxtaposed the notion of a despotic East. This notion appears and reappears in much other work. In the words of Agnes Heller, the noted Hungarian philosopher, 'a specifically European identity was not formed before the eighteenth century... *Modernity, the creation of Europe, itself created Europe*' (her italics).¹⁹

For them, to talk about Europe, then, is to concentrate on the last two or so centuries, when notions of progress, and institutions such as the nation state and its attendant cultural and ideological attributes became central elements of Europe. Necessarily, therefore, the temporal focus of such studies has been the fraction of Europe's history from the Enlightenment to the present, from the birth of modernity

to the advent of 'postmodernity', from the mid-eighteenth century to the turn of the twenty-first. In these studies, references to a more distant past tend to take the form of introductory comments, intended to frame discourses on Europe's much more recent history. In fact, the more distant past (say, the Middle Ages and the early modern centuries) is largely cut off from the present, with the past two hundred or so years considered largely an almost self contained historical period. One is tempted to ask these scholars: why rely on such traditional schemes of historical periodization? Why conceive of the past as if it comprised distinct historical periods? Can there not be cultural characteristics – forms of social organization, types of political allegiance, psychological perceptions, etc. – that traversed the course of European history from one historical period to another? Does 'modernity' (whatever exactly scholars such as Agnes Heller and others might mean by this term) necessarily imply a sundering of 'modern' from 'premodern' Europe? What bearing do experiences from before (even long before) the middle of the eighteenth century have on an understanding of our own, contemporary Europe?

For all these questions, how can one, today, reject these ideas out of hand? What historian, working in the early years of the twenty-first century, could deny them categorically? We all know that analytical terms, values, institutions – despite similarities in vocabulary between present and past – assume different meanings in different periods of time, and in different cultures. One of the first lessons students learn in any course on the history of political philosophy is that a word such as liberty carried different meanings at the times of Thucydides, Saint Augustine, Leonardo Bruni, and John Stuart Mill. The point is self evident, and we know that the cultural and philosophical meanings of the term and the significance imputed to it by contemporaries will become more easily comprehensible to us the more deeply and firmly we place it in the local contexts in which we find it. In this sense, a term such as liberty (or freedom, or democracy, or autocracy, or, of course, Europe) are always constructed, and our task as historians is to recover their historically specific meanings. By extension, how can one take at its face value the notion that permanent, timeless, transhistorical values – of the sort that Havel, Todorov and Eco almost proudly enumerated – could possibly define Europe, and its culture?

Summarizing, I would argue that the 'constructionists' have a weighty argument on their side. Yet, there is a point that remains unclear in their work. It is well and good to talk about construction and shifting meanings, but on the basis of what elements, one wishes to ask, does this construction take place? In short, to stick to the prevalent metaphor, what is lacking in many of these analyses is a sense of the building blocks with which the construction of Europe has taken place. In the end, what does it mean to say, as was recently said, that Europe 'is not a fixed essence but labile and in flux. European – and national – identities are always fluid and contextual, contested and contingent, and discursively shaped under various forms of inclusion and exclusion'?

Our project addresses some of our questions and uncertainties as we gradually discovered and reflected upon the current discourses on Europe. We share many ideas with scholars who have expressed themselves both on the ‘essentialist’ and the ‘constructivist’ fronts. Yet, without repeating the points made above, we think that these ideas are partial. We are convinced that while it is important to seek a common base and common elements in Europe’s past, in two significant ways the values based discourse overdetermines (often with pernicious consequences) the history of Europe. It overlooks the ‘dark’ and negative sides of that history, and it embraces a teleology that simply cannot be supported by careful analysis.²⁰ Furthermore, it is undeniable that the concept of Europe has been manipulated and used in attempts to ‘construct’ various and not always easily reconcilable political and ideological programmes. Yet, the ‘constructivist’ approach is too intent on primarily teasing out of the tissue of European history and discussions about it this manipulative, instrumentally constructive process that coincides with the post-Enlightenment triumph of the nation state.

In our own project, we aspire to preserve the long temporal dimension of the values based approach, separate it from its teleology, and avoid the temptation of succumbing to essentialist formulations. We also wish to integrate into our analysis a sensitivity to the ‘constructivist’ interpretation without pretending that such construction could be carried out outside the framework of (or without reference to) long-standing European traditions. The questions, then, are two: What do we mean by traditions? How do we reconcile the tension between these and the construction of politically motivated and ideologically tinged definitions (or imaginings) of Europe?

Our answer is simple. It is that the continuities in Europe’s history are evident in the persistence of a number of overlapping and intertwining discussions, or discourses. This is what we mean by *discursive traditions*. This book’s contents conveys a sense of these. Centuries-long discussions about the law, about political authority, about resistance to that authority, about citizenship, about ‘otherness’, or civility, or heroism, or the relationship of the present to the past, or about an almost myriad other subjects, define the history of Europe – and not only in the relatively short *durée* of the past two or three centuries. Issues that, according to some, are at the very core of a collective European identity, were themselves contested, provoking individuals or groups to often violent verbal and physical clashes. Even in times of great upheavals (one thinks of the religious reformations of the sixteenth century, or of the English civil wars), these traditions provided a field of common understanding, composed of shared concepts and symbols, often elaborated before the term Europe was invested with its modern, eighteenth century valences. Two points emerge with some clarity from these chapters: the resilience of the discussions (the discursive traditions to which repeated reference is made by the authors); and the fragility of solutions (or resolutions) which were proposed, over time, to these discussions.

One key point about our initial project and the current book needs to be articulated explicitly. It is this: the goal of the overwhelming majority of recent books and articles about Europe, its history, and collective European identities is to present

one or more conclusions of substance about Europe's past. What one means by 'substance' is that in each of these instances, a set of ideas, or institutions, or practices, or processes is identified as representing the core of European culture. There is a unity that is imputed to the history of Europe, a unity of direction, of meaning, of time. We have shied away from such an approach. We simply do not share the view that a reasonable consensus about any such topic could be teased out of an examination of European history – especially if this examination takes a long-term perspective as we do. Nor, as will be suggested below, do discussions based on a presumed unity imputed to the history of Europe help us to capture some of that history's tensions and contradictions.

Our ambition in this book is to make a different point. It is a point of method. The method is to move from things to words, from institutions to discussions about them, from reified values to discourses about ways of justifying and explaining actions. Some might think that our method places our project in a postmodernist camp, that by focusing on *discursive traditions* we forego the ambition of reaching back to the reality of the past. We resist this charge. We believe that historians must seek the reality of the past, and that such reality is, indeed, accessible to them. But we also believe that the reality of a European consciousness has, by necessity, to be sought at the level of discourses, of the ways in which Europeans of the past thought and wrote about their world. The connective tissues out of which a European consciousness was woven comprises the discourses – the words and verbal expressions which persisted over centuries across much of the continent.

In his eloquent essay, *'Europa, Europa ...'*, Carlo Ossola made a point that, we think, is not far from our own. What is Europe, he asked? 'Today', he mused, 'we recognize her in us, memory of so many rustlings, of books, of heroes, of utopias, of regrets' (*la riconosciamo in noi, memoria di tanti brusii, di libri, di eroi, di utopie, di rimorsi*).²¹ For all the pedestrian quality of our own formulation, we suggest that Ossola's image of *brusii* – those rustlings of past discussions, controversies, exhortations that, often at a subterranean level, left a mark on the consciousness of Europeans – are comparable to our *discursive traditions*.

It is hard to tease out of the tumultuous unfolding of Europe's history, a long-lasting agreement about many of these issues. Christianity itself, thought by some as occupying the very core of Europe's collective identity, provoked more controversy, and generated more violence than many other institutions and ideas. Yet, Christianity gave rise to a sense of a community – a community not necessarily based on a consensus but one that was rooted in an understanding of the issues over which it was worth (or so it often seemed) disagreeing, and of the words and expressions that were needed to define a position in one of these unfolding controversies. Edgar Morin, in a book that provoked much discussion when it was first published, referred to the *bouillonnement dialogique permanent*, that, according to him, provided the key characteristic of la culture européenne. This comes fairly close to our own view, if only one adjusts Morin's 'dialogic bubbling' to our own expression discursive tradition, for a dialogue to take place requires the existence of common conceptual and linguistic elements shared by the interlocutors.

There is a further issue that needs to be mentioned here, not so much of method as of perspective. Earlier, we referred to the often celebratory and self-satisfied tone of many accounts of Europe's history, especially those written by historians. For all the wrong turns Europe may have taken, despite the record of suffering, injustice, and oppression, the dark side of its history is either overlooked or minimized. Instead, many historians are often intent on underscoring what they take to be that history's great accomplishments, in the world of ideas, in fashioning institutions, in forging social bonds, or generating productive tensions. This, surely, is an inadequate perspective. There is an indisputably 'bright' side to Europe's history, a record of accomplishment often emulated by non-European peoples; but alongside this, there is also a decidedly 'dark' side, of intolerance, violence, oppression, and destruction. Europeans and non-Europeans have been recipients of this destructive penchant, and to overlook or to minimize it seems to us just as short-sighted as is the occasional case of an exclusive attention on the 'dark' side. All, or nearly all, participants in our discussions shared this perspective, which is evident in their essays for this volume.

All this is at the level of method, or approach. The subjects of this book's essays encompass a large field, from the Iberian peninsula to the Ottoman Empire to the British Isles and several points in between. Although the major portion of the coverage is focused on the period from the fourteenth to the late eighteenth centuries, the chronological span in some instances reaches back to Antiquity, and, in others, to our contemporary world. In every case, each author has reflected upon the materials examined from the perspective of the point of method mentioned above. In each instance, a discursive tradition, sometimes perduringly resilient, in other cases fragile, has been at the centre of analysis. Our coverage of such different traditions does not aspire to be complete. Our aim is different, supported, as we think it is, by Lucien Fèbvre's injunction to *comprendre et faire comprendre*, as against an ambition *d'être complet*.²³ A project such as ours cannot aspire to completeness. But it can aspire to *comprendre et faire comprendre* by a systematic critical analysis, with a point of method at its core, collectively undertaken by a group of historians, each expert in her or his subject.

This approach still leaves a question open. Beyond the issue of method, what common themes can subsume such a numerous set of disparate essays. To be sure, our ambition was to suggest – above all to ourselves and to our students – new ways of thinking about the history of Europe. But beyond this ambition, a second aim has been to tease out of these disparate researches the idea of a European public discourse. It is around this very notion that a series of lively discussions was held among us. Is it possible to imagine that, especially in the period which is the chronological focus of many of the following studies, a European public discourse did exist? Could such discourse encompass regions as distant from each other as was Poland and Scandinavia from the Mediterranean region, Ireland from the Italian states, Spain from the Germanies? What were this discourse's unifying elements, and what was its European character? To be sure, these questions are not subject to ready responses. In our discussions, we came away with a conviction that the existence of such a European public discourse could serve as a useful working hypothesis to

students of the European past. Our final, if necessarily provisional, position was that such a public discourse could be compared to a tissue composed of different fragments (our *discursive traditions*), and shared by several European peoples, their political divisions notwithstanding. As one of our colleagues put it, it was like a Harlequin's dress, a patch-like habit, whose patches retained their distinctiveness all the while connected to each other, forming a variegated whole. A Harlequin's dress: this could have perhaps been our book's title, with its subtitle being 'Elements of European Public Discourse in the pre-Modern Era'.

Thus, variety and pluralism are central images that emerge from this book. There is variety and pluralism in the approaches brought to bear by the authors in their own analyses. But we claim that the qualities of variety and pluralism are also central in the very substance of Europe's history. Here, as we noted earlier, we come to face one of the cornerstones of modern European historiography. From the early nineteenth century, the history of writing the history of Europe has developed along two complementary axes: the nation state and, necessarily, a centralizing and unifying perspective. This perspective was made necessary by the conviction that the nation state represented the highest form of historical development. Recent attempts to write the history of Europe, without always acknowledging their reliance upon the nation state's historiography, have moved very much in the same direction. In this recent tradition, Europe's history has been imagined as entailing an effort to unify, and centralize its political structures, its economies, and its cultures. Even in what, for the sake of argument, we define as the 'constructivist' tradition, there exists an assumption that those who have imagined the history of Europe have done so on the basis of such a unified, and centralized (or unifying and centralizing) perspective.

Our project moves away from this set of assumptions. It rather assumes the perspective that a patch-like landscape can be used as an organizing principle for (re)thinking the history of Europe; that different cadences of time, and a sensibility to non-linear trends, even contradictory ones, come closer to capturing the variegated and rich history of Europe, than does a narrative based on a linear, unidirectional, and centralizing set of assumptions. We like to think that our book, by virtue of the heterogeneity of the topics its sets out to cover, and by virtue of our collective determination not to distil these phenomena into one integrated and unified picture, proposes a new paradigm for studying the history of Europe.

In doing so, we at once address and take our distance from one of the major public issues of our time: Europe's current and future identity. Our project does have the ambition of adding a voice to this discussion. Yet, in our approach and our conclusions, we take our distance from what appears to be one of the dominant ideologies in Europe today. We propose that an examination of Europe's history in the pre-modern, pre-national era reveals variety rather than unity; a perduringly resilient localism alongside unifying forces such as Christianity and the law; the persistence of tradition (Christianity, magic, local customs) alongside novelty, in ideas and institutions. In short, the images of Europe that emerge from our project suggest that nothing in the 'pre-modern' (or early modern) centuries need lead to the conclusion that centralization and homogenization need be central principles of Europe's future identity.

What, then, of Europe's borders, or of its limits? To what extent does our own discussion of Europe's *discursive traditions* cast light on one of today's most hotly debated issues – subject of controversy and anxiety to citizens of the European Community as well as to those who aspire to join it? The answer will probably disappoint some readers, who may look into this book for arguments with which to support their positions for or against the European Union's possible enlargement. The answer for such readers is that the issues they wish resolved are exquisitely political, and that they require political answers. One could construct an answer for including, or for excluding, Turkey, or Romania, or Croatia from the European Union, just as comparable arguments could, in the past, have been constructed for or against Sweden's, or Greece's, or Poland's, or many other countries' membership.²⁴

This book suggests that there is a basis for entertaining a broad, capacious definition of Europe. There is perhaps just as strong a case for calling for a more limited, restrictive definition. In some discourses examined in subsequent chapters, territories physically located in Europe's margins, were referred to as being well outside Europe's imagined boundaries. In other discourses, these same regions were unquestioningly treated as if they belonged to the moral universe which comprised Europe's very core. This is true no less for the lands of the Ottoman Empire (Turkey included) as of the Scandinavian regions, arguably also of Iberia. It is at this analytical level that our discussion meets the work of the 'constructionists', for the sort of Europe one aspires to promote today and in the future must be constructed by reference to elements found in the following pages. But such a construction must be the expression of a political will, and this is, perhaps, what is most strikingly absent in today's public discourse on Europe.

In short, if its non-teleological and non-celebratory perspectives colour our collective approach, an additional perspective is offered by the patch-like pattern that emerges from our enterprise. Variety, rather than unity, tensions and contradictions rather than homogeneity, change as well as resistance to it define Europe's history in the early modern centuries.

One final observation: indirectly, but no less sharply, in the course of our discussions, we faced the issue of historical periodization, which, in turn, led us once again to dwell upon the complex issue of historical time. The question was simple enough: each of the essays that follows deals with a different theme, and proposes the existence of a European *discursive tradition*, mostly in the early modern centuries. Should all these traditions be labelled 'early modern', and, if so, how should each be placed in relation to the presumed modernity that began in the eighteenth century? Were discursive traditions about 'others', or about physical phenomena, or about the law subject to the same cadences of change, as Europe made that presumably great leap into modernity? While struggling with this question, we came across a passage in Johan Huizinga's old but still wonderfully suggestive essay, 'The Problem of the Renaissance'. There, the great Dutch historian, musing on Burckhardt's view of the Renaissance, wrote that 'the image for the transition from the Middle Ages to modern times is ... not that of one revolution of a great wheel, but that of a long succession of waves rolling onto a beach, each of them breaking at a different point

and a different moment. Everywhere the lines between the old and the new are different; each cultural form, each thought turns at its own time, and the transformation is never that of the whole complex of civilization'.²⁵ We should like to think that Huizinga's metaphor can be equally applied to our own enterprise. His reference was to a cultural movement, and ours is to a three-century long span of European history. Yet, in both instances, the metaphor helps to undermine the sense of uniform, lock step change over time, and sharpens the image of fragmentation and variety in Europe's history.

Postscript

The initial meetings on which this book is based were completed by spring 2004. The climate about Europe was positive at the time. It seemed then that citizens of the European Union's states were favourably inclined to the transformation of the Union into a stronger and more integrated organization. If anything, several participants in our meetings expressed their fear that the European Union would become too centralized, and too bureaucratic, that it would try to deprive Europe's culture of its variety and the diversity of its traditions. Whether well- or ill-founded, these fears have now receded, and have been replaced by other, perhaps contradictory ones. In June 2005, as these introductory pages were being written, the European Union seemed to have slid into a state of torpor, unable not only to sustain the process of adopting a Constitution, but even at a loss as to what budget to adopt for the coming years. Rather than fearing for the EU's excess of centralization and uncontrolled power, newspaper polls in various European countries suggest that a surprisingly high fraction of the population nurtures doubts about the Union's ability to survive even in the form it has taken in recent years.

At best, these issues are tangential to our own scholarly enterprise. Yet, it is perhaps understandable that they would suggest a set of reflections about how the themes contained in this book might add to the current, dispirited discussion about the European Union's future. What has happened in recent weeks (late spring and early summer, 2005) is that a process of institutional reinforcement has been arrested. The issues that produced this standstill are clear enough: budgets, subventions, diplomatic and military policies, the admission of new countries, a consequent generalized fear about the future. Yet, it is difficult not to recognize that, alongside these issues, deep processes that were set into motion long ago continue to function. For young people, especially, Europe is a reality in a way that it simply was not for their parents. Programmes of student exchanges have, for one, generated knowledge of Europe among millions of young Europeans, whose lives are coloured by this new knowledge. The 'Treaty of Schengen' has created conditions of travel that altogether have changed the meaning of national borders among huge numbers of travellers through Europe. Travel and study have generated new sensibilities about the environment, about work and leisure. Even in the absence of new institutions,

and new treaties, Europe continues on its path, in directions that were at once imagined, and not. Europeans, drawing on old and new conventions of communicating with each other, continue to inhabit a symbolic space whose underlying unity is provided by these discursive habits.

A reading of this book should give rise to comparable views. For the synthetic image of Europe that emerges from the essays that follow is that of a fragmented unity held together by the Harlequin's dress of discursive traditions. No attention has been paid in this book to the history of diplomacy, not even (and on this point we should, justly, be criticized) to economic trends, little and then only hurried attention has been given to war, and to technology. These are subjects whose importance does not escape even this author. Another time, another workshop, another book – this could be one response to this observation. Yet, we dare to propose a different answer. For this book claims that a European public discourse, composed of fragments that were unevenly shared by societies across the European continent, did offer the basis of self-recognition among inhabitants of this continent. However patchy, and however unevenly distributed the patches might have been, the metaphor of a Harlequin's dress did provide then, as perhaps it helps to provide now, a sense of coherence to Europe. As Ernst Curtius suggested in this essay's very opening, for Europe to cease being merely a name and a geographic expression (and, one should perhaps add, a huge market), it must be rooted in a concept of history.

If not entirely mistaken, the preceding thought should help to dissipate some of the current gloom about Europe's future.

Notes

1. Quoted in French translation in Hersant and Durand-Bogaert (2000), p. 854. Note that in the English translation (Curtius, 1953, p. 6), the expression 'conception d'histoire' appears as 'historical entity in our conception'.
2. De Staël (1814).
3. Hersant and Durand-Bogaert (2000).
4. Chabod (2001); Fèbvre (1999).
5. See Verga (2004), pp. 93–6.
6. Ferro in Fèbvre (1999), pp. 16–17.
7. Book II, 1.
8. Chabod (2001), p. 8.
9. Havel (1995); Todorov (2003), pp. 87–102; Eco (2003), p. 1.
10. Duroselle (1990), p. 21.
11. Dawson (1934).
12. Halecki (1943).
13. Dunn (1992); Pagden (2002).
14. Reale (2003), p. xiii.
15. Pagden (2002).
16. Nelson et al. (1992), p. 5.
17. Malmborg and Strath (2002), p. 5.
18. Hay (1968), p. 116.
19. Heller (2002), p. 12.

20. A recent, eloquent antidote is Mazower (2002).
21. Ossola (2001), ix. Marc Bloch's point, made more than half a century earlier, seems not far removed from Ossola's own. Writing in 1937, Bloch reflected that 'les sociétés humaines sont douées d' une mémoire, pleine de trous, parfois, mais souvent aussi terriblement tenace ... les generations se transmettent les unes aux autres des souvenirs qui s'incorporent à chaque cerveau individuel'.
22. Morin (1987), pp. 79, 129.
23. Fèbvre (1944), p. 11.
24. Pécout (2004) contains a set of very interesting ideas and approaches to the problem of Europe's frontiers.
25. Huizinga (1959), pp. 281–2.

References

- Chabod, F. (2001; orig. pub. 1961), *Storia dell'idea d' Europa*, a cura di Ernesto Sestan e Armando Saitta (Bari).
- Curtius, E.R. (1953), *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, translated from the German by Willard R. Trask (Princeton).
- Dawson, C. (1934), *The Making of Europe. An Introduction to the History of European Unity* (New York).
- De Staël, G. (1814), *De L'Allemagne* (Uppsala).
- Dunn, J. (ed.) (1992), *Democracy: the Unfinished Journey, 508 BC to AD 1993* (Oxford).
- Duroselle, J.B. (1990), *L'Europe. Histoire de ses peuples* (Paris).
- Eco, U. (2003), 'L'Europa incerta tra rinascita e decadenza', *La Repubblica*, 31 May, p. 1.
- Fèbvre, L. (1944), *Autour de l'Héptameron, amour sacré amour profane* (Paris).
- Fèbvre, L. (1999), *L'Europe. Genèse d'une civilisation. Cours professé au Collège de France en 1944–1945, établi, présenté et annoté par Thérèse Charmasson et Brigitte Mazon, avec la collaboration de Sarah Lüdemann*. Préface de Marc Ferro (Paris).
- Halecki, O. (1943), *A History of Poland* (New York).
- Havel, V. (1995), *Charta der Europäischen Identität*, Website: http://www.europa-union.de/fileadmin/files_eud/PDF
- Hay, D. (1968), *Europe: The Emergence of an Idea* (Edinburgh).
- Heller, A. (2002), 'Europe: an Epilogue' in Nelson, Roberts, and Veit, pp. 12–25.
- Hersant, Y. and F. Durand-Bogaert (2000), *Europes. De l'Antiquité au XXe siècle. Anthologie critique et commentée* (Paris).
- Huizinga, J. (1959), 'The Problem of the Renaissance', in *Men and Ideas. Essays. History, the Middle Ages, the Renaissance* (New York).
- Malmberg M. and B. Stråth (eds) (2002), *The Meaning of Europe* (Oxford).
- Mazower, M. (2002), *Dark Continent: Europe's Twentieth Century* (New York).
- Morin, E. (1987), *Penser l'Europe* (Paris).
- Nelson, B., D. Roberts and W. Veit (eds) (1992), *The Idea of Europe. Problems of National and Transnational Identity* (New York and Oxford).
- Ossola, C. (2001), 'Europa, Europa ...' in Carlo Ossola, a cura di, *Europa: miti di identità* (Venice).
- Pagden, A. (ed.) (2002), *The Idea of Europe. From Antiquity to the European Union* (Cambridge).

- Pécout, G. (2004), sous la direction de, *Penser les frontières de l'Europe du XIXe au XXIe siècle. Elargissement et union: approches historiques* (Paris).
- Pius II (1984), *Commentarii rerum memorabilium*, edizione a cura di Luigi Totaro (Milan).
- Reale, G. (2003), *Radici culturali e spirituali dell'Europa. Per una rinascita dell' 'uomo europeo'* (Milano).
- Todorov, T. (2003), *Le nouveau désordre mondial. Réflexions d'un Européen* (Paris).
- Verga, M. (2004), *Storie d' Europa. Secoli XVIII–XXI* (Rome).