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COMMENT PEUT-ON ÊTRE EUROPÉEN?
CONCEPTIONS OF EUROPE IN FRENCH LITERATURE AND FILM

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate School
of The Ohio State University

By
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* * * * *

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ABSTRACT

With the end of the Cold War and the quickening pace of global economic integration, the concept of a united Europe has taken on greater importance and momentum, becoming a major focus of public discourse among journalists, academics and politicians. However, the steadily increasing level of institutional integration has not yet been matched by a shared perception of what it means to be “European.” Indeed, the word “Europe” itself, in spite of its common usage, does not refer to a clearly identifiable geographical, historical, ethnic or cultural entity. And yet, there is today such a thing as the European Union, with its established institutions and its recognized symbols. The modern concept of a united Europe arose in large part from the excesses of competing nationalisms, a phenomenon that proponents of the European Union seek to transcend. In its most narrow form, the rationale for European unification is simply to avoid a reoccurrence of the increasingly destructive wars that have periodically ravaged the continent. In its most generous form, the push for unification reflects a form of intercultural commonality within the current ethnic, religious and linguistic diversity of the continent, a commonality that in turn calls for a greater degree of political integration. In this latter view, it is increasingly artificial national borders, and not fundamental cultural distinctions, that divide Europeans. Citizens of established nation-states generally base their sense of collective identity, their interpersonal and societal ties, on a common past, whether real or partly imagined. The currently evolving economic and political experiment, which finds its institutional expression in the European Union, instead posits an emerging multinational/multicultural identity largely based on its future prospects. To a great extent, these prospects, or expectations, have been developed within the fields of literature and film.
This study explores the conceptions of Europe found in the works of five authors: Voltaire, Germaine de Staël, Victor Hugo, Maurice Barrès, and Jean Renoir. These authors (in the broad sense of the term, thus including the film director Jean Renoir) were all extremely well-known during their lifetimes, and highly influential in the cultural life of their day. They also played important political roles, most of them throughout their careers, and thus exerted a perceptible degree of direct or indirect influence on the development of Europe as a concept and as a practical project. Taken together, the literary and filmic production of these authors provides a historically continuous sampling of the principal representations of Europe, within France, since the eighteenth century. It is also indicative of the wide range of viewpoints expressed in the public discourse on the topic of European integration. The following chapters are by no means intended as comprehensive studies of the works and lives of each author. Neither do they constitute an attempt at a complete history of the idea of Europe from the eighteenth to the twentieth century in France. While highly influential, each of the authors I have chosen hardly constitutes the only relevant example within his or her lifetime. This study is thus limited in terms of its chronology, of its focus on France, and of the number of authors it covers.

The chronological succession found in the following chapters is not designed to retrospectively designate the authors I have chosen as precursors or prophets of Europe. Of the five, only Victor Hugo can be classified as having provided a “défense et illustration” of a united Europe. I have therefore not tried to superimpose a progressive or teleological pattern of evolution towards a united Europe onto the works of these authors. My approach has instead been archeological, a sustained attempt at extracting the changing and sometimes contradictory conceptions of Europe, through an examination of the texts. In this perspective, the idea of Europe is less a unitary historical fact to be retrospectively explored, and more of a multifold corpus of literary constructs to be analyzed and contextualized.
To Sharon
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Chapter 1

Introduction

Europe has never existed. It does not constitute an easily definable entity in geographic, historical, political, social, cultural, ethnic, or religious terms. The word "Europe," whose origin remains unclear, has been used to cover multiple and competing meanings over time, varying from merely a neutral appellation for a loose geographical concept, to an identification with Christendom and civilization, and to its current usage in a developing historical and cultural sense, as a designation and implicit rationale for a transnational political organization. To this day, few of the continent's inhabitants—if it is a continent—would identify themselves primarily as "Europeans."¹ Despite its long interrelated history and literary traditions, what Paul Valéry, after the trauma of the First World War, famously called in *La Crise de l'esprit*, "une sorte de cap du vieux continent, un appendice occidental de l'Asie" (1004), remains a largely unknown quantity, an amorphous multinational entity that seems to be engaged in a continuous quest for some form of common identity. To his own question, "Mais qui donc est Européen?" (1007), Valéry replied with one of the many definitions that have so far been offered, his own being based on the Roman Empire, Christianity, and, less predictably, Greek geometry. Needless to say, this particular definition has yet to gain wider acceptance than any other.

And yet, there is today such a thing as the European Union, with its established institutions and its recognized symbols.² The concept or issue of Europe, meanwhile, as well as the evolving notion of a "European identity," have for centuries constituted

1
important themes for a wide-ranging series of writers, and more recently, film directors. Indeed, to a great extent, the textual production on and about Europe has announced and accompanied—that is, helped to bring about—the current process of European integration. While Europe remains difficult to define, and therefore study, as a historical reality, its diverse representations can be analyzed as literary and filmic topoi. As Edgar Morin points out in his 1987 essay, *Penser l'Europe* (196-7), citizens of established nation-states generally base their sense of collective identity, their personal and societal links, on a common *past*, whether real or partly imagined. The currently evolving experiment, which finds its institutional expression in the European Union, instead posits an emerging multinational/multicultural identity based on its *future* prospects—and on the explicit renunciation of much of its past. These prospects or expectations did not recently arise *ex nihilo*, but were developed over time by artists and philosophers, who articulated a wide variety of conceptions of Europe, some of which will be discussed in the following chapters.

***Textual Europes***

This study explores the conceptions of Europe found in the works of five authors: Voltaire, Germaine de Staël, Victor Hugo, Maurice Barrès, and Jean Renoir. These authors were all extremely well-known during their lifetimes, and highly influential in the cultural life of their day. They also played important political roles, most of them throughout their careers, and thus exerted a perceptible degree of direct or indirect influence on the development of Europe as a concept and as a practical project. Taken together, the literary and filmic production of these authors provides a historically continuous sampling of the principal representations of Europe, within France, since the eighteenth century. It is also indicative of the wide range of viewpoints expressed in the public discourse on the topic of European integration.

The following chapters are by no means intended as comprehensive studies of the works and lives of each author. Neither do they constitute an attempt at a complete history of the idea of Europe from the eighteenth to the twentieth century in France.
While highly influential, each of the authors I have chosen hardly constitutes the only relevant example within his or her lifetime. This study is thus limited in terms of its chronology, of its focus on France, and of the number of authors it covers. To be complete, a study of the literary traces of Europe should be a collective effort in comparative literature, encompassing a broad spectrum of European cultures. Obviously, authors as diverse as Dante, Erasmus, Machiavelli, Leibniz, Hegel, and Nietzsche have been influential in shaping the ancient and ongoing debate over the concept of European identity. It should be noted that a series of broader histories of the idea of Europe are available. The books by Denys Hay, Bronislaw Geremek, Carl Pegg, Denis de Rougemont, and Bernard Voyenne, to cite only a few, provide useful and often insightful overviews, over a much longer historical span.

In this study, the various representations of France’s European neighbors will be one of the principal considerations. Some countries will receive more attention than others, due to their importance in the authors’ texts and in the relevant historical contexts. In particular, after the chapter on Voltaire, these French authors’ representations of Germany will be a central concern. While Europe is not reducible to the French-German relationship, it has been central to most of the historical period considered here. The antagonism between them contributed to the worst wars on the continent; and their reconciliation has been both the principal means and goal of the current process of European unification. Aside from European states and their inhabitants, an issue addressed in each chapter is the representation of transnational or trans-European minorities, groups whose collective identities are not immediately associated with individual nations, such as Jews, Gypsies or homosexuals. Another recurrent topic will be the ways in which groups perceived as non-European, such as Turks or Africans, are represented.

The chronological succession found in the following chapters is not designed to retrospectively designate the authors I have chosen as precursors or prophets of Europe. Of the five, only Victor Hugo can be classified as having provided a “défense et illustration” of a united Europe. I have therefore not tried to superimpose a progressive
or teleological pattern of evolution towards a united Europe onto the works of these authors. My approach has instead been archeological, a sustained attempt at extracting the changing and sometimes contradictory conceptions of Europe, through an examination of the texts. In this perspective, the idea of Europe is less a unitary historical fact to be retrospectively explored, and more of a multifold corpus of literary and filmic constructs to be analyzed and contextualized.

Culture vs. Civilization

Since the eighteenth century is the historical starting point for this study, and since the representations of Germany will be among the main topics discussed, I have chosen, as part of this introduction, to outline the controversy between two eighteenth-century German philosophers over what is still a contentious issue in our own day, an issue directly linked to that of European unification: the opposition between Immanuel Kant’s defense of the notion of cosmopolitan or universal civilization, as expressed in his 1784 “Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View,” and Johann Herder’s affirmation of differentiated individual cultures, in his 1774 “Yet Another Philosophy of History.”

Kant’s keywords, “universal” and “cosmopolitan” (which are of course associated with important literary and philosophical themes of the Enlightenment period), point toward a transcultural commonality to human historical development, inscribing all human societies within a generalized pattern of progress and unification: “The greatest problem of the human race, to the solution of which Nature drives man, is the achievement of a universal civic society which administers law among men” (fifth thesis, 16). Unlike this future “universal civic society,” individual societies that remain isolated and backward are inherently doomed to eventual failure. As rational individuals, all human beings, regardless of their social and cultural specificities, are thus impelled by Nature along an inevitable progression, leading from primitive human folly to an advanced universal civilization:

Through war, through the taxing and never-ending accumulation of armament, through the want which any state, even in peacetime, must suffer
internally, Nature forces them at first to make inadequate and tentative attempts; finally, after devastations, revolutions, and even complete exhaustion, she brings them to that which reason could have told them at the beginning and with far less sad experience, to wit, to step from the lawless condition of savages into a league of nations. (seventh thesis, 18-19)

While it is necessarily universal, Kant's pattern of progress does not evolve simultaneously and uniformly throughout the world. Unavoidably, some societies attain a quicker pace of historical advancement than others. Conveniently, Kant discerned a higher level of societal progress within the Europe of his day, and consequently posited its extension to the rest of the world, without specifying the means by which this civilizational extension would be accomplished: "one will discover a regular progress in the constitution of states on our continent (which will probably give law, eventually, to all the others)" (ninth thesis, 24).

A former student of Kant, and a major figure in the Sturm und Drang movement that prefigured French Romanticism, Herder produced a comprehensive critique of Kantian universalism and continuous progress. He proclaimed the radical, unbridgeable dissimilarities of individual cultures, each one progressing or declining according to its own internal logic, not following some universalistic pattern of generalized progress toward a common, unitary ideal or standard. Herder's exaltation of societal particularism discounts Kant's premise of rational individuals as a misleading abstraction. Human behavior remains in the Herderian schema largely irrational, determined by the historical contingencies of their specific culture:

Whenever the dispositions and spheres of happiness of two nations collide, there arises what we call prejudice, mob judgment, and narrow nationalism! But in its proper time and place prejudice is good, for happiness can spring from it. It thrusts people together toward their center, attaches them more firmly to their roots, causes them to flourish more fully in their own way, and makes them more ardent and therefore happier with their own tendencies and purposes. (43-4)

Any attempt at establishing a classification or hierarchy across cultures, which are by their nature radically distinct, is for Herder illusory and self-defeating: "Basically, then, all comparison is disastrous" (43). The figurative fixity of his metaphors—"roots,"
“center”—connotes an inherent deterministic drive, verging on cultural autarchy, that is specific to each societal entity, and that conditions the thoughts and behavior of individuals. Herder’s skepticism and relativism directly countered Kant’s notion of continuous progress spreading outward from a Europe construed as the civilizational standard, leading the rest of world toward a state of generalized ideality: “The universal, philosophical, philanthropic tone of our century readily applies ‘our own ideal’ of virtue and happiness to each distant nation, to each remote period in history. But can one such single ideal be the sole standard for judging, condemning, or praising the customs of other nations or periods?” (44).

Both of these competing philosophic theses have become associated with repressive historical legacies: Herderian particularism with aggressive nationalism within Europe, and Kantian universalism with colonial conquest and subjugation outside of the continent. Herder’s revalorization of prejudice and irrationalism, his degree of tolerance for cultural isolationism, and his endorsement of ethnic or religious determinism as the main constituent element of national identity, were later appropriated by nazi propaganda, alongside some of Nietzsche’s more bizarre pronouncements. In the eighteenth-century context of French cultural supremacy and German political division, Herder assailed the Kantian pattern of universal progress, arguing that it tended to establish an implicit hierarchy of nations and cultures, while designating the more “advanced” as models to be emulated, and relegating the more “primitive” to the correspondingly negative status of quaintly outdated stages that must be outgrown. As is indicated by the early example of Herder’s denunciation of universalism as merely a disguised form of parochialism, the critique of Eurocentrism—more recently illustrated in various forms by the works of Samir Amin, Martin Bernal, or Edward Said—began within Europe, during the Enlightenment.

The opposition between the Herderian defense of differentiated cultures and Kantian enlightened cosmopolitanism, structured around a metaphor of deeply-embedded roots and another of radiating light (or of solidity vs. mobility), will reappear in some of the following chapters. Hugo’s reiterated appeals in favor of European
unification provide the best illustration of Kantian universalism, with a clear Francocentric orientation. Meanwhile, Barrès's nationalistic ethos of "la terre et les morts," in the context of German political supremacy after the Franco-Prussian War, offers up an extreme form of Herderian particularism.

**Inventing Europe**

Valéry’s interrogation as to who was European, which was quoted at the beginning of this introduction, recalls the famous exclamation of surprise at the encounter with incomprehensible foreignness or alterity, in the form of a question, from letter 30 of Montesquieu’s 1721 epistolary novel, *Lettres persanes*: “Comment peut-on être Persan?” Through the device of the candid outsider’s gaze, Montesquieu was able to satirize French institutions, and, more widely, the “mœurs et coutumes européennes” that seemed so curious to his foreign visitors. The fictional clash of cultures that he orchestrated between Persia and France, or between Asia and Europe, produced much mutual puzzlement among his characters. For some of the French interlocutors of the Persian visitors, Rica and Usbek, the notion of an existing, unfamiliar culture in a foreign nation remained difficult to understand, or even conceptualize. Visitors from such a nation could only be perceived as fantastical creatures. This type of lack of comprehension across cultures is of course hardly limited to the realm of fiction. Not surprisingly, the concept of intercultural commonality between adjoining nations, or the simultaneous acceptance of other cultures as at once neighboring and different, similar and distinct, can produce a similar level of incomprehension. The conceptions of Europe presented in the following chapters constitute limited but influential examples of literary and cinematographical encounters—producing reactions ranging from the enthusiastic to the xenophobic—with those other fantastical creatures, Europeans. It is through such encounters that Europe was invented, or that its conceptions evolved from the domain of myth, in the form of some long-lost common origin, to that of history, in terms of cultural links forged over time.
Chapter 2

Voltaire's Europe

Few writers have so dominated their period as Voltaire (1694–1778); and even fewer have accomplished this beyond the borders of their country. Although he was for the most part skeptical about the possibility of sustained, peaceful cooperation among European states, Voltaire held an inescapably central position in the literary and political cross-currents of his day. Much of his work thus reflects or participates in the already active debates on the issues of European identity and integration. Perhaps the most famous (or infamous) man in Europe during his life, Voltaire announces, in positive or negative terms, most of the variations the European topos will successively, and often simultaneously, undergo: an imagined utopian community of nations that would establish perpetual peace; an imperialist continent that was colonizing much of the rest of the world; a racist Europe periodically ridding itself of undesirable minorities; a rough balance of power among a group of interconnected nation-states; an expanding union based on social and cultural commonalities within most of Europe.

A prolific writer in a wide variety of genres, Voltaire was originally a playwright, poet, and historian, before becoming, during and after his lifetime, the embodiment of the Enlightenment. Although his historical standing as the best-known and most influential eighteenth-century philosophe remains unchanged, many of Voltaire’s texts, including those of which he was most proud, are largely forgotten. While the bawdy humor of the mock-heroic La Pucelle is still enjoyable, for instance, his epic poem La Henriade is seldom read today.1 Similarly, Voltaire’s plays, of which he wrote more than fifty, and
which constitute the principal focus of his early career, are today almost never performed. Considering the encyclopedic scope of Voltaire's written work, any attempt at exhaustiveness within the format of this study would be futile. This chapter will center on certain historical and polemical texts that are most relevant to the development of the theme of Europe. Some aspects of this theme are already present within much of the critical literature devoted to Voltaire, which includes a large number of titles such as "Voltaire et la Hollande," "Voltaire's Russia," "L'Inde de Voltaire," etc. Delineating "Voltaire's Europe" entails an examination of the ways in which he represented different European countries, how he situated Europe in relation to the rest of the world, and to what extent he assigned the status of alterity to individual human groups and geographical areas.

Such an examination does not constitute a simple or straightforward task. In spite of the vaunted clarity of his style—"Voltaire was utterly incapable of writing a sentence the meaning of which is not pellucid at first reading" (Besterman 1969, 209)—such factors as the polemical nature of so many of his texts, the fictional masks he used to express different sides of an issue, as well as the subterfuges he used against the ever-present threat of censorship, complicate the task of the interpreter. As Peter Gay details (83-7), Voltaire often was forced to resort to obfuscatory stratagems, such as using pseudonyms—Besterman (1974, 91) counted about 150—and steadfastly denying he was the author of a given text, or pretending to strongly denounce his own views. In addition, due to the sheer size of the Voltairean corpus, along with the extraordinary length of a literary and political career that spanned six decades, his enviable facility at writing, his propensity for swiftly producing numerous timely and topical texts, and the often petty and vindictive attitudes he displayed when engaging in personal polemics, it is not unusual for the reader to find contradictory statements or positions within Voltaire's written work. The complex issue of European identity and commonalities is no exception, especially in the eighteenth-century context of nearly continuous continental and colonial warfare. At one level, Voltaire generally sought to puncture what he saw as excessive European pride and self-satisfaction, by pointing out that several Asian
civilizations (especially China and India) were much larger and older than their European counterparts, which they had preceded and previously surpassed. However, Voltaire also unmistakably posited Europe as the dominant world power, not only in terms of military and political force, but also in the arts and sciences.

It is indicative of the breadth of the Voltairean corpus—and of the critical literature devoted to it throughout the world—that Theodore Besterman entitled his review of previous efforts at compiling a comprehensive bibliography: "The Impossible Dream" (1974). In his preface to Mary-Margaret Barr's 1968 Voltaire bibliography, René Pomeau also stressed that scholarship on Voltaire is, to an exceptional extent, an international phenomenon: "Voltaire est partout, ou presque partout" (vii). Indeed, the bibliographies compiled by Barr and Frederick Spear only partly account for the wealth and diversity of critical output on Voltaire's work around the world. This diversity reflects Voltaire's privileged position as a main locus of dialogue and debates within eighteenth-century studies. As Besterman points out in his biography, Voltaire, the multilingual polymath who corresponded with widespread segments of the European elites, was well suited for his central role within the eighteenth-century transnational community of letters:

Voltaire certainly stands for all that is most characteristically French, for good and ill, but he was also the most universal genius of modern times. He was so because he spent half his life in England, in the Netherlands, in Prussia and other parts of Germany, and in what is now Switzerland; because of his numerous friendships in these and many other countries; by the visits of many hundreds of foreigners come to do him homage; by his innumerable correspondence, which includes letters written by him in English, Italian, German, Spanish, Latin; by his wide and deep reading in all these languages. (1969, 537)

**Political Cosmopolitanism**

Peter Gay has highlighted Voltaire's wide-ranging interventions, irrespective of national borders, in political issues and controversies throughout his career: "[Voltaire] always said demurely that he was only cultivating his garden, but privately he defined his garden as Europe" (17). On a personal level, Voltaire was proud of his cosmopolitanism,
his capacity to adapt to and learn from other cultures. In a letter to Mme du Deffand, written from Colmar after his departure from the court of Frederick II (23 Apr. 1754), he talks of his “peau de caméléon”: “J’étais devenu anglais à Londres, je suis allemand en Allemagne” (D5786). This was the Frenchman who valued Newton and Locke above Descartes and Pascal, who perceived philosophical model societies in distant China and India, who cast a Russian absolute monarch as the standard-bearer of the Enlightenment. Most durably, Voltaire championed an England where he saw the triumph of bourgeois values (religious toleration, free trade, meritocracy), against an archaically aristocratic France. In a letter written in English from London (11 Apr. 1728), he praises his place of refuge as a free country ruled by law, where he finds himself at home: “I think, I write like a free Englishman” (D330).

The multilingual, well-traveled Voltaire was the most illustrious, long-lasting, and well-connected member of what Thomas Schlereth calls the “international intellectual class” of the Enlightenment, a class that was notable for its aversion to narrow provincialism. Voltaire’s cosmopolitanism, and apparent concomitant lack of patriotism, has brought him retrospective blame from some critics. In a book that was published in 1938—the year of Munich—Louis Réau accused Voltaire of nothing less than treason: “Toutes ses sympathies vont à la Prusse et à l’Angleterre. [...] Il est si bon Prussien qu’il félicite Frédéric d’avoir battu les Français à Rossbach [1757]” (288). This accusation is the type of one-dimensional analysis that is particularly ill-suited to Voltaire, who in his writings was anything but uniform and dogmatic on most, though not all, issues. In fact, Voltaire often did exhibit clear signs of patriotism, as after the French victory over British and Dutch troops at the battle of Fontenoy in 1745. As Besterman has noted, Voltaire was not only indulging his personal sense of French pride, but also fulfilling his assigned propagandistic role within the court of Louis XV as royal historiographer and gentilhomme ordinaire de la chambre du roi: “The new courtier finished up with the popular, if not the artistic, triumph of the Poème de Fontenoy” (1969, 275). Aside from this uncharacteristically lackluster poem (8:371-95), chapters 15 and 16 of the Précis du Siècle de Louis XV (15:235-51) are also devoted to the battle of Fontenoy. Another
example of Voltaire’s patriotic texts is the *Éloge funèbre des officiers qui sont morts dans la guerre de 1741* (23:249-62). In his 1746 *La Félicité des temps, ou l'éloge de la France* (8:456-9), historical meliorism is linked to patriotic pride, with France presented as never having been more prosperous, at peace, and contented:

Patrie auguste et florissante,
Connais-tu des temps plus heureux?

Although his attempts at involving himself in politics were generally unsuccessful, particularly when he attempted to serve as a freelance diplomat for the court of Louis XV, Voltaire played a constant political role outside the governmental processes of his day. During most of his career, he was engaged in numerous campaigns, large or small, which he always conducted vigorously, whether it was against *l'Infâme*, or in favor of smallpox inoculation. In a letter to Jacob Vernes (15 Apr. 1767), he described his writing as the functional means to an effective political end, while rancorously belittling the impact of Rousseau’s literary output: “Jean-Jacques n’écrir que pour écrire, et moi, j’écris pour agir” (D14117). One of the first writers to regularly appeal to, and make use of, public opinion, Voltaire invented an innovative role for himself as the civic conscience of a nation and a continent that frequently reverted to barbarity and fanaticism. In particular, he took the lead against a cruel and arbitrary judicial system, defending the victims of such notorious cases of religious persecution within France as the Calas and Sirven families, as well as the Chevalier de la Barre. Voltaire had already honed his skills as a public defender of those he considered to be unjustly condemned and executed with the case of the British admiral Byng. As Besterman argues, the philosophe’s controversial legacy, alongside his literary production, is one of sustained political action: “Voltaire was in fact the first great man of letters who used his fame and literary skill in the active promotion of his social convictions” (1969, 539).

Throughout his career, Voltaire exhibited an unfortunate weakness for absolute monarchs he imagined to be enlightened or at least progressively-intentioned, especially the Prussian king Frederick II and the Russian empress Catherine II. However, Gay (166-71) defends Voltaire against the charge that he actually *promoted* what is too
commonly called "enlightened despotism," pointing out that, like other philosophes who were often forced to seek out powerful protectors, Voltaire tried to deal in a realistic manner with established European regimes on which he hoped to exert some influence, and from which he sought support for some of his campaigns (particularly anticlericalism). Perkins, finding the traditional notion of enlightened despotism nonsensical, examines instead Voltaire's evolving attitudes toward the "philosopher monarch" who uses power to further legitimate national goals, instead of personal ambitions (1965, chapter 4). Referring to the political program outlined in the *Idées républicaines* (24:413-32), Gay thus summed up the apparent contradiction between Voltaire's advocacy of liberal constitutional principles and his acceptance of absolutist monarchical institutions:

In Russia, Voltaire was supporting enlightened despotism with his admiring letters to Catherine; in France he was supporting constitutional absolutism by taking the king's part in his protracted controversy with the parlements. And in Geneva, he was supporting liberal republicanism by supporting the bourgeoisie. [...] What was important to Voltaire was not the form of government but its substance. Did it oppose the pretensions of aristocrats and ecclesiastics? Did it practice toleration? Did it operate under the rule of law, or was it at least moving toward it? If so, it was a good government. (218)³

Never a democrat in the modern sense of the word, Voltaire felt he rightly belonged, by virtue of his wealth, education, and achievements, within an elite segment of his society. He had no trouble conceiving that since the largest part of the population of France—85% of whom were peasants—lacked the time and the means for learning, it was necessarily excluded from participating in public affairs: "Le travail des mains ne s'accorde point avec le raisonnement, et le commun peuple en général n'use ni n'abuse guère de son esprit" (*Essai sur les mœurs*, 12:322). A similar expression of disdainful, class-based *hauteur* is found in a letter to Etienne Damilaville (19 March 1766), explaining that the campaign against *l'Infâme* would only need to reach a limited number—"quarante mille"—of enlightened readers: "car il est à propos que le peuple soit guidé, et non pas qu'il soit instruit. Il ne mérite pas de l'être" (D13212). During the early part of his stay in Geneva, Voltaire was naturally drawn to the wealthy patriciate
that thoroughly dominated the city-state. As Gay puts it: “When the inevitable quarrel over the theater finally erupted, Voltaire quite naturally became a symbol for the upper, Rousseau for the middle class” (197). However, in an illustration of the fluidity of his positions, Voltaire, the representative of *la haute bourgeoisie*, eventually became the political opponent of the Genevan elite.\textsuperscript{14}

\textbf{Associating Europeans}

Although Voltaire generally sought to undermine what would today be called a Eurocentric view of human history, this did not prevent him from presenting most of the European continent as constituting an amorphous, but discernible, political entity, in the form of an interrelated, if diverse, system of national and religious groups. Throughout his historical works, Voltaire inserts chapters that provide an overview of Europe as a whole at various historical junctures. Chapter 24 of the *Siècle de Louis XIV*, for instance, is devoted to the “Tableau de l’Europe depuis la paix d’Utrecht jusqu’à la mort de Louis XIV” (14:417-20), while the first chapter of the *Précis du Siècle de Louis XV* provides an assessment of the “Tableau de l’Europe après la mort de Louis XIV” (15:453-61). Similarly, several chapters of the *Essai sur les mœurs* constitute attempts to evaluate “l’état de l’Europe” at various historical periods. The second chapter of the *Siècle de Louis XIV* (14:159-75) is an examination of the different countries of Europe before the Sun King’s exceptionally long reign. Voltaire begins by stressing what he sees as their common characteristics:

\begin{quote}
Il y avait déjà longtemps qu’on pouvait regarder l’Europe chrétienne (à la Russie près) comme une espèce de grande république partagée en plusieurs états, les uns monarchiques, les autres mixtes; ceux-ci aristocratiques, ceux-là populaires, mais tous correspondants les uns avec les autres; tous ayant un même fond de religion, quoique divisés en plusieurs sectes; tous ayant les mêmes principes de droit public et de politique, inconnus dans les autres parties du monde. (14:159)
\end{quote}

In Voltaire’s representation, almost all European states thus share a common religious background, although they are unfortunately divided into a series of feuding sects. Perhaps more importantly, they share the same basic principles of civil law and
politics, even though they differ widely in terms of constitutional organization. The “grande république partagée en plusieurs états” suggests a patchwork, or a mosaic, of contentious but interdependent nations. The associated notions of trans-European commonality and internecine conflict are found in several Voltairean texts. In the *Essai sur les mœurs*, he draws a parallel between the situation of Europe in the fifteenth century and the Hellenistic period of interconnected city-states that alternated between cooperation and conflict: “l'Europe catholique était en effet une immense et tumultueuse république, dont les chefs étaient le pape et l'empereur, et dont les membres désunis sont des royaumes, des provinces, des villes libres, sous vingt gouvernements différents [...] l'Europe était en grand ce qu'avait été la Grèce, à la politesse près” (12:6-7). In the *Précis du Siècle de Louis XV*, a temporarily peaceful Europe, in Voltaire’s simile, is likened to a reconciled family after a series of feuds:

L'Europe entière ne vit guère luire de plus beaux jours que depuis la paix d'Aix-la-Chapelle, en 1748, jusque vers l'an 1755. Le commerce florissait de Pétersbourg jusqu'à Cadix; les beaux-arts étaient partout en honneur; on voyait entre les nations une correspondance mutuelle; l'Europe ressemblait à une grande famille réunie après ses différends. Les malheurs nouveaux de l'Europe semblaient être annoncés par des tremblements de terre qui se firent sentir en plusieurs provinces, mais d'une manière plus terrible à Lisbonne qu'ailleurs. (15:335)\textsuperscript{15}

One of the recurring themes in Voltaire’s historical works is the idea that a fragile, but lasting, balance of power had been established among the principal European political entities: “elles s’accordent surtout dans la sage politique de tenir entre elles, autant qu’elles peuvent, une balance égale de pouvoir, employant sans cesse les négociations, même au milieu de la guerre” (14:159-60). While this uneasy balance of power did not prevent recurring rivalries or outbreaks of warfare, it at least tended to keep most of Europe free of total domination by one country. By positing both strong national independence and increasing European interdependence, Voltaire was not far from what would later become the Gaulist concept of “l'Europe des états.”\textsuperscript{16} In the *Essai sur les mœurs*, the persistent sixteenth-century antagonism between the French king François I\textsuperscript{er} and Charles V of Spain is presented as the prefiguration of a multipolar
balance of power within Europe: “Le système de la balance et de l’équilibre était dès lors établi en Europe” (12:262).17

Voltaire was writing during a period of increasing European economic and social integration, although the effects of this process of integration—increased mobility, imported products, cultural exchanges—were largely limited to a privileged segment of the population of each country. The system of interdependency that he discerned within Europe remained visible only at the level of either governments or social and cultural elites. During the eighteenth century, it would not have been possible to speak of “l’Europe des peuples”—nor would Voltaire have been inclined to envision it. What he did perceive was a continuation of the links between literary and philosophical scholars that had been established during the humanistic period of the sixteenth century, but which were being greatly developed, especially in the domain of the natural sciences. In the Siècle de Louis XIV, Voltaire depicted the development of these exchanges between artists and scientists across national boundaries, which tended to strengthen the ties among European nations:

On a vu une république littéraire établie insensiblement dans l’Europe, malgré les guerres et malgré les religions différentes. Toutes les sciences, tous les arts, ont reçu ainsi des secours mutuels; les académies ont formé cette république. L’Italie et la Russie ont été unies par les lettres. L’Anglais, l’Allemand, le Français allaient étudier à Leyde. [...] les véritables savants dans chaque genre ont resserré les liens de cette grande société des esprits, répandue partout, et partout indépendante. Cette correspondance dure encore; elle est une des consolations des maux que l’ambition et la politique répandent sur la terre. (14:563–4)

During the eighteenth century, literary and scientific exchanges were assisted by the growing number of academies, several of which elected Voltaire as a member, and which gradually formed a trans-European network of contacts for scholars and scientists: “une classe académique se constitue au-dessus des frontières” (Pomeau 1991, 221). Among other social institutions, or meeting places, that facilitated contacts and exchanges within the cosmopolitan elite were the freemasons and the literary salons.18 As Pomeau notes, the development of European integration during the eighteenth century was primarily visible at the level of transnational social interaction: “Entreprise malaisée
que de définir l’unité d’une Europe unie sans structure. L’Europe des Lumières ne fut-elle rien d’autre qu’un état d’esprit? L’analyse pourtant, à défaut de saisir une ossature institutionnelle, rencontre la réalité solide d’un support social” (1991, 225). During the age of cosmopolitanism, transnational contacts and travels were relatively unhampered by rigid border controls or complex regulations regarding citizenship. For those who had the means, it was fairly easy to go live, work, and even obtain governmental positions in a foreign country. While means of transportation were still fairly slow, uncomfortable, and often dangerous in the eighteenth century, there were fewer customs barriers: “Les frontières, pourtant, sont au XVIIIᵉ siècle aisément franchissables. Avant l’ère des nationalismes, point de cordons policiers pour interdire l’accès aux étrangers” (Pomeau 1991, 14).

It is in the context of this increasing level of cross-border travels and cultural exchanges—which nevertheless remained accessible to only a limited aristocratic, economic, or cultural elite—that Voltaire, as Pomeau put it, “se pense Européen” (1958, 33). Like all French philosophes, Voltaire also had the advantage of belonging to a wider European elite within which French language and culture were predominant. For Voltaire, this privileged cultural status was the lasting legacy of the reign of Louis XIV. Published in 1752, the *Siècle de Louis XIV* provides a panorama of European politics and wars. The central focus, however, is what Voltaire sees as the exceptional cultural flowering within France during the seventeenth century. Although he was not ordinarily inclined to panegyrite French accomplishments, Voltaire found that under Louis XIV, whose reign lasted from 1643 to 1715, “dans l’éloquence, dans la poésie, dans la littérature, dans les livres de morale et d’agrément, les Français furent les législateurs de l’Europe” (14:539). Comparing the “Century of Louis XIV” to what he considered to be the three previous historical moments of exceptional achievements within Europe (the Greece of Pericles, Rome under Augustus, the Italian Renaissance), Voltaire declared it to be “celui des quatre qui approche le plus de la perfection” (14:156). The influence of the French language and culture reached its peak: “Cette heureuse influence ne s’est pas même arrêtée en France: elle s’est étendue en Angleterre; elle a excité l’émulation dont
avait alors besoin cette nation spirituelle et hardie; elle a porté le goût en Allemagne, les sciences en Russie; elle a même ranimé l'Italie, qui languissait, et l'Europe a dû sa politesse et l'esprit de société à la cour de Louis XIV" (14:156). The idea of French as an appropriate universal language for European elites is a familiar one in the eighteenth century, one which Voltaire helped to disseminate:

[La langue française] est devenue la langue de l'Europe: tout y a contribué; les grands auteurs du siècle de Louis XIV, ceux qui les ont suivis; les pasteurs calvinistes réfugiés, qui ont porté l'éloquence, la méthode, dans les pays étrangers; un Bayle surtout, qui, écrivant en Hollande, s'est fait lire de toutes les nations [...] La langue française est de toutes les langues celle qui exprime avec le plus de facilité, de netteté, et de délicatesse, tous les objets de la conversation des honnêtes gens; et par là elle contribue dans toute l'Europe à un des plus grands agréments de la vie. (Siècle de Louis XIV, 14:554-5)

This sort of retroactive logic, which finds inherent qualities within the French language in order to explain its dominance after the fact, was of course fairly common among writers who were understandably proud of its privileged status. An extreme case is found in Rivarol's well-known De l'universalité de la langue française (1784), which flatly declares that "la langue française, c'est la langue humaine" (271). In a somewhat foolhardy prediction, Rivarol pronounced English, the only rival of French, as unlikely to ever supplant it as a universal language and vector of culture. Writing at a time when the French cultural influence had already peaked, Rivarol provides an illustration of the conceptual risk inherent to any systematically universalizing postulate, which tends to proceed from de facto commonality to enforced uniformity: "Le temps semble être venu de dire le monde français, comme autrefois le monde romain; et la philosophie, lasse de voir les hommes toujours divisés par les intérêts divers de la politique, se réjouit maintenant de les voir, d'un bout de la terre à l'autre, se former en république sous la domination d'une même langue" (169). During the Revolutionary and, especially, the Napoleonic regimes, French armies would serve as the instrument of overt political and cultural "domination."

For his part, Voltaire was, with a few notable exceptions, far from blindly systematic. The 1764 Discours aux Welches (25:229-47), for instance, constitutes a
wide-ranging assault on Francocentrism. France is compared, almost always unfavorably, to other European countries—the only exceptions being found in the field of literature: “C’est dans ces seuls genres que vous êtes supérieurs; vous avez des rivaux ou des maîtres dans tous les autres” (25:246). In what is perhaps an excessively pessimistic analysis, Pierre Daprini sees personal bitterness on the part of the exiled and aged Voltaire as a partial explanation for the violent tone and sweeping range of this pamphlet: “il ne s’agit pas seulement ici de la critique acerbe de certains aspects de la vie française, mais d’une mise en cause globale de la valeur de la civilisation française en Europe” (57-8). Setting aside the issue of Voltaire’s tone, which derives in part from his battles against a corrupt and vicious legal system, what this text indicates is the permanence of his comparative European outlook. While Voltaire assigned a preeminent role to French language and culture within the European “system,” he seldom showed signs of outright nationalistic chauvinism, and he was consistent in his evaluation of other European countries, such as Holland and Great Britain, as more advanced and enlightened in several domains.

A Decentered History?

Published five years after the 1752 Siècle de Louis XIV, the far more extensive Essai sur les Mœurs constituted an attempt at providing a truly universal history, one not merely centered on the Bible and on Europe—as had been the work Voltaire much criticized, Bossuet’s Discours sur l’histoire universelle (1681). In terms of methodology, Voltaire also outlined his refusal of traditional, event-based history, which is often reduced to a series of battles or a succession of monarchs: “Je considère donc ici en général les sort des hommes plutôt que les révolutions du trône. C’est au genre humain qu’il eût fallu faire attention dans l’histoire: c’est là que chaque écrivain eût dû dire homo sum; mais la plupart des historiens ont décrit des batailles” (Essai sur les mœurs, 12:72). Although Voltaire does in fact often dwell on the outcomes of battles and the role of monarchs in his text, he seems in his stated intention to be developing a more complex model of historiography, grounded on the study of broad social and
cultural evolutions: “Je voudrais découvrir quelle était alors la société des hommes, comment on vivait dans l'intérieur des familles, quels arts étaient cultivés, plutôt que de répéter tant de malheurs et tant de combats, funestes objets de l'histoire, et lieux communs de la méchanceté humaine” (12:53). In most cases—Russia's Peter the Great would be a notable exception—Great Men were therefore not the real determining agents throughout history: “Mon but est toujours d'observer l'esprit du temps; c'est lui qui dirige les grands événements du monde” (12:49). As J.H. Brumfit has noted, Voltaire was an innovator in this field: “the role he gives in general history to the arts and sciences, to economic and constitutional changes, to accounts of customs and inventions, and to the life of the ordinary man, is vastly more important than that afforded to them by most earlier historians who are concerned with war, diplomatic intrigue, and colorful incident” (75).

Along with an avowed aversion toward a purely event-based conception of historical study, Voltaire exhibited uncompromising skepticism when he encountered unproved accounts of the past that tended to reinforce local prejudices: “Chez toutes les nations l’histoire est défigurée par la fable, jusqu’à ce qu’enfin la philosophie vienne éclairer les hommes; et lorsque enfin la philosophie arrive au milieu de ces ténèbres, elle trouve les esprits si aveuglés par des siècles d’erreurs qu’elle peut à peine les détromper; elle trouve des cérémonies, des faits, des monuments établis pour constater des mensonges” (13:174). An example of these “siècles d’erreurs” is found in chapter 9 of the *Essai sur les mœurs* (11:230-5), which is devoted to the “fausses légendes” of early Christianity. Voltaire compared the need for skepticism in the field of history to a scientific model: “N’admettons en physique que ce qui est prouvé, et en histoire que ce qui est de la plus grande probabilité reconnue” (11:164). This historical skepticism was also visible in his refusal to blindly glorify the past and to accept the notion that his contemporary society was inherently decadent: “ce penchant presque invincible que nous avons à louer le passé aux dépens du présent” (12:66). In Voltaire's conception of historiography, the past, full of errors, is not prologue. The task of the historian is precisely to point out the errors, to debunk established fables, in order to clear away
accreted ignorance and superstition. By distancing his work from the established historical model of Christian Europe, and by partly shifting his discursive focus toward Asian nations, Voltaire tended to delegitimize the religious, if not the “scientific,” basis for Eurocentrism.

When considering the best means by which to approach the study of world history “en philosophe,” Voltaire, ostensibly addressing Emilie du Châtelet, begins his lengthy examination by reversing Bossuet’s Eurocentrism—or, more precisely, his almost exclusive focus on the development of Judaism and Christianity: “vous portez d’abord votre vue sur l’Orient, berceau de tous les arts, et qui a tout donné à l’Occident” (11:158). From this basic premise flows the organizational principle of most of Voltaire’s historiography: in order to grasp the historical development of the entire world, it was necessary to look beyond the nations of Europe and to assess the achievements of the older civilizations that predated their emergence and recent expansion. For the philosophe, not only were many non-European countries and cultures more ancient, they had also been for a long time more advanced in the arts and sciences, the development of which Europeans achieved only slowly, and often through borrowing from their neighbors, particularly the Arabs:

La chimie et la médecine étaient cultivées par les Arabes. La chimie, perfectionnée aujourd’hui par nous, ne nous fut connue que par eux. Nous leur devons de nouveaux remèdes, qu’on nomme les minoratifs, plus doux et plus salutaires que ceux qui étaient auparavant en usage dans l’école d’Hippocrate et de Galien. L’algèbre fut une de leurs inventions. […] Enfin, dès le second siècle de Mahomet, il fallut que les chrétiens d’Occident s’instruisissent chez les musulmans. (11:214)

As Voltaire praises the scientific and artistic accomplishments of the Arabs, the Indians or the Chinese, he highlights the backwardness of Europe during much of its recorded history, which includes most of the medieval period. He thereby undermines any notion of continuity or linear progress throughout most of European history. As Karen O’Brien writes: “Gradually, Voltaire comes to see the Middle Ages as the opposite, rather than the precursor of modern Europe” (52). For instance, this is his acerbic assessment of the state of Europe at the beginning of the reign of Charlemagne:
“Figurez-vous des déserts où les loups, les tigres et les renards égorgent un bétail épars et timide: c’est le portrait de l’Europe pendant tant de siècles” (11:269). The general situation does not greatly improve after the reign of Charlemagne: “L’Europe était un chaos dans lequel le plus fort s’élevait sur les ruines du plus faible, pour être ensuite précipité par d’autres. Toute cette histoire n’est que celle de quelques capitaines barbares qui disputaient avec des évêques la domination sur des serfs imbéciles” (11:304).

Voltaire is thus fairly consistent in his depiction of Europe as backward and largely barbaric, by comparison with other regions of the world, during the Middle Ages, which appear in his stark vision of history as a prolonged, benighted period of abject decadence, situated between the glory of the Roman Empire and the sudden flowering of the Renaissance:

Lorsqu’on passe de l’histoire de l’empire romain à celle des peuples qui l’ont déchiré dans l’Occident, on ressemble à un voyageur qui, au sortir d’une ville superbe, se trouve dans des déserts couverts de ronces. Vingt jargons barbares succèdent à cette belle langue latine qu’on parlait du fond de l’Illyrie au mont Atlas. Au lieu de ces sages lois qui gouvernaient la moitié de notre hémisphère, on ne trouve plus que des coutumes sauvages. Les cirques, les amphithéâtres élevés dans toutes les provinces sont changés en masures couvertes de paille. Ces grands chemins si beaux, si solides, établis du pied du Capitole jusqu’au mont Taurus, sont couverts d’eaux croupissantes. La même révolution se fait dans les esprits; et Grégoire de Tours, le moine de Saint-Gall, Frédegaire, sont nos Polybe et nos Tite-Live. L’entendement humain s’abrutit dans les superstitions les plus lâches et les plus insensées. Ces superstitions sont portées au point que des moines deviennent seigneurs et princes; ils ont des esclaves, et ces esclaves n’osent pas même se plaindre. L’Europe entière croupit dans cet avilissement jusqu’au XVIe siècle, et n’en sort que par des convulsions terribles. (11:246)

Voltaire also finds no correlation between the fall of Constantinople to the Ottoman Turks (1453) and the beginning of the Renaissance in Italy. The late Byzantine Empire was for him unredeemably decadent, having nothing of value to transmit to Western Europe, which in fact was dependent on the Arabs for what little scientific knowledge it possessed during this period: “ce n’est point aux fugitifs de Constantinople qu’on a dû la renaissance des arts. Ces Grecs ne purent enseigner aux Italiens que le Grec. Ils n’avaient presque aucune teinture des véritables sciences; et c’est des Arabes
que l'on tenait le peu de physique et de mathématiques que l'on savait alors" (Essai sur les mœurs, 12:61). In Voltaire’s depiction, scientific and technological progress within Europe was seldom self-sustaining, and was contingent on outside contributions at crucial periods.

Another technique of Voltaire’s campaign to reduce European arrogance was to defend other regions of the world against what he saw as common misconceptions. Voltaire sought to destroy the presupposition that non-Christian countries would necessarily practice a form of paganism or atheism: “Il fallait être aussi ignorant et aussi téméraire que nos moines du moyen âge pour nous bercer continuellement de la fausse idée que tout ce qui habite au-delà de notre petite Europe, et nos anciens maîtres et législateurs les Romains, et les Grecs précepteurs des Romains, et les anciens Egyptiens précepteurs des Grecs, et enfin tout ce qui n’est pas nous, ont toujours été des idolâtres odieux et ridicules” (12:373). Similar defenses of Asian countries against accusations of idolatry and atheism are found in the article “Idole, idolâtre, idolâtrie” of the Dictionnaire philosophique (19:402-15), and in chapters 4 and 5 of Dieu et les hommes (28:435-9). In his shorter essay, La Philosophie de l’histoire, which in 1769 became the introduction to the Essai sur les mœurs, Voltaire praises the Persian book of Zend, which he describes as having predated the emergence of monotheism among the Hebrews: “voilà une religion utile, établie sur le dogme de l’immortalité de l’âme et sur la connaissance de l’Être créateur” (11:34-5). Indeed, not only do all Asian countries practice some form of religion, some of these are probably superior, in terms of their civilizing effects, to the European versions: “En un mot, l’ancienne religion de l’Inde, et celle des lettrés de la Chine, sont les seules dans lesquelles les hommes n’aient point été barbares” (11:51).

Along with history, the discipline of geography was one of Voltaire’s tools for ridiculing French and European pretensions. In the article “Géographie” of the Dictionnaire philosophique (19:252-7), he opposes the narrow provincialism of the inhabitants of Paris’s “rue Saint-Jacques” to the vastness and diversity of the world: “Prenez alors une mappemonde, montrez-leur l’Afrique entière, les empires du Japon, de
la Chine, des Indes, de la Turquie, de la Perse, celui de la Russie, plus vaste que ne fut l'empire romain; [...] vous opposerez l'univers à la rue Saint-Jacques" (19:256). In this short, vivid passage, Voltaire achieves a decentering effect that is similar to the stated goal of his longer historical texts.

**The Cosmopolitan Uses of Exoticism**

Voltaire repeatedly insisted on the historical importance of more ancient Asian civilizations, particularly India and China, opposing their early achievements to the comparatively recent emergence of European preponderance throughout the world: “Les Chaldéens, les Indiens, les Chinois me paraissent les nations les plus anciennement policées” (*La Philosophie de l'histoire*, 11:28). By foregrounding the significance and long-term vitality of older Asian civilizations, he could at once puncture European self-importance and diminish the claim to *a priori* validity of European social and political norms. Among Asian nations, China presented the advantage, for Voltaire’s purposes, of having the oldest continuous set of historical documents, thereby indirectly undermining the Biblical account of the creation of the world: “Il est incontestable que les plus anciennes annales du monde sont celles de la Chine” (11:151).^{25}

The first two chapters of the *Essai sur les mœurs*, which are devoted to China, posit this vast country as a relatively philosophical, tolerant, and deistic other for Europe. The manners and religion of the long-established Chinese civilization—“le plus sage empire de l’univers” (11:180)—are seen favorably in comparison to those of the “superstitious” Hebrews and, by implication, to those of European Christians. Voltaire eventually came to equate the teachings of Confucius with the deistic form of philosophy he espoused. As Shun-Ching Song puts it: “La sagesse, le bonheur du genre humain, l’antiquité caractérisent la philosophie confucéenne bâtie sur les anciennes lois de la Chine. Voltaire utilise ce personnage religieux comme porte-parole pour distinguer la sagesse philosophique de la théologie, et ainsi mettre en valeur cette sagesse purement humaine” (170). In China, as in some other Asian countries,^{26} Voltaire discerned—or posited—non-Christian systems of values and ethics that were founded more on reason
than on metaphysics (although they all shared the belief in a supreme being). Continuing his examination of Asia, Voltaire devotes the next six chapters of the *Essai sur les moeurs* to India, Persia, and Arabia. Countries which he had never visited, and whose languages he did not speak, thus became all the more useful as rhetorical foils against seemingly self-evident European practices and institutions.

As Basil Guy points out (232), there is a parallel between Voltaire’s use of a non-Christian, philosophical China as a contrapuntal counterpart to Europe and the construction of a similarly tolerant Great Britain (vs. France) in his *Lettres philosophiques*. A similar parallel could be established in the case of Russia under Catherine the Great, to whom Voltaire dedicated *La Philosophie de l’histoire*, and whom he persistently lauded as an enlightened monarch. Voltaire’s comparative method allowed him to disguise attacks on French religious and secular institutions as mere exercises in dispassionate analysis, often using instances of more humane cultural practices within non-European cultures as a means of deflating European pretensions of superiority. He regularly employed exotic foreigners in order to satirize some of the absurdities of European societies—for instance, in the 1767 *L’Ingénû* (21:247-304), and in chapter 7, entitled “Des sauvages,” of *La Philosophie de l’histoire* (11:18-24)—or to point out that other societies, particularly India and China, had been “civilized” earlier. Guy sees the theme of China as fundamental in Voltaire’s development as a writer: “without the Chinese example, Voltaire would not have become the philosophe which today we recognize in him” (244). Voltaire’s interest in China was part of a broader movement of curiosity—particularly visible in the vogue of *chinoiseries*—and debate about a country that had only recently become accessible to Europeans. What set Voltaire apart in his rhetorical use of China was his systematic presentation of the country as a haven for tolerance and rational organization. As A. Owen Aldridge puts it: “the role of China in the Voltairean philosophy was primarily to bolster his private system of deism, to further his attack on religious superstition and clerical domination, and to advance his plea for toleration” (164).
Referring to the 1755 play, *L'Orphelin de la Chine* (5:291-358), Guy points out Voltaire's literary construction of an age-old Chinese civilization, steeped in wisdom and philosophy: "He pictured China as it appeared to him and as his contemporaries imagined it to be—an ideal and abstract country, governed by philosophers and sages" (223). The superiority of what Voltaire saw as the Chinese natural religion over (mostly) European superstitions is highlighted in *Galimatias dramatique* (24:75-7). In this short, ironic series of exchanges, the Chinese characters, who embody reason and common sense, are subjected in quick succession to the strident and contradictory preachings of a Jesuit, a Jansenist, a Quaker, an Anglican, a Lutheran, a Puritan, a Moslem, and a Jew. The text ends with the Chinese dismissing all of these absurd religious proselytizers as madmen. Characteristically, in a projection abroad of the opposition between the dévots and the philosophes, Voltaire (*Essai sur les mœurs*, 13:167-8) approved of China's expulsion of Christian missionaries. He also adopted the same approbatory attitude in the case of Japan (to which chapter 142 of the *Essai* is devoted), another ancient non-European civilization he found worthy of admiration: "Toute la conduite des Japonais a été celle d'un peuple généreux, facile, fier et extrême dans ses résolutions: ils reçurent d'abord les étrangers avec cordialité; et quand ils se sont crus outragés et trahis par eux, ils ont rompu avec eux sans retour" (13:172). A more ironic version of this Voltairean theme of duplicitous missionaries abroad is found in *Avis à tous les Orientaux* (26:561-2).

Daniel Hawley paints a similar picture concerning the prevailing image of India within Voltaire's work. After reading the *Ezour-Védam*—which was only revealed to be a fake in the following century—Voltaire constructed an approbatory representation of Indian Brahmins, that he put to polemical uses resembling those he had already elaborated for Chinese Mandarins. A far older, non-European civilization, India became for Voltaire the authentic source of Jewish and Christian metaphysical principles, thereby reducing their spurious historical status to one of mere imitation of the established Indian philosophical model. In the *Essai sur les mœurs*, Voltaire extends Indian scholarly influence to ancient Greece, characterizing the Greeks as a fairly recent civilization, who,
In the *Précis du Siècle de Louis XV*, Voltaire criticizes greedy Europeans who sent military expeditions abroad, seeking to conquer and plunder India, instead of trying to learn from it: "Les nations européennes ont inondé l’Inde. On a su y faire de grands établissements, on y a porté la guerre, plusieurs y ont fait des fortunes immenses, peu se sont appliqués à connaître les antiquités de ce pays, plus renommé autrefois pour sa religion, ses sciences et ses lois, que pour ses richesses, qui ont fait de nos jours l’unique objet de nos voyages" (15:325). Voltaire’s complementary themes of Indian historical precedence and European cupidity are found in more comic form in *Les Lettres d’Amabad*. In this epistolary *conte philosophique*, Shastasid, the Indian sage, expounds upon what he sees as the distinctive role of Indian civilization: "Il est vrai (et nous n’en devons tirer aucune vanité) que nous sommes le peuple de la terre le plus anciennement policé. Les Chinois eux-mêmes n’en disconviennent pas. Les Egyptiens sont un peuple tout nouveau qui fut lui-même enseigné par les Chaldéens. Ne nous glorifions pas d’être les plus anciens, et songeons à être toujours les plus justes" (21:437). The same character also delivers a biting satire of European rapacity and arrogance during the early period of the colonization of India: "Je crains mortellement l’irruption des barbares d’Europe dans nos heureux climats. [...] Ils ne connaissent qu’une liqueur qui leur fait perdre la raison. Leur vraie divinité est l’or; ils vont chercher ce dieu à une autre extrémité du monde" (21:437). Overall, as discursive constructs, the Indians, the Chinese, and, to a lesser extent, the Japanese, Persians, and Arabs, collectively participated in Voltaire’s texts at extending his cosmopolitanism beyond the limits of
Europe, helping to fashion a more rational, enlightened other for Europeans to consider and perhaps emulate.

However, Voltaire unambiguously positioned Europe as the most advanced, and therefore “civilized,” continent of the modern world, a view that was quite consistent with the European colonialism he sometimes decried. While Asian civilizations were more ancient, Voltaire made it clear they had long been surpassed by European scientific and technical accomplishments: “Enfin, de quelque peuple policé de l’Asie que nous parlions, nous pouvons dire de lui: il nous a précédés, et nous l’avons surpassé” (Essai sur les mœurs, 12:444). Although he had started with the avowed aim of looking beyond Europe in order to forge a more balanced view of historical development, Voltaire in fact reestablished Europe as the central and dominant locus, not only of world power, but of almost all areas of human activity:

Tous ces peuples étaient autrefois bien supérieurs à nos peuples occidentaux dans les arts de l’esprit et de la main. Mais que nous avons regagné le temps perdu! Les pays où le Bramante et Michel-Ange ont bâti Saint-Pierre de Rome, où Raphaël a peint, où Newton a calculé l’infini, où Cinna et Athalie ont été écrits, sont devenus les premiers pays de la terre. Les autres peuples ne sont dans les beaux-arts que des barbares ou des enfants, malgré leur antiquité, et malgré tout ce que la nature a fait pour eux. (12:366)

Voltaire’s unambiguous and reiterated affirmation of eighteenth-century European superiority tends to attenuate Besterman’s evaluation of his decentering intent: “Voltaire put Western man in his place by reminding him that there exist other parts of the world, occupied by pagans and savages whose behavior oddly resembled that of civilized Christians” (1969, 419). Shun-Ching Song (213-26) has detailed Voltaire’s often sharp critical representation of China as a generally static, backward-looking society, as compared to rapid European progress in the arts and sciences since the Renaissance. As Song points out, in spite of Voltaire’s construction of a philosophical China, he retained Europe as the civilizational norm against which he judged others: “Malgré son esprit critique et son enthousiasme sinophile, son regard et son jugement restent toujours occidentaux. Homme de lettres ayant le goût scientifique, il est tout naturellement fier du progrès de la civilisation européenne” (213). It should be noted that
Voltaire’s pride in European technological achievements did not blind him to its destructive consequences abroad. In the *Siècle de Louis XIV*, he thus characterized the effects of inter-European wars on the rest of the world:

*C’est, depuis deux siècles, un des effets de l’industrie et de la fureur des hommes que les désolations de nos guerres ne se bornent pas à notre Europe. Nous nous épuisons d’hommes et d’argent pour aller nous détruire aux extrémités de l’Asie et de l’Amérique. Les Indiens, que nous avons obligés par force et par adresse à recevoir nos établissements, et les Américains dont nous avons ensanglanté et ravi le continent, nous regardent comme des ennemis de la nature humaine, qui accourent du bout du monde pour les égorger, et pour se détruire ensuite eux-mêmes. (14:320)*

A Euroskeptic

If ever there was an illustrative instance of the opposition between Voltaire’s ironic skepticism and Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s instinctive enthusiasm, it is on the issue of peace and unity within Europe—as a practical possibility, not a mere dream. In 1761, Rousseau published a text that updated one of the most comprehensive proposals for establishing a supranational organization designed to bring peace to the continent. The possibility of lasting peace through transnational cooperation seemed to have inspired Rousseau, an inspiration glowingly expressed in the introduction to his *Extrait du Projet de Paix perpétuelle de Monsieur l’Abbé de Saint-Pierre*: “Comme jamais Projet plus grand, plus beau ni plus utile n’occupa l’esprit humain, que celui d’une Paix perpétuelle et universelle entre tous les Peuples de l’Europe, jamais Auteur ne mérita mieux l’attention du Public que celui qui propose des moyens pour mettre ce Projet en exécution” (3:563).[^52]

The Abbé de Saint-Pierre had published his voluminous *Projet* in 1713, near the end of the reign of Louis XIV. It was neither the first nor the last such proposal designed to establish the conditions for perpetual peace and unity in Europe; but it became the best known, perhaps until Immanuel Kant’s 1795 *Pour la paix perpétuelle*, and therefore the object of much debate among the philosophes.[^33] Saint-Pierre’s detailed scheme combined utopianism with hard-headed politics, calling not just for lasting peace, but also for its enforcement, by an arbitrary supranational organization that, incongruously,
left in place all the different political regimes then existing in Europe. In a bid to make his project more acceptable to the French monarchy, Saint-Pierre described his text as the mere development of the erstwhile "grand dessein" of King Henri IV (1589-1610) and Sully, his minister: "c'est Henri le Grand qui en est le premier inventeur" (165). Interestingly, Saint-Pierre's text repeatedly uses terms that are not far removed from those of Voltaire: "société européenne" and "système de l'union européenne." Another similarity is that both clearly designate the Ottoman Empire as the enemy of Europe. For Saint-Pierre, peace within Europe is not simply an end in itself: thanks to European unity, "il sera avantageux, facile et glorieux aux souverains chrétiens de chasser les Turcs de l'Europe" (465).

Voltaire wrote about the Abbé de Saint-Pierre in one of the preliminary chapters of the Siècle de Louis XIV, "Catalogue alphabétique de la plupart des écrivains qui ont paru dans le siècle de Louis XIV" (14:32-144). He ridiculed the Abbé as an idle dreamer: "Il avait la simplicité de rebattre, dans ses livres, les vérités les plus triviales de la morale, et par une autre simplicité il proposait presque toujours des choses impossibles comme praticables" (14:128). Not surprisingly, in a letter to Voltaire (12 Apr. 1742), Frederick II similarly dismissed Saint-Pierre's project as utopian: "Il ne manque pour la faire réussir, que le consentement de l'Europe, et quelque autre bagatelle semblable" (D2602). Throughout his career, Voltaire referred numerous times to Saint-Pierre's work, most often disparagingly: "La seule paix perpétuelle qui puisse être établie chez les hommes est la tolérance: la paix imaginée par un Français, nommé l'abbé de Saint-Pierre, est une chimère" (De la paix perpétuelle, 28:103).

In his 1761 Rescrit de l'Empereur de la Chine à l'occasion du projet de paix perpétuelle (24:231-3), a satirical response to Rousseau's Extrait, Voltaire combined two of his favorite polemical targets. He also used a familiar rhetorical device in order to deflate European pretensions: the apparently puzzled musings of a foreign narrator encountering the narrow, self-serving European view of the rest of the world. This short text ridicules Rousseau's praise and reformulation of the project put forward by Saint-Pierre, pointing out both its practical futility and its Eurocentrism: "on avait oublié le
rest of the univers" (24:231). In a letter to Mme de Meinigen (30 Jan. 1762) bemoaning the then-raging Seven Years War, Voltaire also cast both Rousseau and Saint-Pierre as foolishly misguided: “Cela est un peu plus loin de la paix perpétuelle que Jean-Jacques Rousseau a si généreusement proposée d’après le vertueux visionnaire l’abbé de Saint-Pierre. Les hommes seront toujours fous; et ceux qui croient les guérir, sont les plus fous de la bande” (D10300). For Voltaire, no supranational organization could prevent or contain aggression initiated by states that sought to gain territorial or other spoils. Nor could it eliminate deep-seated divisions over competing religious dogmas, which lead to particularly horrific civil wars. Europe was already ravaged by recurring conflicts and warfare when it was still largely dominated by Catholicism. During and after the Reformation, the level of mutual intolerance had only increased with the emergence of Protestant denominations. In La Henriade (1728), Voltaire depicted Henri IV, whom he deeply admired for ending the sixteenth-century wars of religion in France, as refusing to choose between the twin dogmatic evils embodied by Geneva and Rome (8:66):

C’est la religion dont le zèle inhumain
Met à tous les Français les armes à la main.
Je ne décide point entre Genève et Rome.
De quelque nom divin que leur parti les nomme,
J’ai vu des deux côtés la fourbe et la fureur;
Et si la perfidie est fille de l’erreur,
Si, dans les différends où l’Europe se plonge,
La trahison, le meurtre est le sceau du mensonge,
L’un et l’autre parti, cruel également,
Ainsi que dans le crime est dans l’aveuglement.

In his critical evaluation of Saint-Pierre’s project, Voltaire once again called for a campaign against the ingrained intolerance and fanaticism that give rise to divisiveness, hatred, and wars (a campaign which was of course linked to his call to “Ecraser l’Infâme”): “Le seul moyen de rendre la paix aux hommes est donc de détruire tous les dogmes qui les divisent, et de rétablir la vérité qui les réunit” (De la paix perpétuelle, 28:128). While he generally ridiculed Saint-Pierre and his utopian visions, Voltaire obviously reflected at length on the preconditions for the eventual establishment of peace and stability in Europe—at least in partial, if not absolute, terms. As Maria Grazia
Bottaro Palumbo points out (54), Voltaire read many of Saint-Pierre’s works very closely and commented upon them at length. Similarly, Perkins argues that Voltaire did initially take Saint-Pierre seriously, and sometimes even made use of the Abbé’s ideas in his own writings (1965, 94-6). It is interesting that Voltaire wrote so often about a man he tended to dismiss as an naïve and ineffectual dreamer. A parallel could be made in the case of the Jews, whose historical status Voltaire strove to diminish, but about whom he produced so many texts.

Although he remained unalterably convinced that no supranational organization would have the power or the wisdom to prevent recurring wars and bloodshed, Voltaire’s often sarcastic criticism of Saint-Pierre’s proposals did have a positive corollary, one that is linked to his view of the role of economic self-interest. For Voltaire, it is through the cultivation of trade and commerce, or the search for profits, that nation-states become politically strong. Continuous trade requires peace and the rule of law, not prolonged civil or foreign wars. Once enlightened people realize the advantages of peaceful development and the absurdity of religious divisions, they will tend to achieve an international balance of power, based on economically beneficial interdependence, that will curtail, if not eliminate, the use of warfare as a means of achieving political gains. In his commendatory characterization of international commerce as a contributing factor for mutual comprehension and cooperation, Voltaire was diametrically opposed to Rousseau, but quite close to Montesquieu. As Perkins argues (1961, 33), Voltaire’s cautiously melioristic approach, which presumed the gradual diffusion of philosophic ideas, represented another form of idealism. The Voltairean vision of enlightened nations devoting their energies to economic development, and maintaining a rough balance of power through a system of alliances, was not inconsistent with the more recent Gaullist concept of “l’Europe des états.” Unfortunately, neither was it incompatible with the continuation of European imperialism and colonialism in many parts of the world.
In Voltaire’s 1768 La Princesse de Babylone (21:369-433), the star-crossed lovers Formosante and Amazan provide a review of the progress, or stagnation, of philosophical ideals, as they chase each other over most of Europe. Holland is one of the countries, along with England and Russia, that receives effusive praise in this extravagantly imaginative conte philosophique. Voltaire visited Holland several times, during a span of thirty years. Although he never learned the language or came to know the country as well as England, he was obviously impressed with much of what he saw of Dutch religious, economic, and political life. In this bourgeois, Protestant republic, he found prosperity, relative freedom of expression, and peaceful coexistence among the believers of diverse religions. While Voltaire never devoted a separate historical text to les Provinces-Unies, his numerous observations are found interspersed throughout his works. Voltaire’s letter to the Marquise de Bernières, during his second trip to Holland (7 Oct. 1722), constitutes a preview of the praise for British tolerance and industry—and the concomitant implied criticism of France—that he would develop in the Lettres philosophiques:

"c’est un paradis terrestre depuis la Haie à Amsterdam; j’ai vu avec respect cette ville qui est le magasin de l’univers. Il y avait plus de mille vaisseaux dans le port. [...] On ne voit là personne qui ait de cour à faire, on ne se met point en haie pour voir passer un prince, on ne connaît que le travail et la modestie. [...] J’y passe ma vie entre le travail et le plaisir et je vis ainsi à la hollandaise et à la française. Nous avons ici un opéra détestable mais en revanche je vois des ministres calvinistes, des arminiens, des sociniens, des rabbins, des anabaptistes qui parlent tous à merveille et qui en vérité ont tous raison. (D128)"

Although not always as enthusiastic in tone, Voltaire’s comments regarding Dutch society (if not its artistic life) are generally in this complimentary vein. Praise for Holland is also found in the Essai sur les moeurs, where Voltaire contrasts the country’s limited dimensions and lack of natural resources with its astounding achievements as a commercial and maritime power: “La Hollande mérite d’autant plus d’attention que c’est un état d’une espèce toute nouvelle, devenu puissant sans posséder presque de terrain, riche en n’ayant pas de son fonds de quoi nourrir la vingtième partie de ses habitants, et
considérable en Europe par ses travaux au bout de l’Asie” (13:116). In a much shorter text, Voltaire takes the time to consider an obscure aspect of the Dutch legal system, admiring a form of preliminary mediation which was used in order to avoid incurring unnecessary expenses: “La meilleure loi, le plus excellent usage, le plus utile que j’aie jamais vu, c’est en Hollande” (“Fragment d’une lettre sur un usage très utile établi en Hollande,” 23:127). As Jeroom Vercruysse points out, Voltaire could also be condescending or sarcastic in his descriptions of Dutch culture and mœurs (1966, 75-6).

On the whole, however, Holland was for Voltaire a small-scale rhetorical societal model, in many ways a prototype for the more extensive model he would construct after his stay in England.³⁹ René Pomeau thus summarized the comparative advantages that Voltaire perceived during his second trip to Holland:

Il prend connaissance de ce qui est en son temps la forme avancée de la civilisation européenne. Une société commerçante, pratiquant les vertus bourgeoises (travail, modestie), s’est assuré la prospérité matérielle, avec la liberté de penser, de parler, d’imprimer, à la fois conséquence et condition de cette prospérité. En comparaison, combien archaïque la France, hier de Louis XIV, aujourd’hui du régent et du jeune Louis XV. (1988-94, 1:156)

For a writer who in France often had to contend with the threat of censorship or worse, there were famous literary precedents to ponder when traveling to the Dutch republic. Holland had been home for René Descartes (from 1628 to 1649) and Pierre Bayle (from 1681 until his death in 1706). The *Discours de la méthode* (1637) and the *Dictionnaire historique et critique* (1697), two texts that, in very different ways, profoundly influenced Voltaire, had both been published in that country.⁴⁰ Voltaire was certainly mindful of the relative literary and political freedom these French writers had found in Holland. In a letter to Pierre de Cideville (8 Dec. 1736), he complained of persecutions after his publication of *Le Monde*, and evoked the possibility of seeking shelter abroad: “Je vous avoue que je suis outré, et qu’il faut que l’amitié soit bien puissante sur mon cœur pour que je n’aïlle pas chercher plus loin une retraite à l’exemple de Descartes et de Bayle” (D1220).

Voltaire traveled to Holland for various reasons, to meet with some his correspondents, for example, or to play a diplomatic role. However, the country’s
principal attraction for him was as a place of refuge from potential persecution at home. Due to the relative lack of censorship, it was also easier for him to have some of his works published there, rather than in France. While Voltaire was somewhat of a trailblazer as an eighteenth-century French writer traveling to England, this was less true in the case of Holland, which already constituted a privileged destination, along with Switzerland, for travelers who were looking for a different religious and political model. As a prosperous republic that was geographically close to France, but divergent in its religious and social structures, Holland offered an accessible case study for the philosophes and their followers: "la Hollande reste au dix-huitième siècle l’une des rares républiques, qui, avec la Suisse, soient encore florissantes, et à ce titre elle excite la curiosité et l’intérêt" (Van Strien-Chardonneau, 282).

An English Model

Chez Voltaire, après les tâtonnements de ses trente premières années, les conditions exceptionnelles de son contact prolongé avec les Anglais sur leur propre sol, contact physique avec le climat et la civilisation matérielle, moral avec les mentalités et la culture, imprimèrent en lui un sentiment très aigu du rôle joué par l’Angleterre dans sa formation intellectuelle, et du génie propre à cette nation parmi les diverses traditions qui tissent l’esprit et l’âme de l’Europe. Dans un coin du monde voltairien, il existe un territoire hachuré à l’anglaise. (André-Michel Rousseau, 3:854)

After fruitlessly seeking to avenge the infamous bastonnade he suffered at the hands of the Chevalier de Rohan’s lackeys, and after spending time in the Bastille because of his retaliatory intentions, Voltaire lived in England for over two years, from May 1726 to November 1728. His lengthy stay in England, his enthusiastic appreciation of its society and culture, his complex and often conflicting relationship with English thought and literature, as well as the role he played in shaping the image of that country in France, have generated one of the largest sections of the critical literature devoted to his work: for example, the section on “Les Iles Britanniques” (154-68) of Spear’s bibliography lists 121 references. There is no doubt that, during his stay, Voltaire became deeply immersed in English literature and culture in general. He learned the language
well enough to write two texts (*Essay on Epick Poetry* and *Essay on the Civil Wars in France*) as well as numerous letters in English. Having already met Bolingbroke in France, he would become acquainted with such authors as Alexander Pope, John Gay, and Jonathan Swift. He was received at court by both George I and George II. He frequently attended plays, including several by Shakespeare. He also attended the impressive funeral at Westminster Abbey of Isaac Newton, whose work Voltaire and Emilie du Châtelet would popularize in France. More prosaically, but no less influentially, Voltaire was hosted during much of his stay by an English merchant, Everard Fawkener.

From the first, Voltaire’s impressions of Great Britain as a whole were positive. In a letter written in English to Nicolas Thieriot (26 Oct. 1726), he described its inhabitants as "a nation fond of their liberty, learned, witty, despising life and death, a nation of philosophers" (D303). Similar praise, accompanied by disparaging comparisons with France, is found in his *Notebooks*: "In England everybody is public-spirited—in France everybody is concerned in his own interest only" (81:54). In the *Lettres philosophiques*, which were published in 1734, Voltaire reserved particular appreciation for the accomplishments—and the highly regarded societal status—of British scientists and philosophers: Bacon, Newton, and Locke. This work was considered by Gustave Lanson as "la première bombe lancée contre l’ancien régime" (52), because it indirectly attacked French social and political institutions, by pointing out the comparative advantages of the more enlightened British model it held up for scrutiny. Voltaire was severely punished for throwing his bomb: his book was condemned and publicly burned shortly after its publication, and he had to flee to Emilie du Châtelet’s residence at Cirey in order to avoid an order of imprisonment by *lettre de cachet*. Censorship within France, however, did not prevent the book from reaching large segments of the European elites: "les *Lettres philosophiques* ont obtenu la diffusion maximale dans l’Europe des Lumières de 1730-1740" (Pomeau 1988-94, 1:330).

In the *Lettres philosophiques*, Voltaire adapted the relatively innocuous genre of the travel account to suit his polemical needs. The apparently isolated vignettes he drew
of British religious, cultural, economic, and political life implied a series of unfavorable comparisons with their French counterparts. For Voltaire, the superiority of British empiricism over French reverence for established tradition was visible in several areas, large and small: smallpox vaccination, religious tolerance, trade and industry, science and rationalism. Christiane Mervaud, detailing Voltaire’s sources among the preexisting travel accounts of Great Britain, stresses that his image of the country as a whole, while obviously based on observed facts, reaches the dimensions of a literary myth: “La raison en marche que symbolise l’Angleterre des *Lettres philosophiques*, toute pénétrée qu’elle est par la passion voltairienne de la raison, dépasse le rationnel et s’exprime dans une création à fortes connotations mythiques” (1992, 15).

Voltaire’s depictions of British particularisms were not always exempt from a tone of amused condescension, as in the case of the Quakers (the first four letters). Nor were his accounts of British institutions and political practices always accurate. As Gay points out, Voltaire’s description of the country’s constitutional system in particular “omitted some inconvenient facts” (59). The same could be said of his overly rosy evaluation of British society in general. This selective form of description was, however, in keeping with Voltaire’s polemical intent. By stressing, and even exaggerating, the advantages of the British political and social order—religious tolerance, commercial prosperity, rule of law—he could all the more effectively criticize the corresponding failings of the French system. Through the implicit contrast he established between progressive Great Britain and retrograde France, praise for one country could be clearly understood as criticism for the other. As Besterman put it: “A word of approbation here was necessarily one of condemnation there” (1969, 119).

The comparison between Britain and France, usually to the latter’s disadvantage, became a staple of Voltaire’s texts, across very diverse genres. In *L’Ingénu*, the opacity and arbitrariness of French justice is emphasized by a contrasting reference to the rule of law on the other side of the English Channel: “Il n’y a donc point de lois dans ce pays? On condamne les hommes sans les entendre! Il n’en est pas ainsi en Angleterre” (21:285). In the article “propriété” of the *Dictionnaire philosophique*, Voltaire
establishes a stark contrast between a bourgeois, commercial, tolerant, forward-looking Great Britain and a static, dogmatic, aristocratic France: "Liberty and property, c’est le cri anglais. Il vaut mieux que Saint George et mon droit, Saint Denis et Montjoie: c’est le cri de la nature" (20:291). Chapter 83 of the Essai sur les mœurs provides a critique of the French system of three social orders, aimed at the privileges of the nobility and particularly at the power and influence of the clergy: "la France est le seul pays du monde où le clergé fasse un ordre de l’état" (12:70). The same chapter unfavorably compares the ineffectual and rarely-convened États Généraux to the more advanced British Parliament. As Pomeau briefly recounts (1988-94, 1:262-4), the brutal contrast between the respective funeral rites accorded to two actresses—one French, one English—was particularly distressing to Voltaire’s sensibility, and to his reverence for the theater. In the poem he devoted to this incident, La Mort de Mlle Lecouvreur (1730), Voltaire thus had another opportunity to praise England, and to rail against French “superstition” and the repressive power of the clergy, which had denied a decent burial to a distinguished French actress: “N’est-ce donc qu’en Angleterre que les mortels osent penser?” (9:370). During the early phase of his campaign against l’Infâme, Voltaire kept in mind the model of religious toleration and concomitant intellectual freedom he had found in England. In a letter to Jean d’Alembert written from Ferney (23 June 1760), he advocated the curtailment of the power of institutionalized religion in France “à l’état où elle est en Angleterre” (D9006).

An especially important area of comparison was in the economic field, as well as in the conceptual interconnections Voltaire perceived between free trade, individual freedom, and national power and stability. During what was still largely a protectionist, mercantilist age, he praised liberal capitalism as a contributing factor in the development of toleration and freedom, as well as international integration. Overall, for Voltaire, the uninhibited development of free trade and enterprise generated beneficial social consequences. His positive view of economic activity generally did not take into account such real-world aspects of eighteenth-century European expansionism as colonialism and the slave trade, which he alternately condemned or countenanced. In the tenth letter,
entitled “Sur le commerce,” Voltaire compares what he sees as the energetically entrepreneurial spirit of the British elites, and its resulting social effects, to the stagnant obsession with aristocratic ancestry and titles in Germany and France: “Le commerce, qui a enrichi les citoyens en Angleterre, a contribué à les rendre libres, et cette liberté a étendu le commerce à son tour; de là s’est formée la grandeur de l’état” (Lettres Philosophiques, 22:109-10). For Voltaire, countries such as Holland, and especially Great Britain, had used their burgeoning economies as the foundation for the rise of their national power and influence. By linking the ascendancy of Britain as a world power to its consistent encouragement of trade and commerce, Voltaire articulated the connection, which has become axiomatic, between a nation’s economic strength and its geopolitical power: “Mais ce qui a fait la puissance de l’Angleterre, c’est que tous les partis ont également concouru, depuis le temps d’Elisabeth, à favoriser le commerce” (Essai sur les mœurs, 13:91).

In economic matters, Voltaire did not exhibit the sort of amateurism he had shown in diplomatic affairs. As Besterman puts it: “Voltaire shows a firm grasp of the realities of national finance” (1969, 234). Voltaire was also an astute businessman throughout most of his life: “he died one of the wealthiest private commoners in Europe” (1969, 162). He wrote often on economics and on its links with what he saw as the relatively backward social and political situation in France. Aside from sections of the Lettres philosophiques, the Siècle de Louis XIV (chapter 30, for instance, deals with “Finances et règlements”), and the Essai sur les mœurs, several of Voltaire’s shorter texts are devoted to economic issues and their social effects: Lettre à l’occasion de l’impôt du vingtième (1749), Dialogue entre un philosophe et un contrôleur général (1751), the article “Luxe” of the Dictionnaire philosophique (1764), L’Homme aux quarante écus (1768), Diatrise à l’auteur des Ephémérides (1775). The historical importance of economic trends is spelled out in the Essai sur les mœurs: “Quiconque lit l’histoire avec fruit voit qu’il y a eu autant de révolutions dans le commerce que dans les états” (12:222).
During the eighteenth century, in a situation that bears some resemblance to the late twentieth century, the level of international commerce was evolving at a quicker pace than the differing political and financial institutions of the countries it increasingly interconnected. In France, the spectacular failure of John Law's economic reforms during the Regency—in 1720, 14 years prior to the publication of the *Lettres philosophiques*—had considerably slowed the much-needed modernization of the country's monetary system (Voltaire's account of this episode is found in chapters 60 and 61 of the *Histoire du Parlement de Paris*, 16:58-67). Voltaire felt that, unlike France, Great Britain had successfully adapted its financial, legal, and constitutional framework, in order to accommodate the economic changes resulting from the development of trade. These changes had in turn beneficially impacted the social and religious fabric of a potentially divided country. In a passage of the *Lettres Philosophiques* that deserves close scrutiny, this impact was particularly visible at the London Stock Exchange:

> Entrez dans la Bourse de Londres, cette place plus respectable que bien des cours; vous y voyez rassemblés les députés de toutes les nations pour l'utilité des hommes. Là, le juif, le mahométan et le chrétien traitent l'un avec l'autre comme s'ils étaient de la même religion, et ne donnent le nom d'infidèles qu'à ceux qui font banqueroute; là, le presbytérien se fie à l'anabaptiste, et l'anglican reçoit la promesse du quaker. (“Sixième Lettre. Sur les presbytériens.” 22:99)

By directly addressing his readers, and figuratively asking them to step into the financial center of London, Voltaire progresses semantically from the stock exchange to the exchange of values, praising the symbol of British capitalism while disparaging the intolerance and corruption found in the churches and royal palaces of Europe. This passage is inserted within the first seven letters, which cover the different religious denominations Voltaire encountered during his stay in Britain. It implicitly establishes a contrast between that country's religious plurality and relative tolerance, and the religious and political hegemony of the Catholic church in France. Voltaire thus elevates the stock exchange to the status of a benign social institution that encourages peaceful coexistence among diverse religious groups. The economic domain, as embodied by the temple of commerce, symbolically exerts a calming influence on the passions and the
conflicts of the political and religious domains, by providing a neutral, peaceful area for human activity, diminishing extraneous differences among religious groups, and channeling collective energies towards productive ends. The stock exchange in effect becomes a relatively open and accessible locus of power, counterbalancing the arbitrary power of the courts and the churches. By associating London’s financial market with the values he sees lacking in France—tolerance, reason—Voltaire establishes it, through a metonymic effect of conceptual contiguity, as the unprejudiced arbitrator of feuding religious and political factions. In Holland, and especially in Great Britain, Voltaire found examples of unfettered, beneficial economic development that he could offer up as models for the eventual establishment of religious toleration and a rational political order within France.

**Against Anglomania**

Voltaire’s admiration for the science, philosophy, and social system he discovered in Great Britain stands in stark contrast with his often sharply negative appraisal of the esthetic standards of its theatrical literature. Although he remained proud of having popularized the accomplishments of British scientists and writers in France, Voltaire came to regret the cultural *anglomanie* he had helped to create. In particular, he sought to counter what he saw as the ill-deserved popularity of British playwrights. Voltaire’s choice of the theater as his comparative polemical focus is not surprising, coming from a prolific playwright whose work—which faithfully abided by the elaborate stylistic rules of seventeenth-century classicism—dominated French stages during most of the eighteenth century. His personal stake in matters of artistic tastes partly accounts for the glaring discrepancy between his open cross-cultural outlook in the political domain and the exaggerated patriotism that underlay his literary conservatism. As early as the *Lettres philosophiques*, he had already detected, and extensively commented on, a striking disparity between the enlightened societal institutions of the British and their “barbaric” tastes. The eighteenth and nineteenth letters are devoted to Voltaire’s opinions on the state of British theater. In his eighteenth letter, entitled “Sur la tragédie,”
Voltaire attempts to translate excerpts from Shakespeare’s work, and declares British playwrights constitutionally incapable of producing tragedies that approach the established French standards of regularity and decorum: “leurs pièces, presque toutes barbares, dépourvues de bienséance, ont des lueurs étonnantes au milieu de cette nuit” (22:152-3). The same letter faintly praises Shakespeare’s natural genius, while strongly denouncing his lack of taste and his ignorance of the accepted—i.e.: seventeenth-century French—rules of the theater:

Les Anglais avaient déjà un théâtre, aussi bien que les Espagnols, quand les Français n’avaient que des tréteaux. Shakespeare, qui passait pour le Corneille des Anglais, fleurissait à peu près dans le temps de Lope de Véga. Il créa le théâtre. Il avait un génie plein de force et de fécondité, de naturel et de sublime, sans la moindre étincelle de bon goût et sans la moindre connaissance des règles. Je vais vous dire une chose hasardée, mais vraie: c’est que le mérite de cet auteur a perdu le théâtre anglais; il y a de si belles scènes, des morceaux si grands et si terribles répandus dans ces farces monstrueuses, qu’on appelle tragédies, que ses pièces ont toujours été jouées avec un grand succès. (22:148-9)

In the afterword to his translation of Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar*, Voltaire had a similar appreciation of both British and Spanish theater: “il y a beaucoup de naturel; ce naturel est souvent bas, grossier et barbare” (7:485). Voltaire’s mixed feelings led him to try to “improve” upon Shakespeare, producing one of his few dull texts, especially when compared to the original. As Colette Astier points out, Voltaire’s 1733 French re-writing of *Julius Caesar*, entitled *La Mort de César* (3:297-366), which followed the rules of French tragic theater that were so dear to his heart—”respect des bienséances, unité d’action, refus de mettre des gens du peuple en scène, refus de l’histoire vivante” (60)—produced less than felicitous results. In the process of eliminating Shakespeare’s “barbarisms,” Voltaire restricted the expansive scope of the original play, producing the sort of dry, passionless work the Romantics would later rail against. Other sections of the *Lettres Philosophiques*, it should be noted, were more balanced as to the relative merits of French and British literature:

Les Anglais ont beaucoup profité des ouvrages de notre langue; nous devrions à notre tour emprunter d’eux, après leur avoir prêté; nous ne sommes venus, les Anglais et nous, qu’après les Italiens, qui en tout ont été nos maîtres, et que nous avons surpassés en quelque chose. Je ne sais à laquelle des trois
nations il faudra donner la préférence; mais heureux celui qui sait sentir leurs différents mérites! ("Vingt-deuxième Lettre. Sur M. Pope et quelques autres poètes fameux." 22:177)

In 1761, Voltaire’s *Appel à toutes les nations d’Europe* (24:192-221) once again characterized Shakespeare’s tragedies, particularly *Hamlet* and *Othello*, as barbaric in form and content, regardless of the English playwright’s natural genius. However, this traditional Voltairean lament was now part of a more general and long-lasting campaign against the spread of *l’anglomanie* and its corrosive effects on French tastes, which had been shaped by the classicism of the seventeenth century. Voltaire’s defense of classic French *goût* was already visible in his correspondence. Writing to Henri Lekain (16 Dec. 1760), he decried London-inspired theatrical innovations: “on court un peu le risque d’avilir la scène française, et de ne ressembler aux barbares anglais que par leur mauvais côté; ces farces monstrueuses amuseront pendant quelque temps, et ne feront d’autre effet que de dégoûter le public de ces nouveaux spectacles et des anciens” (D9472). In a letter written on the same day to Charles Feriol (16 Dec. 1760), his sense of esthetic outrage is accompanied by patriotic fervor: “Le zèle de la patrie m’a saisi. J’ai été indigné d’une brochure anglaise dans laquelle on préfère hautement Shakespeare à Corneille” (D9474). As David Williams writes, Voltaire—who considered himself the inheritor of the French theatrical tradition of excellence, as exemplified by Corneille and Racine—was consistent in his opposition to literary Anglomania: “Voltaire formally declared war on the English in 1768 [...] by that date Europe’s most admired spokesman in the cause of English science and philosophy had already achieved considerable notoriety as an enemy of English literary taste” (1979, 79).

For the greater part of his career as a writer, Voltaire had been a notably influential cultural intermediary between Great Britain and France, a self-styled cosmopolitan function that has been studied at length by Ahmad Gunny and André-Michel Rousseau. With such texts as the *Appel*, he cast himself as the defender of French classical culture against what he saw as the crudities of the stages of London, the imitation of which within France could only accelerate the decline of prevailing artistic standards. French literary classicism, with its elaborate stylistic rules, especially in the
theatrical realm for which Voltaire felt a special affinity, had reflected the rigid political order of the seventeenth century. Many of its esthetic codes would persist into the eighteenth century, including of course in Voltaire’s own plays, even as the dominant focus of French letters shifted from the psychological to the political domain. The cosmopolitan Voltaire, who had been an innovator in so many other domains, staunchly remained the conservative voice of the French theatrical tradition, continuing to interpret English theater according to the constraining rules which had governed what he considered to be the crowning glory of French—indeed world—literature.

Frederick the Great

It seems clear that Voltaire was far less immersed, or even interested, in German culture than he had been in the case of Great Britain. He did not seek out contact with the intellectual life found outside Frederick’s court: “D’autres centres intellectuels existaient à Berlin, que Voltaire ne semble pas avoir fréquentés” (Pomeau 1988-94, 3:26). Nor did he attempt to visit most of the kingdom: “De la Prusse il ne connaîtra guère que Potsdam et Berlin, partageant sa vie entre la résidence royale et la capitale” (3:21). It was only after he had left the Prussian state that he found himself in a German intellectual environment: “[A Leipzig,] Voltaire alors, et pour la première fois, entre en contact avec un milieu intellectuel authentiquement germanique, différent des cercles francisés qu’il a jusqu’ici fréquentés” (3:132).

Voltaire’s lengthy stay in Prussia (1750-53) followed the untimely death of Emilie du Châtelet. It was also partly due to his sagging fortunes within the French court. However, it was mainly the promise and the myth of Frederick the Great, an enlightened monarch—“un roi philosophe”—and not the reality of Prussian political, economic, and intellectual life, that seems to have spurred Voltaire’s desire to go live and work in Potsdam. Perhaps due to the weight of his personal relationship with Frederick, Voltaire never constructed a full-fledged Prussian or German model to use as a critical yardstick against France. He may also have sought out similarities instead of differences. It seems that Prussia, with its Francophone king and its academy that
deliberated in French, required less adjustment on the part of Voltaire, who was already in his mid-50s when he went to live at Frederick’s court. In a 1750 letter from Potsdam to the Marquis de Thibouville, he claimed to feel right at home: “Je me trouve ici en France. On ne parle que notre langue. L’allemand est pour les soldats et les chevaux; il n’est nécessaire que pour la route” (D4248).55

Before his extended stay in Potsdam, Voltaire had tried to use his meetings and his epistolary ties with Frederick as a means of advancing French interests in the context of the ongoing power struggle between Prussia and Austria.56 He had also closely followed Frederick’s military exploits, attempting to influence a king who had presented himself as a peace-minded philosophe during the early phase of their correspondence, but who proved to be all too willing to use force in order to further his ambitions. Writing after one of Frederick’s bloody victories, Voltaire showed concern but not condemnation (26 May 1742):

Le Salomon du nord en est donc l’Alexandre?
Et l’amour de la terre en est aussi l’effroi? (D2611)

A few weeks later (30 June 1742), Voltaire seemed to want to believe that Frederick’s genuine intent was one of lasting peace: “je crois que vous forcerez toutes les puissances à faire la paix, et que le héros du siècle sera le pacificateur de l’Allemagne et de l’Europe” (D2623). Voltaire would of course be continually disappointed by the disparity between the Prussian king’s philosophical pretensions and his cynical use of military power.57 For his part, Frederick generally sought to make use of their friendship to further his aims of representing himself as the philosopher-prince who was transforming a relatively backward Berlin into the “Athènes du nord.” As the reigning prince of letters, Voltaire constituted the crowning glory of Frederick’s efforts to enhance the cultural status of his court abroad. As it turned out, Voltaire was not always the reliable panegyrist for Frederick that he would later become for Catherine II of Russia. Partly due to the lack of direct contact with Catherine and with the reality of her rule, Voltaire’s fantasy of Frederick as a roi philosophe, working to bring enlightenment
where there had only been barbarity, would later be transferred to the Russian empress, with more propagandistic success.

The stylistic aspects of the forty-year correspondence between Voltaire and Frederick have been studied at length by Christiane Mervaud, who characterizes the frequently fawning tone of their reciprocal flattery as a prolonged instance of “narcissisme de couple” (1985, 46), especially during the early phase of their epistolary exchanges. As she emphasizes, their long, tempestuous relationship, although not exempt from cynicism and attempts at manipulation, was based on more than just the possible advantages each could obtain from the other’s position of power or influence. The two men shared common cultural and emotional affinities that went beyond the needs of the moment: “Une échange de lettres aussi nourri, aussi étalé dans le temps, suppose une harmonie, des affinités, voire des analogies entre deux esprits en dépit de l’obstacle du rang” (1985, 510). It is striking that despite all the mutual disappointments and periods of outright hostility—Frederick’s purportedly peaceful intentions, as found in his Anti-Machiavel, followed by his cynically opportunistic invasion of Silesia; Voltaire’s intrigues and financial dealings while at the Prussian court; his bitter rivalry with Maupertuis; his satirical Akakia, burned by order of Frederick as a chilling reminder of arbitrary power; the humiliations inflicted on Voltaire and his niece in Frankfurt, on Frederick’s orders—after all of this, the two men eventually resumed their correspondence, which, though it eventually lost much of its passionate tone, nonetheless remained cordial. After leaving Frederick’s court, Voltaire eventually settled in Geneva. His new home, les Délices, did not long provide the tranquillity he was seeking. Once again, he became undesirable through his writings and activities. He would only find a lasting place of refuge when he effectively created his own little principality at Ferney.

**A Russian Fantasy**

For Voltaire, Russia, since the reign of Peter the Great, had definitely become a part of Europe. Indeed, he saw Russia as having made such extensive progress, in such a short time, that it had effectively overtaken some of its erstwhile Western European
societal models. Because the Russian empire had only recently emerged from what he saw as abject barbarity, Voltaire was all the more enthusiastic about what appeared to be an immense laboratory for the rapid application of philosophic principles. Long before French communists would find that "la lumière vient de l'est," Voltaire heralded a new dawn at the extremity of Europe, based on the sheer will and absolute power of monarchs determined to bring progress to their long-benighted country. The phrase first used by Voltaire had of course relied on the same metaphor, if not the same geographic direction: "c'est du Nord aujourd'hui que nous vient la lumière" (Epître à l'Impératrice de Russie, Catherine II, 10:435-8).

Ironically for Voltaire, the historian of Russia, this vast country was in many ways terra incognita. Among the major European countries that Voltaire extolled for their progressive achievements, Russia was also the only one with which he had no direct personal contact. He never traveled there and had no knowledge of the language. There was little or no serious French scholarship on Russian culture and society on which he could rely. With only fragmentary information at his disposal, much of it supplied by unreliable and obviously biased Russian officials, the distant Russian empire was thus in many ways for Voltaire a European version of China and India, onto which he could project the favorable or improving image he needed, no matter how unrealistic it might be, in order to didactically reflect it back toward France and the rest of Europe. In Voltaire's literary landscape, Russia loomed as an awakening giant, energetically putting into practice the ideals of the Enlightenment, which many countries of Western Europe still stubbornly resisted. His enthusiastic endorsement of Russia's program of modernization was to a large extent another instance of his well-honed rhetorical strategy of praising foreign cultures as a means of indirectly criticizing France and Europe:

Les Russes habitent aujourd'hui l'ancienne Scythie européenne; ce sont eux qui ont fourni à l'histoire des vérités bien étonnantes. Il y a eu sur la terre des révolutions qui ont plus frappé l'imagination; il n'y an a pas une qui satisfasse autant l'esprit humain, et qui lui fasse autant d'honneur. On a vu des conquérants et des dévastations; mais qu'un seul homme ait, en vingt années, changé les mœurs, les lois, l'esprit du plus vaste empire de la terre, que tous les arts soient venus en foule embellir des déserts, c'est là ce qui est admirable. Une femme qui
ne savait ni lire ni écrire perfectionna ce que Pierre le Grand avait commencé. Une autre femme (Elisabeth) étendit encore ces nobles commencements. Une autre impératrice encore est allée plus loin que les deux autres; son génie s’est communiqué à ses sujets; les révolutions du palais n’ont pas retardé d’un moment les progrès de la félicité de l’empire. Et enfin, on a vu en un demi-siècle la cour de Scythie plus éclairée que ne l’ont été jamais la Grèce et Rome. (La Philosophie de l’histoire, 11:43)

In Voltaire’s Russia (chapter 2), Carolyn Wilberger recounts the circumstances under which Voltaire wrote his Histoire de l’empire de Russie sous Pierre le Grand (16:377-639). Peter the Great had already been portrayed by Voltaire as the adversary of Charles XII, during the great northern war of 1700-1721, in his 1731 Histoire de Charles XII roi de Suède (16:123-354). Voltaire’s continuing interest in the Russian monarch is also visible in his 1748 Anecdotes sur le czar Pierre le Grand (23:281-94). In his history of Russia, which was published in 1759 and 1763, Voltaire, who claimed to have seen Peter during his 1717 visit to France, would paint a picture of a ruthless but well-intentioned czar, single-handedly transforming the isolated, backward country he had inherited: “Il a forcé la nature en tout, dans ses sujets, dans lui-même, et sur la terre, et sur les eaux; mais il l’a forçée pour l’embellir. Les arts, qu’il a transplantés de ses mains dans des pays dont plusieurs alors étaient sauvages, ont, en fructifiant, rendu témoignage à son génie, et éternisé sa mémoire” (16:626). Thanks to the work begun by Peter and continued by his successors, Russia had been rapidly modernized, growing in population and wealth: “Il s’en fallait beaucoup avant Pierre le Grand que la Russie fût aussi puissante, qu’elle eût autant de terres cultivées, autant de sujets, autant de revenus que de nos jours” (16:426). This Voltairean image of Peter’s quasi-Promethean role, as a visionary ruler dragging an entire country from the depths of barbarity, is also found in the Essai sur les mœurs: “La Russie, jusqu’au Czar Pierre, resta presque inconnue aux peuples méridionaux de l’Europe, ensevelie sous un despotisme malheureux du prince sur les boyards, et des boyards sur les cultivateurs” (13:135). Along with technical modernization came social and cultural Europeanization, as Peter forced Russians to adapt “aux mœurs et aux coutumes des nations chez lesquelles il avait voyage” (Histoire de Russie, 16:468).
The issue of Russian efforts, ruthlessly initiated by Peter, to resemble the more advanced nations of Western Europe became the focus of a debate that, as so often occurred, pitted Voltaire against Rousseau. In the article “Pierre le Grand et J.-J. Rousseau” of the *Dictionnaire philosophique* (20:218-22), Voltaire ridiculed Rousseau’s negative judgment on the forcible evolution of Russian society. Quoting from the *Contrat Social* (3:386), Voltaire repeated his praise of Peter the Great’s historical role in transforming Russia. Disagreements over the methods and results of Russia’s campaign of modernization were not limited to the two old adversaries. For instance, in his *Commentaire sur l’esprit des lois*, Voltaire also disputed Montesquieu’s earlier characterization of Russia as still living under despotism (30:439). The eighteenth-century debate over Russia’s transformation is eerily similar to current controversies concerning the presumed “threat” posed by European integration (or, for that matter, American pop culture) to the preservation of individual national identities. As Wilberger puts it: “While Rousseau wanted to create ‘Russians,’ Voltaire wished to make ‘Europeans’” (1976, 233). Voltaire’s position on Peter’s efforts to Europeanize Russia provides the clearest instance of his universalizing tendency. Voltaire refuted Rousseau’s insistence on the value of a distinct national character, arguing that excessive particularism would lead to xenophobia, intolerance, and war. Although he did not condone Peter’s brutal methods, Voltaire found lasting intrinsic value in Russia’s adoption of Western European norms. By creating a civilized/savage dichotomy, he asserted the superiority of what he saw as universally valid European societal standards over primitive Russian practices.

Voltaire would find a more than worthy successor to Peter in Catherine the Great, who would also supplant Frederick as his favorite enlightened monarch: “Soon Catherine’s image replaced that of Frederick in Voltaire’s dream of a philosopher-king, an illusion fortified by the empress’s offer of hospitality to the *Encyclopédie*, now banned in France” (Besterman 1969, 430). The French philosophe’s praise for Russian czar Catherine II was, if anything, more lavish than what he had bestowed on Peter: “elle a mérité le titre de mère de la patrie, et elle aura celui de bienfaisance du genre humain, si
elle persévère” (La Princesse de Babylone, 21:404). Throughout the latter part of his career, he effectively became Catherine’s most visible literary sycophant (for example in his Lettres sur les panégyriques, 26:307-14). Voltaire’s correspondence with Catherine was similar in flattering tone, if not in literary merit, to his epistolary exchanges with Frederick. As Gay understatedly put it: “his correspondence with Catherine shows him at his least admirable” (171).

Voltaire enthusiastically supported Catherine during the war she waged against the Ottoman Empire (1768-74). He wanted to see the Turks, oppressors of the Greeks, expelled from Europe. As Pomeau notes (1991, 212-3), Voltaire’s call for Greek independence was part of a wider philhellenic movement within Western Europe. After having so vividly depicted the horror and absurdity of war in Candide, Voltaire did not hesitate to praise Catherine’s Russia as a liberator throughout its war effort. Henry Meyer notes that it was “the only war Voltaire supported without any mental or emotional reservations” (52). Due to Voltaire’s literary saber-rattling, his royal correspondent Frederick (4 Dec. 1770) had the opportunity—which he obviously enjoyed using, with the heavy irony of a cynical militarist—to remind the philosophe of his past calls for peace: “Vous qui avez de tout temps déclamé contre la guerre, voudriez-vous perpétuer celle-ci?” (D16803).

In his support for Catherine’s Russia against the Ottoman Empire, Voltaire clearly posits the Russian empire as not only a part of Europe, but as the instrument of the rest of the continent against the Turkish outsiders. Voltaire, who had labored so long to revalorize Asian cultures and to puncture European arrogance, thus resorted to traditional prejudices against Moslems and Asians. In several texts, he provided propaganda for the war effort of “La Minerve du Nord” against the Turks. In Sur la guerre des Russes contre les Turcs en 1768, he sounds a disturbingly bloodthirsty note: “Frappez, extermez les cruels janissaires” (8:490). In Le Tocsin des rois (1771), a tract for which he was paid by Catherine, Voltaire labels the Ottoman Empire “l’implacable ennemi de toute l’Europe” (28:468). The same jingoistic image is found in Traduction du poème de Jean Plokof (1770): “Aux armes contre les ennemis de l’Europe!” (28:365). In
Ode Pindarique (8:491-3), he issues a call to liberate Greece from the Ottoman Empire—as well as a call for a new crusade:

Ecoutez Pallas qui vous crie:
“Vengez-moi! vengez ma patrie!
Vous irez après aux saints lieux.”

Unequivocally distinguishing between Europeans and Asians, Voltaire uses similar imagery to celebrate a 1769 Russian victory in Stance à l’Impératrice de Russie Catherine II, a poem that draws a parallel between the Russian-Turkish war and the wars between the Greeks and the Persians:

O Minerve du Nord! ô toi, sœur d’Apollon!
Tu vengeras la Grèce en chassant ces infâmes,
Ces ennemis des arts, et ces geôliers de femmes.
Je pars; je vais t’attendre aux champs de Marathon.

While Voltaire resorted to outright warmongering in the case of Turkey, he limited himself to rationalizing the 1772 partition of Poland in which both of his royal correspondents, Catherine and Frederick, participated. In his Essai historique et critique sur les dissensions des églises de Pologne (1767), Voltaire had tended to make religious divisions within a relatively backward Poland—and not Russian expansionism—responsible for an armed Russian intervention. Absurdly, Catherine is depicted, with logic that seems to anticipate Orwellian newspeak, as benevolently seeking to calm internal Polish dissension: “elle envoya la paix avec une armée” (26:465). As Wilberger puts it: “The philosophe’s positions on Poland and Turkey remain major blots on Voltaire’s record” (1976, 183).

Europe without Jews

Voltaire’s anti-Semitism has been amply documented. His early historical role in elaborating and articulating a modern, racist version of anti-Jewish hatred is particularly significant. Léon Poliakov has identified Voltaire as an influential figure in the transition from traditional religious anti-Jewish bigotry to a more “scientific,” race-based rejection of Jews within Europe. The budding science of anthropology soon
provided the basis for a hierarchical system of classification of races, that either superseded or was superimposed on the theologically-centered process of differentiation and exclusion. As Poliakov has noted (103), Henri Labroue produced an anti-Semitic book during the German Occupation that consisted mainly of extended excerpts from Voltaire’s works. Labroue did not need to twist Voltaire’s words, or take them out of context, in order to make them fit into his racist propaganda aims. Indeed, Voltaire’s writings were instrumental, beyond his familiar campaign against “religious superstitions,” in the elaboration of a new basis for exclusion and oppression, one that would later be amplified in ways he could not have imagined. Voltaire clearly posited Jews as unredeemably alien and hostile towards all those who did not resemble them: “[les juifs] se trouvèrent, par leur loi même, ennemis de ces nations, et enfin du genre humain” (*Essai sur les moeurs*, 12:164). For him, Jews had long been almost universally hated, and deservedly so, for reasons that went beyond traditional religious intolerance: “À l’égard des juifs, ils étaient haïs, non parce qu’ils ne croyaient qu’un Dieu, mais parce qu’ils haïssaient ridiculement les autres nations, parce que c’étaient des barbares qui massaçaient sans pitié leurs ennemis vaincus, parce que ce vil peuple, superstiteux, ignorant, privé des arts, privé du commerce, méprisait les peuples les plus polisés” (“Remarques sur les Pensées de Pascal,” 22:45).

Given his long-standing hostility toward all revealed religions, it is not surprising that Voltaire should have expressed similar contempt for Judaism as he did for Christianity and Islam. However, Voltaire singled out Judaism as a religion, and the Jews as a people, for special, and lengthy, rhetorical treatment. As Pomeau points out: “dans le corpus voltaïrien, Israël est la nation dont l’histoire est le plus longuement commentée” (1956, 361). David Lévy has provided a detailed and well-organized study of Voltaire’s exegesis, or rather anti-exegesis, of the Pentateuch. He also highlights the importance of the Jewish topos within Voltaire’s works: “On n’a peut-être pas suffisamment remarqué combien les Juifs constituent une véritable obsession pour le philosophe. On peut en dire autant de l’Ancien Testament” (223). Since Voltaire was able to attack them with relative impunity, Jews were particularly useful for his polemical
purposes. If Jews had not existed, Voltaire would have had to invent them. By purposefully considering the Hebrew Bible as a literal document, Voltaire was provided with a vast and relatively easy target, one which allowed him to play up the erratic chronology, logical inconsistencies, and bizarre occurrences found in the Biblical texts. He could thus at once attack the religion of the Jews directly, and the basis of Christian revelation indirectly. For him, it was clear that Jews, who incarnated a particularly contemptible form of preposterous religious dogma, would progressively disappear as a group, along with the more fanatical Christian sects, as a result of the spread of philosophical principles.

While Voltaire used praise for China and other Asian countries as a means of indirectly attacking the customs and institutions of much of Europe, his attempt at undermining the Biblical foundations of established Christian denominations was achieved through frequent and increasingly vicious attacks on Jews. The religious and historical links between Jews and Christians are summarized, in English, as a patrimonial metaphor in the *Notebooks*: “When I see Christians cursing Jews, methinks I see children beating their fathers” (81:51). Voltaire did much beating of his own. Several chapters of *La Philosophie de l'histoire* are devoted to delegitimizing the historical and religious role of Jews and of the Hebrew Bible: instead of contributing to historical progress, the Jews merely borrowed many of their beliefs and customs from older, more civilized peoples; they briefly occupied a tiny, arid corner of the ancient world that could not have sustained a real civilization; their Bible is a frequently immoral and lascivious document, as well as absurd in chronological terms; and they consistently exhibited rapacity and barbaric bloodthirstiness in war and peace:

En suivant simplement le fil historique de la petite nation juive, on voit qu'elle ne pouvait avoir une autre fin. Elle se vante elle-même d'être sortie d'Égypte comme une horde de voleurs, emportant tout ce qu'elle avait emprunté des Égyptiens; elle fait gloire de n'avoir jamais épargné ni la vieillesse, ni le sexe, ni l'enfance, dans les villages et dans les bourgs dont elle a pu s'emparer. Elle ose étaler une haine irréconciliable contre toutes les autres nations; elle se révolte contre tous ses maîtres; toujours superstitieuse, toujours avide du bien d'autrui, toujours barbare, rampante dans le malheur, et insolente dans la prospérité. (*La Philosophie de l'histoire*, 11:121-2)
In chapter 44, entitled “Des prières des Juifs,” Voltaire selectively uses excerpts from the book of Psalms in order to characterize Jews as a group: “Si l’on peut conjecturer le caractère d’une nation par les prières qu’elle fait à Dieu, on s’apercevra aisément que les Juifs étaient un peuple charnel et sanguinaire. Ils paraissent, dans leurs psaumes, souhaiter la mort du pécheur plutôt que la conversion; et ils demandent au Seigneur, dans le style oriental, tous les biens terrestres” (11:128). In later chapters, the perpetually depraved Jews are contrasted with their conquerors, the Romans, who gradually developed from barbarity to a civilizing historical role: “Les Romains, policés avec le temps, policèrent tous les barbares vaincus, et devinrent enfin les législateurs de l’Occident” (11:146). By stressing the divergent fortunes of the Romans and the Jews in historical terms, Voltaire assigns a rough form of justice to their respective fates: “N’est-il pas clair (humainement parlant et ne considérant que les causes secondes) que si les Juifs, qui espéraient la conquête du monde, ont été presque toujours asservis, ce fut leur faute? Et si les Romains dominèrent, ne le méritèrent-ils pas par leur courage et par leur prudence? Je demande très humblement pardon aux Romains de les comparer un moment avec les Juifs” (11:148). The historical lesson is clear: while the ostensibly monotheistic Jews remained mired in barbaric superstitions, the pagan—but less fanatical—Romans evolved into the dominant civilizing force of the ancient world. As Hertzberg argues (299-308), Voltaire tended to cast the classical Roman period as the true European tradition, while he saw the Jews and the Christians as having introduced an alien, Oriental element that needed to be extirpated.

A similar technique is used more forcefully in the *Sermon des cinquante* (1762), which systematically ridicules “les écrits des Hébreux” (24:439) before moving on to Christianity as an equally mendacious and contemptible outgrowth of Judaism: “le misérable peuple [juif] dont est sortie cette religion chrétienne, qui a été la source de tant de divisions, de guerres civiles et de crimes, qui a fait couler tant de sang, et qui est partagée en tant de sectes ennemies dans les coins de la terre où elle règne” (24:449). Voltaire had thus progressed from anticlericalism to anti-Christianity, by placing Christians at the same benighted level as Jews. When it was consistent with his
purposes, he could also attack Christians for persecuting Jews, as in the *Sermon du Rabbin Aikib* (24:277-85). However, this often generous pamphlet, a call for generalized religious tolerance, was not typical of Voltaire’s writings on Jews. As Lévy puts it: “Étonnant Voltaire qui ne cesse de clamer sa haine des Juifs et qui n’hésite pas dans le même temps à dénoncer leurs persécuteurs!” (252).

Voltaire’s virulent attacks on the historical role of Jews earned rebukes from some of his indirect Christian targets. In *Un Chrétiens contre six Juifs*, he sought to refute the criticisms of Catholic apologists regarding his Biblical commentaries, particularly those of l’Abbé Guénée in his *Lettres de quelques Juifs* (1769). Jews and Jewish history were thus one of the main rhetorical battlegrounds in Voltaire’s long-term war against “l’Infâme.” Although he never specifically defined the target of his campaign, he applied the term in general to manifestations of religious fanaticism and intolerance. With very few exceptions, he placed Jews, an often despised and persecuted minority, within the same category as the powerful Catholic institutions he was indirectly attacking. Despite his attacks on Catholicism, Voltaire was also capable of presenting himself as belonging to the Church. Poliakov (90) has noted the condescending resonance of Voltaire’s reply to Isaac Pinto’s letter (D10579) concerning his negative views on Jews, a tone that belies Voltaire’s (failed) promise to amend his text in future editions. In his letter to Pinto (21 July 1762), Voltaire punctuated his famous admonition—“soyez philosophe”—with a sardonic signature that stood in sharp contrast to his incessant calls to “Ecraser l’Infâme”: “chrétien, gentilhomme ord. de la chambre du roi très chrétien” (D10600).

As a group or category, Jews probably remained literary abstractions for Voltaire, in the same way that Chinese and Indian sages were discursive constructs that frequently proved useful for his polemical purposes. In most cases, he seems to have perceived no authentic distinctions between the Jews of eighteenth-century Europe and the image of the rapacious and bloodthirsty Jews of Biblical times that he had so painstakingly elaborated. However, Jews did constitute a very real minority in France and Europe, a minority that he persistently attacked as harshly as the secular and
religious power structures he sought to transform. By contrast, Voltaire was never as unremittingly hostile towards another persecuted French religious minority, the Protestants. Graham Gargett concludes a long study of Voltaire’s complex views on Protestantism with the notion of a “temporary alliance” (471-9), partly based on a common refusal of the centralizing power and authority of the Popes. Voltaire could thus make occasional use of Protestantism in his campaign against *l’Infaire*. The same could be said about Islam, which Voltaire sometimes attacked as another descendant of Judaism, but which he also utilized as a polemical tool against Christianity. Magdy Badir and Djavâd Hadidi have detailed the evolving role and representation of Islam within Voltaire’s works. Badir (151-90) highlights the ways in which Voltaire made use of Islamic faith and history in his battle against Bossuet’s view of Christian history as divinely inspired. As Hadidi argues (153-73), Voltaire gradually overcame many of his initial prejudices towards Mohammed and Islam, eventually coming to compare them favorably to Jesus and Christianity. While Voltaire did at times rely on Protestantism and Islam in order to undermine the Catholic institutions that wielded real power in France, he could make no such use of Judaism, which remained for him the underlying source of Catholic dogma.

Voltaire’s widespread writings on Jews have generated some of the most acerbic critical literature devoted to his work. While Pierre Aubéry presents a balanced, though unconvincing, defense of Voltaire on the issue of his anti-Semitism, Bertram Schwarzbach arduously defends the philosophe against accusations of racialist anti-Semitism, arguing that Voltaire attacked Jews, as he did Christians, strictly on the basis of philosophically-motivated criteria that were “exclusivement culturels” (58). Strangely, in his otherwise useful and well-documented article, Schwarzbach seems to be directing his criticism mainly against the phenomenon of “political correctness” he perceives as deriving from “le multiculturalisme des facultés de lettres américaines actuelles” (88). He specifically compares condemnation of Voltaire’s anti-Semitism by some critics to what he sees as a widespread form of misguided identity politics, concluding with the all-too familiar and convenient argument that writers of previous centuries should not be judged
by present-day standards: "On peut comparer la critique idéologique adressée à Voltaire aux études de lettres, d'histoire et de sociologie écrites par des Noirs et des féministes aux États-Unis aux États-Unis depuis 1980 environ. Cherchant partout des admirateurs de leur race ou de leur sexe, ils sont heureux d'en découvrir au moins des détracteurs vigoureux qu'ils peuvent sataniser" (30). However, the two historians whose work he specifically rebuts, Arthur Hertzberg and Léon Poliakov, could hardly be categorized as radical multiculturalists intent on demolishing Voltaire's literary reputation. Furthermore, Schwarzbach produces no serious arguments to counter the central thesis of both of these writers: that Voltaire was the most prominent philosophe who instigated an innovative, widely-imitated exclusionary discourse that was based not on religion, but on the supposedly innate and invariable character of an ethnic group. As Hertzberg characterized this lasting aspect of Voltaire's influence: "he provided the fundamentals of the rhetoric of secular anti-Semitism" (286).

Another backward and despised group that Voltaire designated for exclusion was the Gypsies: "Il y avait alors une petite nation aussi vagabonde, aussi méprisée que les juifs, et adonnée à une autre espèce de rapine" (Essai sur les moeurs, 12:165). The two stateless, trans-European ethnic groups are unequivocally associated in terms of their level of barbarity and malevolence (chapter 103 is devoted to "létat des juifs en Europe," and chapter 104 to "ceux qu'on appelait Bohêmes ou Égyptiens," 12:162-6). Taken together with his urging Catherine II to expel the Turks from Europe, Voltaire's exclusionary attitude towards Jews and Gypsies suggests a mental landscape of a fairly uniform European area, made up of distinct nationalities and Christian sects that have achieved mutual tolerance through the gradual adoption of philosophical standards of conduct—and that have clearly identified the groups that cannot be assimilated. An interesting example is found in Voltaire's approval of the expulsions of Jews and Moslems from Spain, following the 1492 Christian Reconquista: "Autant de musulmans que de juifs se réfugièrent en Afrique, sans qu'on pût plaindre ni ces Arabes qui avaient si longtemps subjugué l'Espagne, ni ces Hébreux qui l'avaient plus longtemps pillée" (12:161). This evaluation can be compared with Voltaire's well-known condemnation of
Louis XIV for having revoked the Edict of Nantes in 1685: “un des grands malheurs de la France” (*Siècle de Louis XIV*, 15:28). In this case, the expelled Protestant minority was not presented as an occupying or pillaging horde, but as an economic asset to the country, foolishly squandered by the French king: “Ainsi la France perdit environ cinq cent mille habitants, une quantité prodigieuse d’espèces, et surtout des arts dont ses ennemis s’enrichirent” (15:29).

**Non-Humans**

In the *Essai sur les mœurs*, Voltaire described the attitude of the ancient Romans toward Jews, as he understood it: “On les regardait du même œil que nous voyons les Nègres, comme une espèce d’hommes inférieure” (11:223). This is the sort of statement that illustrates Voltaire’s double legacy: he developed his own form of intolerance and exclusionary logic, grounded on the purported unvarying essence of an ethnic group, which did not prevent him from strongly decrying the effects of crude xenophobia and religious bigotry. Besterman consistently portrays Voltaire as combating fanaticism and intolerance: “Above all, he never ceased to underscore not merely the horror but the laughable folly of injustice, and its progeny: intolerance, fanaticism, cruelty, and war” (1969, 419). However, Voltaire also showed manifest signs of the worst kind of racism, that which denies its victims full membership in the human race. In *Les Lettres d’Amahed*, the title character is forcibly taken from India to Rome, in order to be tried as a heretic. On the way, his boat stops off on the African coast. He delivers this comment on “ces animaux,” the local inhabitants: “Nul art n’est connu chez tous ces peuples. C’est une grande question parmi eux s’ils sont descendus des singes, ou si les singes sont venus d’eux” (21:462).

categorized them, despite their relative geographic proximity, as radically distinct from the other inhabitants of Europe: “C'était donc une nouvelle espèce d’hommes qui se présentait à nous, tandis que l’Amérique, l’Asie et l’Afrique nous en faisaient voir tant d’autres” (12:223). The lack of a common origin for humankind is later presented as self-evident, based on its discernible diversity: “En effet, puisque le nègre d’Afrique ne tire point son origine de nos peuples blancs, pourquoi les rouges, les olivâtres, les cendrés de l’Amérique, viendraient-ils de nos contrées? et d’ailleurs, quelle serait la contrée primitive?” (12:385). Similarly, the second chapter of *La Philosophie de l’histoire*, entitled “Des différentes races d’homme,” reinforces Voltaire’s assertion of the multiplicity, and concomitant inequality, of human races: “Il n’est permis qu’à un aveugle de douter que les Blancs, les Nègres, les Albinos, les Hottentots, les Lapons, les Chinois, les Américains, soient des races entièrement différentes” (11:5). Not surprisingly, the affirmation of different origins for human groups leads to the use of presumed racial characteristics in order to justify intellectual and physical hierarchies among them:

La race des nègres est une espèce d’hommes différente de la nôtre, comme la race des épagneuls l’est des lévriers. La membrane muqueuse, ce réseau que la nature a étendu entre les muscles et la peau, est blanche chez nous, chez eux noire, bronzée ailleurs. [...] La forme de leurs yeux n’est point la nôtre. Leur laine noire ne ressemble point à nos cheveux, et on peut dire que si leur intelligence n’est pas d’une autre espèce que notre entendement, elle est fort inférieure. Ils ne sont pas capables d’une grande attention; ils combinent peu, et ne paraissent faits ni pour les avantages ni pour les abus de notre philosophie. Ils sont originaires de cette partie de l’Afrique, comme les éléphants et les singes; guerriers, hardis et cruels dans l’empire de Maroc, souvent même supérieurs aux troupes basanées qu’on appelle blanches; ils se croient nés en Guinée pour être vendus aux blancs et pour les servir. (*Essai sur les mœurs*, 12:357-8)

Using the type of pseudo-scientific approach, relying on apparently objective comparative anthropological data, that would come to be one of the hallmarks of racist discourse during the next century, Voltaire established varying degrees within his hierarchical classification of races, a classification that of course placed Europeans at one extremity of a biological continuum, animals at the other extremity, and Africans at different levels in between:

As part of his purportedly scientific approach, Voltaire presented his elaborate system of racial differences and inequalities as based on the natural order, and therefore not subject to change. Science, the interpreter of nature, provided illustrative examples and explanations for European superiority:

Nous apprenions alors, par les voyages des Portugais et des Espagnols, le peu qu’est notre Europe, et quelle variété règne sur la terre. [...] mais ce qui est plus à remarquer, c’est que, dans quelque région que ces races soient transplantées, elles ne changent point quand elles ne se mêlent pas aux naturels du pays. La membrane muqueuse des nègres, reconnue noire, et qui est la cause de leur couleur, est une preuve manifeste qu’il y a dans chaque espèce d’hommes, comme dans les plantes, un principe qui les différencie. La nature a subordonné à ce principe ces différents degrés de génie et ces caractères des nations qu’on voit si rarement changer. C’est par là que les nègres sont les esclaves des autres hommes. On les achète sur les côtes d’Afrique comme des bêtes, et les multitudes de ces noirs, transplantés dans nos colonies d’Amérique, servent un très petit nombre d’Européens. L’expérience a encore appris quelle supériorité ces Européens ont sur les Américains qui, aisément vaincus partout, n’ont jamais osé tenter une révolution, quoiqu’ils fussent plus de mille contre un. (12:380-1)

Voltaire’s clearly stated racism generally coexisted with lukewarm or infrequent condemnations of colonialism and slavery. In Histoire de Jenni, Voltaire has the wise, deistic character Freind assert: “Les nègres, cette espèce d’homme si différente de la nôtre, sont tellement nés pour leur patrie que des milliers de ces animaux noirs se sont donnés la mort quand notre barbare avarice les a transportés ailleurs” (21:560). Chapter 9 of this conte philosophique also includes a condemnation of the massacres committed by the Spaniards in the New World (21:558-68). A similar passage is found in the Essai sur les mœurs (12:384), with Voltaire quoting Bartolomé de Las Casas in order to condemn the slaughter of the native inhabitants of the islands of Cuba and Hispaniola.76
At times, however, Voltaire stoops to an outright justification of slavery, by shifting the responsibility for its existence to the Africans themselves: "Nous n’achetons des esclaves domestiques que chez les nègres. On nous reproche ce commerce: un peuple qui trafique de ses enfants est encore plus condamnable que l’acheteur; ce négoce démontre notre supériorité; celui qui se donne un maître était né pour en avoir" (13:177-8). Elsewhere, Voltaire does condemn slavery, if only as a means of highlighting European rapacity and religious hypocrisy: "Les Européens n’ont fait prêcher leur religion depuis le Chili jusqu’au Japon que pour faire servir les hommes, comme des bêtes de somme, à leur insatiable avarice" (12:376). However, with some exceptions, Voltaire did not consistently exhibit the same level of indignation when he was condemning slavery for Africans as when he was fighting against the remnants of serfdom within France. In Commentaire sur l’esprit des lois, Voltaire mentioned Montesquieu’s denunciation of the enslavement of Africans, but only called for an end to serfdom within France (30:445-7). As Emeka Abanime put it: “Devant les Français incommodés par les vestiges de la féodalité, Voltaire a été un antiesclavagiste zélé. Devant les noirs, son antiesclavagisme a été plutôt tiède, voire équivoque” (243).

It is interesting to contrast Voltaire’s ambivalent attitudes towards colonialism and slavery—that is, towards very real issues of his day—with his treatment of a long-lived literary topos: cannibalism. Frank Lestringant has studied the evolution of the image of cannibals since the discovery of the New World. He compares Voltaire’s variation (149-52) to Montaigne’s classic formulation of cannibals as dignified, eloquent embodiments of aristocratic virtues and internal social harmony, who practice violence only against their enemies, unlike the Europeans who flock to see them. In chapter 16 of Candide (21:169-72), the title character and his servant Cacambo barely escape being cooked and eaten by the Oreillons—who are far removed from the established image of the noble savage—by announcing that Candide had killed one of their enemies, a Jesuit. As Lestringant points out, Cacambo’s speech to the Oreillons, instead of denouncing barbaric alterity, highlights the underlying resemblance in conduct between the Europeans and the cannibals: “le droit naturel nous enseigne à tuer notre prochain, et
c’est ainsi qu’on en agit dans toute la terre” (21:171). No civilized/savage dichotomy here, since, for Voltaire, “the universality of evil is a much more serious matter than cannibalism, which is a mere sideline, a particular illustration of a more general problem” (Lestringant, 151). In her analysis of the article “Anthropophages” of the *Dictionnaire philosophique* (17:262-71), Christiane Mervaud reaches a similar conclusion: “point besoin de courir aux Caraïbes, de rechercher des témoignages de sacrifices humains, il suffit d’ouvrir les yeux sur les atrocités de tous les jours” (1994, 110). Voltaire’s Oreillons, and other anthropophages, are simply behaving as Europeans would under comparable conditions of alimentary scarcity. In the *Essai sur les mœurs,* cannibalism is compared to the real horror of war and massacres, as routinely practiced within Europe: “La véritable barbarie est de donner la mort, et non de disputer un mort aux corbeaux et aux vers” (12:388). In his texts, Voltaire encountered metaphorical cannibals and recognized them as full-fledged members of the human race. It is regrettable that he could not apply the same insight to the real ethnic groups he had relegated to the status of near-animality.

**Conclusion**

Voltaire’s Europe is a relatively unstable political conglomeration, linked by a growing level of economic interdependence and cultural affinities. As an economic liberal, Voltaire cogently analyzed the role of free trade as a contributing factor for greater international integration. Although ostensibly an arch-cosmopolitan intent on combating Eurocentric limitations, he tended to construct the rest of the world according to his polemical needs, which revolved around the religious and political order of the countries of Europe. While Voltaire combined sharp criticism of French society with praise for the foreign models he deemed more enlightened, he also labored to justify and to reinforce the then-preeminent standing of French literary culture.

In geographical terms, Voltaire’s Europe extends to Russia, but excludes Turkey. Underlying this conception of where Europe’s physical limitations are situated is a vague, but exclusionary, historical notion of the slow, irregular development of a loose
system of strife-ridden European states, which eventually came to aggregate into an interrelated civilizational entity. Having largely evacuated the long-established notion of Europe as the bastion of Christianity, Voltaire nevertheless limited his Europe, in effect, to countries that had long been dominated by a Christian tradition (whether it be Catholic, Protestant, or Orthodox). Among those countries, Voltaire naturally reserved his praise for those that he perceived as having already adopted the ideals of the philosophes, or which were in the process of doing so.

Voltaire announces Europe at its best and its worst. On the one hand, he campaigned, often at great personal risk, in favor of politically liberal values—tolerance, rule of law, refusal of provincialism—that tend to accommodate peaceful human diversity. On the other, he clearly assumed the superiority of his particular form of civilization, an unambiguous attitude which often translated into open racism and acquiescence in imperialistic conquest, by designating as inferior both internal and external groups. Voltaire was a precursor in that he sought to divorce his conception of Europe from the inherited Christian model. However, he did reestablish Eurocentrism on a scientific, civilizational basis, by positing the superiority of European technological accomplishments and, by extension, of European societal norms. Voltaire certainly believed in "Civilization" as an abstract value, and western Europe had developed its most advanced version.

Voltaire was one of the leading lights for the cosmopolitan, largely Francophile, European elite into which Germaine de Staël was born. Although her work is often presented as a forerunner to the romantic reaction against the anticlericalism, detached irony, and classical esthetic standards that Voltaire incarnated, both of these writers and political activists experienced exile and served as trans-European cultural intermediaries, among other similarities. The next chapter will examine the ways in which Staël’s literary work reflects the wrenching changes brought about during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic periods, which contributed to the rise of modern nationalistic movements throughout Europe.
Chapter 3

The European Spirit of Germaine de Staël

Born into the intellectual and financial cosmopolitan elite of the eighteenth century, Germaine de Staël (1766-1817) became a pivotal literary and political figure during the transitional period that saw the upheavals of the French Revolution and the emergence of modern nationalism. The daughter of the Swiss banker and French government minister Jacques Necker, she married a Swedish diplomat and wrote at length about British, German, and Italian literatures. An innovative novelist, essayist, and literary critic, Staël played a constant political role, most famously in her opposition to Napoleon Bonaparte's dictatorial rule, a principled position that resulted in her being exiled from France for several years. The multinational literary circle that revolved around her Swiss home of Coppet represented the last flowering of the cosmopolitan society of the eighteenth century, as well as the beginning of nineteenth-century nationalistic literary traditions within Europe.

Staël and her parents are representative of the fluid nature of citizenship during the eighteenth century. Although a foreigner and a Protestant, Jacques Necker was twice put in charge of the French kingdom's ailing finances by Louis XVI. During the early stages of the Revolutionary period, Necker was immensely popular, because he was perceived as a reformer. It was the king's dismissal of Necker on July 11, 1789 that led to the insurrection in Paris, which in turn forced Louis XVI to call him back once again. Necker quickly returned to Paris for a triumphant, if short-lived, welcome. Through her family and social contacts, and later, through her writings, Staël was thus in a privileged,
albeit sometimes dangerous, position in which to analyze and even try to influence the course of the Revolution. By September 1790, Necker had lost his popularity and was forced to leave his ministerial position and return to Coppet, having become caught between the rising demands of the National Assembly and the resistance of the king. Staël’s unbounded admiration for her father’s judgment and policies is visible throughout such works as the Considérations sur la Révolution française, which was published posthumously in 1818: “J’aurai par la suite l’occasion de faire remarquer que, dans les divers ouvrages publiés par M. Necker pendant l’espace de vingt ans, il a toujours annoncé d’avance les événements qui ont eu lieu depuis; tant la sagacité de son esprit était pénétrante” (223).

Staël’s mother, Suzanne Necker, was herself a writer, and held an influential literary salon in Paris before the Revolution. In 1778, Mme Necker, who had been one of Voltaire’s correspondents, took her daughter Germaine to see him, shortly before his death in Paris. Like her mother, Staël would host her own literary salon after her marriage in 1786, but she would go on to define herself principally as a novelist and essayist, becoming one of the most important French writers of her time, during a period of French literary history that was generally hostile to women of intellectual stature and accomplishment. As a member of a rich bourgeois family who had married into the aristocracy, Staël had the notable advantage, for a female writer of this period, of being financially and socially self-sufficient.

Staël was both a privileged witness of—and an active, if necessarily indirect, participant in—political and literary life in France during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic periods. She managed to be in Paris during some of the most dramatic events of those periods, and to meet many of the principal political and intellectual leaders (including her future nemesis, Napoleon), in France as well as abroad. The list of her social contacts and correspondents, through whom she exerted her political influence, reads like a Who’s Who of the French and European elites during her lifetime. Like Voltaire, Staël made use of her voluntary travels and involuntary periods of exile, becoming one of the most influential cultural intermediaries between France and its
European neighbors. Staël certainly traveled more widely than Voltaire, and visited several countries he never did: Austria, Italy, Sweden, and Russia.

A precursor in the field of literary history, Staël was one of the first writers to articulate a theory on the conditions for the rise and expansion of literature. In such books as *De la littérature considérée dans ses rapports avec les institutions sociales* (1800), she posited that the development of individual literary traditions is closely linked to the material and cultural evolution of the societies from which they arise. By stressing the influence of customs and religions on literature, she helped to establish its status as an evolving social and historical institution, linked to a given national and linguistic entity. Until fairly recent critical developments, and particularly before she became an important figure for gender and feminist studies, Staël was generally depicted as a mere precursor of the Romantic movement. As such, her work was often belittled by literary historians, who tended to concentrate on the traditional opposition between the "rationalistic" eighteenth century and the "romantic" nineteenth—an opposition which, while conceptually useful, has often been excessively stated. As a transitional figure embodying both of these perceived periods of French literature—the last of the philosophes, the first Romantic—and especially as a woman, Staël has frequently been categorized as a relatively minor writer. During much of her career, she was also the target of organized press campaigns, both as a prominent opponent to Napoleon’s regime and as a woman seeking recognition as a serious writer and political thinker. Her novels reflect the overwhelming social pressures faced by women, particularly those who showed intellectual promise and sought to avoid total dependency on men. *Corinne* and *Delphine* each depict a gifted woman who is eventually defeated in her quest for happiness by the power of rigidly established gender roles, which are enforced by the weight of public opinion.

Along with her literary activities as a novelist and cultural theorist, Staël participated in the development of liberal political thought in the post-Revolutionary era. Not surprisingly for someone of her social class, she defended the principles of private property and enterprise. Perhaps less predictably, she advocated the abolition of
hereditary privileges, which she saw as stifling individual initiative. Like Voltaire, Staël’s political model was Great Britain. Unlike him, she did not posit French classicism as the historical culmination of European literary achievement. An inheritor of the enlightened cosmopolitan tradition of the eighteenth century, Staël opposed the enforced uniformity of the Napoleonic empire by championing individual national identities. As a reaction against the excesses of Napoleon’s militarized version of “universalism,” her Europe is characterized by cultural diversity, which she considered a contributing factor to the development of liberty.

**A Writer and a Woman**

Most of Staël’s career as a writer took place within the context of the Revolution and the Napoleonic era, a stridently anti-feminist phase of French history, despite—or perhaps in part because of—the increasing level of female participation in public debate. During the eighteenth century, some women of her privileged class had achieved a degree of social independence and had produced notable literary and scientific accomplishments. A prominent example is Emilie du Châtelet, whose scientific work includes the only extant French translation of Isaac Newton’s *Principia Mathematica.* This period of relative social and intellectual freedom for some women, who belonged to an obviously limited social class, was halted by the renewed patriarchal ideology and outright misogyny ushered in by the French Revolution, and codified into law by Napoleon’s *Code civil* (1804). In her fictional texts as well as her essays, Staël generally depicted women of her time as socially and legally marginalized, especially those who sought individual achievements or independence, thereby refusing to conform to their assigned gender roles:

Il arrivera, je le crois, une époque quelconque, dans laquelle des législateurs philosophes donneront une attention sérieuse à l’éducation que les femmes doivent recevoir, aux lois civiles qui les protègent, aux devoirs qu’il faut leur imposer, au bonheur qui peut leur être garanti; mais, dans l’état actuel, elles ne sont, pour la plupart, ni dans l’ordre de la nature, ni dans celle de la société. Ce qui réussit aux unes perd les autres; les qualités leur nuisent quelquefois, quelquefois les défauts leur servent; tantôt elles sont tout, tantôt elles ne sont rien. Leur destinée ressemble, à quelques égards, à celle des affranchis chez les
empereurs; si elles veulent acquérir de l’ascendant, on leur fait un crime d’un
pouvoir que les lois ne leur ont pas donné; si elles restent esclaves, on opprime
leur destinée. (De la littérature, 2:332)

As Joanna Kitchin has detailed, Staël was very conscious of the relative degree of
social and artistic importance accorded to women who belonged to the aristocratic elite
of l’Ancien Régime: “Dans cette société et par rapport à cette littérature, Mme de Staël
voit les femmes jouant un rôle essentiel, et très agréable pour elles. Par leurs attraits et
par leur aptitude pour la conversation, elles président aux entretiens où les hommes
cherchent à se faire valoir. Ce rôle social permet aux femmes d’exercer une grande
influence sur la littérature” (413). In De la littérature, Staël described the role of a
privileged class of women as arbiters of social and cultural tastes, wielding their
influence—through male intermediaries—by indirectly fashioning public opinion: “Je
crois fermement que dans l’ancien régime, où l’opinion exerçait un si salutaire empire,
cet empire était l’ouvrage des femmes distinguées par leur esprit et leur caractère [...]”
Durant le cours de la révolution, ce sont ces mêmes femmes qui ont encore donné le plus
de preuves de dévouement et d’énergie” (2:337). Ironically, Staël’s novels would later
stress the constraining and often destructive power of public opinion on the lives of
women who deviate from prevailing social norms.

In her two major novels, Delphine and Corinne, both of the title characters
attempt—and spectacularly fail—to reconcile the search for happiness and fulfillment
within their private lives with the ever-present weight of public opinion, which they allow
to severely circumscribe their actions. Both eventually seek shelter from public
reprobation in a form of self-exclusion from their social environments—a futile means of
escape, which only foreshadows their deaths. As Simone Balayé points out, the female
characters in Staël’s novels are punished largely for having abandoned their own volition
or agency to others: “La souffrance provient de l’abandon de soi à d’autres qui ont
toujours la possibilité de se dérober. Corinne et Delphine seront toujours vaincues pour
n’avoir pas su garder leur liberté” (1979, 56). Madelyn Gutwirth reaches a similar
conclusion regarding the partly self-inflicted causal determinants of Delphine’s fate: “The
novel Delphine is a protest of a woman against the rules of love and their enslavement of

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the character of woman. Delphine’s tragedy is that of having accepted the rules of the

game” (153).

Within their closed social stratum, the female characters in Staël’s novels who
step outside their assigned social roles are inherently subversive, even though both
Corinne and Delphine seek matrimony with men who would relegate them to the status
of strictly domestic partners. Although limited to the artistic and emotional spheres, their
subversive potential leads to the defeat of these female characters, who are endowed
with a degree of originality, or with exceptional talents, but who end up accepting the
oppressive, if apparently chivalric, values of their milieu. As Susan Tenebaum writes:
“Staël draws on the meritocratic principles of liberalism to uphold the claims of the
exceptional woman—a Corinne or a Delphine—whose heightened sensibilities and/or
creative energies overflow the bounds of domesticity to challenge the social conventions
requisite to a stable society” (161). It was the Staëlian subtext of social criticism against
discriminatory gender-based determinism, along with her constant revalorization of
foreign cultures, that led the Napoleonic regime to impose increasing levels of censorship
against her work. While they ostensibly remain focused on the emotional domain of
interpersonal relationships, Staël’s novels constitute, as Gutwirth points out, “a fairly
vigorous and articulate attack against convention, and there is no doubt that in this
respect they represent a far stronger arraignment of society than those of other women
novelists of the time” (297).

In her private and public life, Staël did not conform to many of the restrictive
conventions that governed the conduct of women of her time and her class. There is
therefore a vast and paradoxical distance between her own almost incessantly active
engagement in literature and politics and the degree of passivity exhibited by the heroines
of her novels. As Gutwirth writes: “The fascination of Delphine the heroine lies in her
dissimilarity to her author. Meek and meltingly beautiful, her only apparent pretension is
to please” (146). A similar discrepancy is found between Staël’s actual political activities
and her own portrayal of her role within her writings.¹⁸ Even in her last, unfinished book,
Dix années d’exil, she tends to downplay the importance of her role, portraying herself

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as strictly a victim of Napoleon’s policies. There is also considerable distance between the submissive, deferential romantic ideal espoused in Staël’s novels and the reality of her relationships with men: “Selon Mme de Staël écrivain, la femme doit être douceur et courage, soumission, passivité, abnégation; c’est d’ailleurs le type idéal en honneur dans la société qui l’entoure et dans les romans du temps. Mais elle-même ne peut s’y conformer entièrement, d’où les conflits qu’elle vivra et qu’elle fera vivre à ses héroïnes, parées ou non de dons exceptionnels” (Balayé 1979, 48).

Staël’s political positions, as a post-Revolutionary liberal seeking to preserve and extend what she saw as the moderate, anti-absolutist ideals of the Enlightenment, were thus at odds with her esthetic tastes, which were largely shaped by the pre-Revolutionary social conventions of her aristocratic milieu. Gutwirth thus underlined the conflict between the proto-feminism found in many aspects of Staël’s biography and the romanticized ideal of feminine submissiveness found in her novels: “Mme de Staël, despite her obvious pleasure in Corinne’s independence, believes with nearly equal strength that women owe fealty in love” (249). The Staëlian female characters’ pattern of self-sacrificial romantic love also reflected her literary influences, including that of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, to whom she devoted her first essay of literary criticism in 1788 (Lettres sur les ouvrages et le caractère de Jean-Jacques Rousseau, OC 1:1-24). Staël had an ambivalent reaction to Rousseau’s work, which included the pre-Romantic notions (nature, melancholia, spontaneity, enthusiasm, divine inspiration, etc.) that were consonant with her own work, but which also strongly denounced any form of independence and intellectual achievement among women.

Staël’s first novel, Delphine (1802), the success of which greatly contributed to her generally acknowledged status as the best known French writer of her time, set the pattern for her heroines, who were doomed by the weight of convention, and enhanced Staël’s own highly unconventional public image. An epistolary novel that is also a roman à clé, with characters that are inspired by such figures as Talleyrand and Benjamin Constant, Delphine depicts women’s roles and lives as hemmed in by rigid social norms. Often compared to such eighteenth-century novels as Rousseau’s Julie ou la Nouvelle
Héloïse (1761), Goethe’s The Sorrows of Werther (1774), and Choderlos de Laclos’s Les Liaisons dangereuses (1782), this long and melodramatic novel is set in a decaying milieu of largely idle aristocrats. It details the fall of a young, rich, and well-intentioned woman, whose generous actions and concern for others’ feelings result only in degrading her image and position within her rigidly conventional class, with a regularity and predictability worthy of Sade’s Justine, and thus hastening her demise. The plot of Delphine occurs during the first part of the Revolution, thereby purposefully avoiding any mention of Napoleon’s rule. Nevertheless, what today seems an extremely prudent undertone of feminism angered Napoleon, who orchestrated a press campaign against Staël’s novel (which did not prevent its popular success). As Marie-Claire Vallois notes, Staël illustrated in Delphine the social effects, within a limited aristocratic milieu, of the transition from the Ancien Régime to the Revolutionary period: “le roman staëlien permet de dramatiser le conflit des anciennes et des nouvelles valeurs, en ce début du dix-neuvième siècle” (68).

In Delphine, the title character is tragically in love with the married and therefore inaccessible Léonce, a Spanish nobleman who is obsessed with the notions of family and personal honor—nulations that he seems to perceive only in terms of the degree of esteem in which he is held by his aristocratic peers. As Vallois points out, his excessive sense of honor is in fact reducible to “la vanité sociale” (64). Although Léonce is not religious, the meticulous, indeed slavish, respect he exhibits for public opinion reflects Staël’s view of the negative impact of Catholic traditionalism. As Balayé writes: “son culte de l’honneur qui, en Espagne, et non sans grandeur, a provoqué à son encontre l’injuste disgrâce royale, le met à Paris, à la merci de l’opinion même des médiocres” (1979, 124). The discrepancy is glaring between Léonce’s hyperbolic sense of honor, seemingly inspired by an incongruous chivalric sensibility, and the less-than-glorious social stratum in which he lives. Léonce represents the pre-Revolutionary aristocratic values, which have become not just quaintly outdated, but socially destructive. Although their relationship remains chaste, Delphine sacrifices herself for the sake of preserving the appearances of Léonce’s loveless marriage. As Vallois notes, Staël eventually removes
her main characters from "l’horizon borné des cercles mondains" (51), sending them traveling within France and even abroad. In particular, Delphine seeks shelter in Switzerland, finding relatively more freedom in a Protestant country.\(^{25}\) However, she eventually becomes a nun, although not fully by her own choice. In so doing, she obviates any possibility of wedlock with Léonce after the death of his wife. Once again, she has allowed others to decide for her.

In *Delphine*, the character of Henri de Lebensei, a French Protestant who studied at Cambridge, and a member of the *Assemblée constituante*, exemplifies the link between the intellectual heritage of the Enlightenment and the liberal society of the future. Although an aristocrat, he is opposed to emigration by reactionary members of his class. Based on Staël’s lover, Benjamin Constant,\(^{26}\) this character is a partial outsider, due to his religion and by virtue of having been educated abroad. As such, he is a symbolic representative, through his connection with England, of Staël’s Romantic category of the “littérature du nord.” He is also a quintessentially modern figure, who advocates such progressive ideas as the legalization of divorce (4, 17).\(^{27}\) While Delphine is swayed by Lebensei’s arguments, which would allow her to marry Léonce, but would also force her to face being ostracized within her milieu, she ultimately embraces her lover’s adherence to convention and exacerbated notion of honor, a renunciation of individual choice which inexorably leads both of them to their deaths.

As Gutwirth has detailed (265-6), a counter-example to the pattern of female defeat is found in one of Staël’s shorter works, an 1811 play entitled *Le Mannequin* (*OC*, 3:478-91), which features a French character whose personality traits combine two of the author’s favorite rhetorical targets: masculine arrogance and pretensions of cultural superiority. In this witty, atypically satirical play, Staël depicts a third-generation German family of French Huguenot descent, with the father clinging to a fantasy of Parisian sophistication. This nostalgic dream is embodied by a visiting French aristocrat who is seeking a wife with a large dowry, in spite of his disdain for all things German. Meanwhile, Sophie, the daughter and intended marital prize, is in love with Frédéric, a German commoner. Both of them are practical-minded and well educated, unlike the
preening aristocrat. Together, the two lovers outwit the Frenchman by convincing him to court Sophie’s “cousine” (the mannequin of the title), whom they have described as exceedingly rich, if somewhat lacking in the art of conversation. The courtship scene, a relatively rare instance of comedy within the Staëllicon corpus, effectively deflates the French aristocrat’s dual levels of pretentiousness, based on gender and national origin.

In France and abroad, Staël had to contend with gender-based opposition to her work, with exceptionally harsh denigration of her talent, throughout her career. A contemporary example is found in Chateaubriand’s analysis of De la littérature. While raising valid points, such as Staël’s reliance on a source as dubious as Ossian, he most saliently faults her for thinking and writing as a woman. Staël’s main literary rival during the Napoleonic period would have preferred, disingenuously, that: “on n’eût pas été si superficiel, et que dans un livre où l’on fait la guerre à l’imagination et aux préjugés, dans un livre où l’on traite de la chose la plus grave du monde, la pensée de l’homme, on eût moins senti l’imagination, le goût du sophisme et la pensée inconstante et versatile de la femme” (647). In De la littérature, Staël anticipates misogynistic attacks against her work, even derisively providing past examples of hostility to intellectual achievements by women, by quoting Molière’s L’Ecole des femmes (1:15-6). Although Staël ordinarily tended to avoid the use of irony, she came to classify the types of opposition to independent female achievements according to the political regime: “Dans les monarchies, [les femmes] ont à craindre le ridicule, et dans les républiques la haine” (De la littérature, 2:333). In the chapter entitled “Des femmes qui cultivent les lettres” (2:331-42), Staël likens a woman who has achieved literary eminence to a social outcast, a metaphor she would frequently use: “elle promène sa singulière existence, comme les Parias de l’Inde, entre toutes les classes dont elle ne peut être” (2:342). This chapter offers a cautionary analysis of what awaits a famous female writer, an analysis that of course could apply to Staël herself:

S’il existait une femme séduite par la célébrité de l’esprit, et qui voulût chercher à l’obtenir, combien il serait aisé de l’en détourner s’il en était temps encore! On lui montrerait à quelle affreuse destinée elle serait prête à se condamner. Examinez l’ordre social, lui dirait-on, et vous verrez bientôt qu’il est
tout entier armé contre une femme qui veut s'élever à la hauteur de la réputation des hommes. (2:338)

As Balayé has noted in “Madame de Staël ou comment être femme et écrivain” (1994, 13-23), Staël’s repeated warnings to women who would seek an autonomous literary career did not derive from any uncritical acceptance of the restrictive norms of her society, but from a bitterly realistic appraisal of their constraining power: “Elle constate donc que la condition des femmes les voue à l’obscurité. Ce n’est pas son avis comme on l’a prétendu. Si elle leur déconseille de sortir de leur rôle social, c’est qu’elle en connaît les dangers et les souffrances, dont la calomnie contre laquelle elles sont désarmées” (22). While Staël remained unflinchingly lucid about the myriad societal limitations and restrictions imposed upon women, she did not ultimately yield to resignation: “Si la situation des femmes est très imparfaite dans l’ordre civil, c’est à l’amélioration de leur sort, et non à la dégradation de leur esprit, qu’il faut travailler. Il est utile aux lumières et au bonheur de la société que les femmes développent avec soin leur esprit et leur raison” (De la littérature, 2:338-9). In the chapter entitled “De l’invasion des peuples du nord” (1:130-48), Staël describes the role of women in providing an alternative point of view within male-dominated literature, thereby outlining their possible future status as writers:

Les femmes n’ont point composé d’ouvrages véritablement supérieurs; mais elles n’en ont pas moins éminemment servi les progrès de la littérature, par la foule de pensées qu’ont inspirées aux hommes les relations entretenues avec ces êtres mobiles et délicats. Tous les rapports se sont doublés, pour ainsi dire, depuis que les objets ont été considérés sous un point de vue tout à fait nouveau. La confiance d’un lien intime en a plus appris sur la nature morale que tous les traités et tous les systèmes qui peignaient l’homme tel qu’il se montre à l’homme, et non tel qu’il est réellement. (1:140-1)

**Literary Renewal**

Published in 1800, *De la littérature considérée dans ses rapports avec les institutions sociales* was Staël’s first major book. It constituted an innovation by linking the evolution of individual literary traditions to their overall societal contexts. Staël thus announces comparative literary history as a critical discipline, one that would remain
dominant until the 1960s, with the emergence of "la nouvelle critique" and other schools of literary theory. As is often the case when it comes to literary manifestoes, political considerations were not far removed from the esthetic concerns developed by Staël. In particular, she questioned the widely accepted notion of the seventeenth century as the towering, indeed unsurpassable, standard of French literary achievement. While she did agree with Voltaire's assessment of the seventeenth century as the classical period of French literature, Staël insisted on the need to go beyond that esthetic model, the alternative being artistic stagnation:

Il est impossible d'être un bon littérateur, sans avoir étudié les auteurs anciens, sans connaître parfaitement les ouvrages classiques du siècle de Louis XIV. Mais l'on renoncerait à posséder désormais en France des grands hommes dans la carrière de la littérature, si l'on blâmait d'avance tout ce qui peut conduire à un nouveau genre, ouvrir une route nouvelle à l'esprit humain, offrir enfin un avenir à la pensée; elle perdrait bientôt toute émulation, si on lui présentait toujours le siècle de Louis XIV comme un modèle de perfection, au-delà duquel aucun écrivain éloquent ne pourra jamais s'élève. (De la littérature, 1:9).

Napoleon's centralized regime tended to extol the reign of Louis XIV, with its system of royal patronage and control, as a model for the development of French literature under the new absolutist ruler. As an officially sanctioned esthetic standard, neoclassicism, which was promoted largely in order to stifle artistic innovation and change, reflected the political conservatism of the Empire. Staël's goals, partly as a reaction to the Napoleonic regime's preference for the seventeenth-century model, were thus to revalorize the literary achievements of the eighteenth century (minus the sort of anticlericalism Voltaire symbolized), and to seek innovative artistic inspiration outside of France. Through her refusal of pre-established standards of taste, no matter how prestigious (Voltaire's generally conservative attitude is again a negative model in this regard), Staël situated herself outside of the court literature that Napoleon was attempting to reestablish. As Balayé writes: "Ainsi, Mme de Staël n'est-elle pas du tout disposée à recevoir du dehors, des règles objectives de jugement et démontre-t-elle que le critique a besoin, pour mettre en évidence les œuvres véritablement riches, de la même liberté que le philosophe, le romancier, l'historien" (1979, 164). Refusal of imitation and
praise for innovation are complementary Staëlian themes found throughout her work. She decried the imitation of French literary standards by writers from other countries, as well as the imitation within France of both the seventeenth-century stylistic patterns and the literary models of Greek and Roman antiquity: "A quelque perfection que l'on portât l'étude des ouvrages des anciens, on pourrait les imiter, mais il serait impossible de créer comme eux dans leur genre. Pour les égaler, il ne faut point s'attacher à suivre leurs traces; ils ont moissonné dans leurs champs: il vaut mieux défricher le nôtre" (De la littérature, 2:361).

As a continuator of the oppositional French literary tradition of the eighteenth century, and as an opponent to the revival of the seventeenth-century court literature favored by Napoleon’s regime, Staël posited literary progress and innovation as endowed with a socially useful function: “Dans l’état actuel de l’Europe, les progrès de la littérature doivent servir au développement de toutes les idées généreuses” (1:25). As Balayé puts it: “En 1800, elle n’hésite pas à dire que l’écrivain maintient et augmente les lumières nécessaires à la démocratie et à la liberté. Seule la littérature peut vaincre de vieux préjugés subsistant dans une société nouvelle et ouvrir des voies” (1979, 93). Literary progress participated in the process of generalized moral perfectibilité, a concept which bears a resemblance to Voltairean meliorism—and particularly to Condorcet’s vision of human perfectibility in Esquisse d’un tableau historique des progrès de l’esprit humain (written shortly before his death in prison in 1794).31 Despite the widespread sense of disillusionment that resulted from the failings and excesses of the French Revolution, Staël remained faithful to Condorcet’s representation and projection of historical progress:

Il importe d’ailleurs de distinguer entre la perfectibilité de l’espèce humaine et celle de l’esprit humain. L’une se manifeste encore plus clairement que l’autre. Chaque fois qu’une nation nouvelle, telle que l’Amérique, la Russie, etc. fait des progrès vers la civilisation, l’espèce humaine s’est perfectionnée; chaque fois qu’une classe inférieure est sortie de l’esclavage ou de l’avilissement, l’espèce humaine s’est encore perfectionnée. (De la littérature, 1:14).

Comparing the decadence of the Roman empire, which led to its conquest by the “peuples du nord,” with the Europe of her day, Staël finds no parallel, due to the lasting
consequences of historical progress: “La civilisation de l’Europe, l’établissement de la religion chrétienne, les découvertes des sciences, la publicité des lumières ont posé de nouvelles barrières à la dépravation, et détruit d’anciennes causes de barbarie. Ainsi donc la décadence des nations, et par conséquent celle des lettres, est maintenant beaucoup moins à craindre” (1:129-30). Staël’s version of perfectibility at once linked her to the philosophes, and allowed her to develop a less linear, more dialectical philosophy of history, one that (unlike Voltaire’s) integrated the expansion of Christianity in Europe during the Middle Ages, thereby providing the link with Romanticism. Contrary to Voltaire’s harshly negative assessment, Staël saw the Middle Ages as a generally progressive, if uneven, period of moral and intellectual betterment within Europe: “les siècles appelés barbares ont servi, comme les autres, d’abord à la civilisation d’un plus grand nombre de peuples, puis au perfectionnement même de l’esprit humain” (1:146). She associated this progress with the spread of Christianity, which she represented as a contributing factor to the fusion of the north and south: “La religion chrétienne a été le lien des peuples du nord et du midi” (1:137). The unifying Christian religion had also constituted, during most of the Middle Ages, a source of inquiry and learning, instead of superstition: “Je ne pense pas que l’espèce humaine ait rétrogradé pendant cette époque; je crois, au contraire, que des pas immenses ont été faits dans le cours de ces dix siècles, et pour la propagation des lumières, et pour le développement des facultés intellectuelles” (1:130). Far from opposing Christianity to the Enlightenment, or faith to reason, Staël tended to present one as reinforcing the other: “la religion chrétienne, à l’époque de son établissement, était indispensablement nécessaire à la civilisation et au mélange de l’esprit du nord avec les mœurs du midi. Je crois de plus que les méditations religieuses du christianisme, à quelque objet qu’elles aient été appliquées, ont développé les facultés de l’esprit pour les sciences, la métaphysique et la morale” (1:132). As Roland Mortier writes:

A l’inverse d’un Voltaire ou d’un Diderot, [Staël] ne croit nullement les lumières incompatibles avec le christianisme, pour autant que celui-ci soit débarrassé de la gangue de superstition et de fanatisme dont il s’est recouvert. Le Moyen Age a donc vu des progrès constants, la religion chrétienne a favorisé la civilisation en raffinant les peuples du nord et en ranimant la vie morale de ceux
du midi, le christianisme a permis l’avènement d’une culture, non plus romaine ou nationale, mais européenne et la scholastique elle-même, en dépit de son verbalisme, a permis le développement de certaines facultés intellectuelles. (1969a, 128)

Staël inherited (and sought to transcend) the traditional eighteenth-century opposition between unfettered scientific inquiry and deadening religious superstition. She also developed some of her own binary oppositions, most famously the twin Nord/Midi European literary traditions. However, she generally tended to find a synthesis or a harmonizing principle that would allow the terms of her oppositions to become conjoined in a relation of complementarity, without losing their specificity. Within the Staëlian dialectic, Christianity, and especially her liberal form of Protestantism, was thus associated with science and philosophy, rather than being in conflict with them. Similarly, the figures of Ossian and Homer, and the literary traditions of north and south that they hypostatized, were presented in terms of reciprocal influence, instead of irreducible antithesis. As Pierre Macherey has noted, it was in the area of the points of contact and interpenetration of national cultures, or in her updated version of the eighteenth-century cosmopolitan tradition, that Staël’s synthetic or associative pattern of thought was most productive:

C’est ainsi que Mme de Staël a été amenée à formuler une thèse originale, selon laquelle il ne peut y avoir d’identité culturelle qu’à l’intérieur de ce système complexe de rapports qui rassemble les cultures, en maintenant leurs différences et leurs oppositions. C’est sur ce principe qu’elle a fondé son cosmopolitanisme intellectuel. Dans une telle perspective, la contradiction entre l’universalisme des classiques et le particularisme des romantiques pouvait être surmontée, puisqu’il devenait tout aussi illusoire d’affirmer l’autonomie radicale de chaque forme singuliére de culture que de les confondre toutes à l’intérieur d’un même modèle idéal, en les coupant de leur enracinement. (1990, 35)

As Mortier has noted, Staël’s work was solidly grounded in the Enlightenment tradition, which she never renounced, even as she became the principal champion and propagator within Europe of German Romanticism: “[elle] occupe une position charnière entre le XVIIIe et le XIXe siècle, entre lumières et romantisme. Loin de les opposer, son œuvre témoigne de leur continuité; elle suffirait, à elle seule, à faire justice du faux
dilemme dans lequel on a voulu les enfermer” (1969a, 125). Other critics have approached in similar ways Staël’s continuum, or complementary juxtaposition, of the rationalism of the Enlightenment and the emotion of Romanticism. Julia Kristeva compares Staël to her eighteenth-century predecessors, referring to her as “une Encyclopédiste attardée” (238). James Hamilton argues that Staël was in many ways closer to Voltaire’s esthetic classicism than to Rousseau’s pre-romanticism. In “A propos du ‘Préromantisme’: continuité ou rupture chez Madame de Staël” (1994, 291-306), Balayé situates Staël as a continuator of the eighteenth-century literary tradition. Meanwhile, Staël’s central role within the development of European Romanticism has been detailed by John Isbell, who argues that she represents “a mythic parent to link all Europe’s Romantic movements, and the vast spread of Romantic civilization” (1994, 9). Staël’s approach to literary renewal was thus evolutionary and interconnective. While her taste for literary innovation or variety was often perceived as radical during her lifetime, she never sought to break with the French esthetic and intellectual heritage that had nurtured her.

European Literatures

One of the most famous quotes from the Staël’ian corpus is found in chapter 28 (“Des romans”) of the second part of De l’Allemagne: “Il faut, dans nos temps modernes, avoir l’esprit européen” (2:50). Staël addresses this near-command to Johann Richter (who took the French name “Jean Paul” out of admiration for Rousseau), gently chiding the German novelist for what she sees as his excessive originality, which was preventing him from being read outside of his native land: “On pourrait prier J. Paul de n’être bizarre que malgré lui” (2:50). While Staël’s phrase is often quoted within texts and speeches advocating European unity, its context has been largely forgotten, and perhaps justly so. Staël’s invocation of a European spirit or mindset constitutes the converse aspect of her better known contributions to comparative literature and cultural nationalism. In accordance with her opposition to the political and intellectual uniformity enforced by the Napoleonic regime, she extolled individual national cultures, often
inveighing against the dangers of fawning imitation of a (French) model perceived as universally valid: "Il n'y a point de nature, point de vie dans l'imitation" (1:97). In general, Staël therefore tended to see value in cultural difference, fragmentation, and originality. In a dialectical movement, the corollary of her praise of cultural difference is the search for a synthesis of cultural expression across linguistic and national borders, a synthesis that, unlike the homogenizing impulse of the Empire, was not designed to merely erase or occlude cultural variance and divergence. Her "European spirit," which characterizes much of her work (especially in the latter stages of her writing career), is marked by constant attempts to transcend oppositions and reconcile differences within a broader framework. While she sought to revalorize the Italian and German literary traditions that had been neglected or trivialized in France, she also advocated—and practiced—a constant flow of reciprocal influence, on equal terms, between national cultures:

Les nations doivent se servir de guide les unes aux autres, et toutes auraient tort de se priver des lumières qu'elles peuvent mutuellement se prêter. Il y a quelque chose de très singulier dans la différence d'un peuple à un autre: le climat, l'aspect de la nature, la langue, le gouvernement, enfin surtout les événements de l'histoire, puissance plus extraordinaire encore que toutes les autres, contribuent à ces diversités, et nul homme, quelque supérieur qu'il soit, ne peut deviner ce qui se développe naturellement dans l'esprit de celui qui vit sur un autre sol et respire un autre air: on se trouvera donc bien en tout pays d'accueillir les pensées étrangères; car, dans ce genre, l'hospitalité fait la fortune de celui qui reçoit. (2:75)

Comparing, associating, and classifying the varied literatures of Europe became one the main foci of Staël’s work as a critic and novelist. She structured her famous categories of the northern and southern literary traditions of Europe around Montesquieu’s theory of climatic determinism, but also around a totemic or originating figure, one of which later became more mythic than she had imagined. Staël’s Nord/Midi dichotomy was personalized by two writers she saw as having originated each tradition: Ossian and Homer. Her work therefore participated in a widespread Romantic movement that accepted at face value James Macpherson’s 1792 *Ossian* hoax, which
would turn out to be one of the most elaborate and influential instances of forgery in European literary history:

Il existe, ce me semble, deux littératures tout à fait distinctes, celle qui vient du midi et celle qui descend du nord, celle dont Homère est la première source, celle dont Ossian est l’origine. Les Grecs, les Latins, les Italiens, les Espagnols, et les Français du siècle de Louis XIV, appartiennent au genre de littérature que j’appellerai la littérature du midi. Les ouvrages anglais, les ouvrages allemands, et quelques écrits des Danois et des Suédois, doivent être classés dans la littérature du nord, dans celle qui a commencé par les bardes écossais, les fables islandaises, et les poésies scandinaves. (De la littérature, 1:178)

Along with the influence of the climate and the originating literary figures, Staël posited such societal factors as the political structure, the degree of economic development, the dominant religion and language, as well as the social and gender norms of conduct, as determinants in the development of individual literary traditions:

“J’aurai souvent l’occasion de faire remarquer les changements qui se sont opérés dans la littérature, à l’époque où les femmes ont commencé à faire partie de la vie morale de l’homme” (1:59-60). Comparing pre-Revolutionary France and England, for instance, Staël found French writers, because they had no possibility of influencing political events, tempted by purely abstract notions, while their English counterparts were more realistic, due to their level of influence in a limited monarchy:

D’ailleurs sous une monarchie absolue, on pouvait, comme Rousseau l’a fait dans le Contrat Social, vanter sans danger la démocratie pure; mais on n’aurait point osé approcher des idées plus vraisemblables. Tout était jeu d’esprit en France, hors les arrêts du conseil du roi: tandis qu’en Angleterre, chacun pouvait agir d’une manière quelconque sur les résolutions de ses représentants, l’on prend l’habitude de comparer la pensée avec l’action, et l’on s’accoutume à l’amour du bien public par l’espoir d’y contribuer. (2:235)

Similarly, within her category of the North, Staël established distinctions based on societal factors: “Le caractère général de la littérature est le même dans tous les pays du nord; mais les traits distinctifs du genre allemand tiennent à la situation politique et religieuse de l’Allemagne” (2:246-7). In the chapter entitled “De la littérature allemande” (2:243-61), Staël discusses the lack of political unity in Germany, but still finds a
"national character," that is reflected in its literature: "L'enthousiasme que Werther a excité, surtout en Allemagne, tient à ce que cet ouvrage est tout à fait dans le caractère national. Ce n'est pas Goethe qui l'a créé, c'est lui qui l'a su peindre. Tous les esprits en Allemagne, comme je l'ai dit, sont disposés à l'enthousiasme" (2:248). In De la littérature, Staël stated her preference for the northern literary tradition, which she posited as inherently more conducive to innovation, as well as to the introspection and dreaminess that accompanied a poetic sensibility: "Toutes mes impressions, toutes mes idées me portent de préférence vers la littérature du nord" (1:180-1).\(^5\) Seeking literary renewal and political change, Staël increasingly found her inspiration outside of France, with England providing a political model, while German literary innovations would become for her the source that would help rejuvenate French letters. A passage of Staël's preface to Delphine is worth quoting in its entirety, since it summarizes several of her themes (aside from the perhaps involuntary irony of the cross-cultural "homme de génie" she effectively became):

Une autre nation aussi distinguée par ses lumières que les Anglais le sont par leurs institutions, les Allemands ont des romans d'une vérité et d'une sensibilité profonde; mais on juge mal parmi nous les beautés de la littérature allemande, ou pour mieux dire, le petit nombre de personnes éclairées qui la connaissent ne se donnent pas la peine de répondre à ceux qui ne la connaissent pas; ce n'est que depuis Voltaire que l'on rend justice en France à l'admirable littérature des Anglais; il faudra de même qu'un homme de génie s'enrichisse une fois par la féconde originalité de quelques écrivains allemands, pour que les Français soient persuadés qu'il y a des ouvrages en Allemagne où les idées sont approfondies et les sentiments exprimés avec une énergie nouvelle.

Sans doute les auteurs actuels ont raison de rappeler sans cesse le respect que l'on doit aux chefs-d'œuvre de la littérature française, c'est ainsi que l'on peut se former un goût, une critique sévère, je dirais impartiale, si de nos jours, en France, ce mot pouvait avoir son application. Mais le grand défaut dont notre littérature est menacée maintenant, c'est la stérilité, la froideur et la monotonie; or l'étude des ouvrages parfaits et généralement connus que nous possédons, apprend bien ce qu'il faut éviter, mais n'inspire rien de neuf; tandis qu'en lisant les écrits d'une nation dont la manière de voir et de sentir diffère beaucoup de celle des Français, l'esprit est excité par des combinaisons nouvelles, l'imagination est animée par les hardiesses même qu'elle condamne autant que par celles qu'elle approuve; et l'on pourrait parvenir à adapter au goût français, peut-être le plus pur de tous, des beautés originales qui donneraient à la littérature du dix-neuvième siècle un caractère qui lui serait propre. (1:84-5)
Against the Empire

Staël’s Parisian salon, which brought together personalities of widely differing political opinions (including Napoleon’s brothers Lucien and Joseph), was inherently threatening for Napoleon, who repeatedly prevented her from reestablishing her residence in the French capital. Polowetzky refers to Staël as “the uncontested leader of the liberal opposition” (121), due to the influence of her books and of her salon, which she maintained in exile at Coppet. In Dix Années d’exil, Staël refers to her salon, before her forced exile, as one of the places where the Parisian elite, including foreign diplomats, could meet and converse with relative freedom:

Mon hiver à Paris se passa tranquillement. Je n’allais jamais chez le Premier Consul; je ne voyais jamais M. de Talleyrand. Je savais que Bonaparte ne m’aimait pas, mais il n’en était pas encore arrivé au degré de tyrannie qu’on a vu se développer depuis. Les étrangers me traitaient avec la plus grande distinction; le corps diplomatique passait sa vie chez moi et cette atmosphère européenne me servait de sauvegarde. (104).

Balayé has analyzed in “Les Rapports de l’écrivain et du pouvoir” (1994, 137-54) Staël’s refusal to conform to the largely propagandistic role assigned to French writers during the Napoleonic regime: “Mme de Staël considère la littérature comme sacrée; [Napoléon] a d’elle comme de la religion la même conception utilitaire; il faut que les prêtres et les écrivains contribuent à la puissance et à la gloire de l’État et de son chef” (143). Staël was of course repeatedly punished for her insubordinate writings and conduct, most notably after the publication of De l’Allemagne in 1810. Her persistent conflict with the French regime was not limited to the issue of the prescribed societal role of writers, since even Napoleon’s esthetic choices led to indirect political consequences. As Balayé put it, Staël’s penchant for cross-cultural literary innovations was inherently suspect: “Là encore, elle s’oppose à Napoléon qui fait donner en exemple aux littérateurs le siècle pour lui le plus utile, le XVIIe aux ordres de Louis XIV, donc les règles littéraires alors en usage qui ne peuvent être que stérilisantes pour la littérature d’un temps nouveau” (144).
In *Considérations sur la Révolution française* (third part, chapter 26), Staël recounts that she was initially an admirer of Napoleon Bonaparte, a victorious general who seemed to be attached to the preservation of the Republic. However, she soon perceived his personal ambitions and unscrupulousness after meeting him in Paris: “La force de sa volonté consiste dans l’imperturbable calcul de son égoïsme; c’est un habile joueur d’échecs dont le genre humain est la partie adverse qu’il se propose de faire échec et mat” (338). As Balayé points out, by the time Staël was working on her *Considérations*, “Il y a longtemps alors qu’elle a démythifié le héros de l’Italie qui avait flatté son imagination; elle le décrit cynique, vulgaire et mal élevé, autoritaire, comédien et rusé, parfaitement maître de lui, régnant sur une cour où la bassesse le dispute à l’avidité d’honneurs et d’argent” (1979, 77).

As Charlotte Hogsett points out (141), Staël tended to diminish her political role in her writings, generally presenting herself as an innocent victim, rather than as an active participant in efforts to undermine Napoleon’s regime. Staël also tended to shift further back in time the moment when she began to be disillusioned with his political intentions: “Je devinai plus vite que d’autres, et je m’en vante, le caractère et les desseins tyranniques de Bonaparte” (386). By downplaying her political activities, Staël tended to accentuate the disproportionality between her supposedly meek literary statements and the ferocity of the censorship and repression she endured, a disproportionality she expressed in starkly personal terms, as a drawn-out, if unbalanced, duel between Napoleon and herself (or between the embodiments of ruthless power and independent thought): “la longue lutte qu’il a établie entre sa toute-puissance et ma faiblesse” (218). This personalized dichotomy had the intentionally paradoxical effect (given Staël’s tendency to ostensibly diminish her own role) of raising her stature as the political and cultural antithesis of what Napoleon represented: “Staël has linked her fame to Napoleon: like Byron, she thus creates her own myth, both in her life and in her books” (Isbell 1994, 105-6). As Gutwirth points out, Staël played out against Napoleon a dual role of political opposition and national conscience in exile, a role that announced that of Victor Hugo during the Second Empire, which was ruled by Napoleon’s nephew:
As a political, no less than an esthetic, embodiment of freedom, Corinne was perhaps even more powerful. Its heroine, together with her author, came to stand, as Hugo later did on his rock in exile, for the spirit of liberty banished from Napoleon's armed camp of a nation (280). For his part (as recounted by Las Cases in Le Mémorial de Sainte-Hélène), Napoleon tended to belittle the impact and motivations of Staël's oppositional stance toward his regime, even arguing that her antagonistic political convictions resulted in fact from his steadfast rejection of her personal advances: "[les] avances et les cajoleries les plus actives de celle-ci" (1:358). However, instead of merely dismissing "la Corinne genevoise" (2:189), the former Emperor discusses Staël and her books several times, in fairly lengthy passages.

As a constant, but usually unsuccessful, practitioner of what Paul Vemière calls "la possible pression de l'intelligence sur le pouvoir" (941), Staël was indeed one of the principal leaders of the liberal literary and political opposition to Bonaparte's dictatorial rule. In "Philosophie et religion dans la pensée de Mme de Staël," Mortier argues that the excesses of the Revolution had taught Staël that the modern State apparatus can itself be as dangerous to freedom as traditional religious institutions. The centralized, bureaucratic, militarized governmental system of the Napoleonic empire was the final repressive result of a flawed Revolutionary movement that had strayed far from its initial objectives: "Singulière destinée que cette Révolution de France! Elle a détruit dans toute l'Europe continentale les principes mêmes de la liberté sur lesquels elle se disait fondée" (Dix Années d'exil, 59). Although Staël was never nostalgic about l'Ancien Régime in political terms, she presciently analyzed the increasingly totalitarian nature of Napoleon's regime, which prefigured twentieth-century dictatorships by seeking to concentrate all the instruments of coercion and influence into a single governmental leviathan:

On appelait jadis les canons la dernière raison des rois. Il faut y ajouter les gazettes, qui sont maintenant l'un des plus habiles moyens de la tyrannie. Le gouvernement peut s'en servir pour tout dire en défendant de répondre à rien, de manifester en rien son talent ni son caractère. On ne peut se représenter ce que c'est qu'un homme à la tête d'un million de soldats et d'un milliard de revenu, disposant de toutes les prisons de l'Europe, ayant les rois pour geôliers et usant de l'imprimerie pour parler, quand les opprimés ont à peine l'intimité de l'amitié pour répondre, enfin pouvant rendre le malheur ridicule, exécrable pouvoir dont
l'ironique jouissance est la dernière insulte que les génies infernaux puissent faire supporter à la race humaine! (223-4).

In a letter to Gouverneur Morris (18 Oct. 1804), Staël lists some of Napoleon’s military conquests, concluding: “L’Europe entière, à l’exception de l’Angleterre, est dépendante d’un seul homme” (Correspondance, 5:443). She saw the continually expanding Napoleonic empire as a cynical perversion of the universalistic tendencies of the Enlightenment. For Staël, while Napoleon did contribute to ending feudalism within Europe, he did not use his conquests to spread the liberal principles linked to the French Revolution. Instead, these were the soothing illusions through which he legitimized his conquests and annexations:

C’est aussi dans l’hiver de 1802 à 1803 que la Suisse prit les armes contre la constitution unitaire qu’on voulait lui donner. Singulière manie des révolutionnaires français, d’obliger tous les pays à s’organiser politiquement de la même manière que la France! Il y a sans doute des principes communs à tous les pays, ce sont tous ceux qui assurent les droits civils et politiques des nations libres, mais que ce soit une monarchie limitée comme l’Angleterre, une république fédérée comme les États-Unis ou les treize cantons en Suisse, qu’importe? et faut-il réduire l’Europe à une idée comme le peuple romain à une seule tête afin de pouvoir commander et changer tout en un jour! (Dix Années d’exil, 140)

In the chapter of Considérations sur la Révolution française entitled “De la conduite de Napoléon envers le continent européen” (4:12), Staël lists all the opportunities Napoleon had to achieve lasting liberal changes in France and Europe. Instead, he used his power to benefit the small French governing caste, thereby contributing to lasting nationalistic hatreds and reactions against his rule, and against French influence:

Mais fallait-il inonder la terre de sang pour que le prince Jérôme prit la place de l’électeur de Hesse, et pour que les Allemands fussent gouvernés par des administrateurs français qui prenaient chez eux des fiefs dont ils savaient à peine prononcer le titres, bien qu’ils les portassent, mais dont ils touchaient très facilement les revenus dans toutes les langues? Pourquoi l’Allemagne se serait-elle soumise à l’influence française? Cette influence ne lui apportait aucune lumière nouvelle, et n’établissait chez elle d’autres institutions libérales que des contributions et des conscriptions encore plus fortes que toutes celles imposées par ses anciens maîtres. (401-2).
Opposed to the rigid uniformity imposed by Bonaparte’s ever-increasing extension of power throughout Europe, Staël, who coined the word “nationalité,” was led to affirm the value of national specificities and particularisms as a means of counterbalancing the perverse effects of forcibly imposed universalism. For her, the revalorization of national literatures and cultures was associated with the need for political independence and unity for each national group within Europe. Her “European spirit” thus rested on the rejection of the unchecked transnational regime which the Napoleonic perversion of universalism had brought about. While understandable in the context of Bonaparte’s repressive empire, Staël’s concept of Europeans associated mainly by shared cross-cultural affinities would soon find its limits with the rise of jingoistic nationalism during the nineteenth century. That the cult of nationalistic pride would itself later become a vehicle for aggressive totalitarianism was a development she did not foresee. At the start of the century, marked by the seemingly continual victories of Revolutionary and Imperial French armies, Staël offered a defense of national diversity, and therefore the cultivation of pride in individual national literatures and cultures, as a contributing factor to European opposition against despotic rule: “[Bonaparte] veut être un homme ou quelque chose de plus qu’un homme, à la tête d’une fourmilière appelée des Allemands, des Italiens, des Français, mais n’étant bientôt plus désignés que comme des sujets de Bonaparte” (Dix Années d’exil, 112). It should be noted that Staël also contrasted the rise of nationalistic movements with traditional aristocratic solidarity, which tended to stretch across national borders: “Les nobles de France se considèrent malheureusement plutôt comme les compatriotes des nobles de tous les pays, que comme les concitoyens des Français. D’après leur manière de voir, la race des anciens conquérants de l’Europe se doit mutuellement des secours d’un empire à l’autre; mais les nations, au contraire, se sentant un tout homogène, veulent disposer de leur sort” (Considérations, 254). This seemingly perennial opposition between national and class solidarities will be one of the main themes of Jean Renoir’s 1937 film, La Grande Illusion.
In political terms, Staël’s liberal model was Great Britain, a coherent national entity ruled by a hereditary monarchy wielding only limited political power, with mechanisms that balanced aristocratic rule and popular representation.\textsuperscript{40} Of course, the reality of Staël’s model was problematic, to say the least, within Europe (the case of Ireland) and throughout its colonial empire. Staël’s views on the British system are most clearly articulated in the sixth part of *Considérations*. In chapter 7, entitled “De la conduite du gouvernement anglais hors de l’Angleterre,” she offers measured criticism of the “abus affreux” (566) of the colonial administration in India, and of British “dédain” (568) for the United States. Staël praised the British political system, as had Voltaire, for its relative stability and degree of individual (particularly economic) freedom. In chapter 3 (“De la prospérité de l’Angleterre”), she attributes a large part of Great Britain’s eventual victory over Napoleon’s regime to its economic strength, which rested on guaranteed property rights, budgetary transparency, and freedom of the press. She saw Great Britain as uncommonly resistant to the temptation of despotism: “Mais dans l’état actuel de l’ordre social en Angleterre, après un siècle de durée des institutions qui ont formé la nation la plus religieuse, la plus morale et la plus éclairée dont l’Europe puisse se vanter, je ne concevrais pas de quelle manière sa liberté pourrait être jamais menacée” (581).

Staël’s sympathies with the British constitutional system naturally led her to hope for the triumph of England over Napoleon. However, one of the paradoxical consequences of Staël’s opposition to the totalitarian Napoleonic empire was her grudging support for another multinational empire ruled by an absolutist despot. While Staël harbored few illusions about the Russian empire, it constituted the last continental bulwark against French expansionism: “On n’était guère accoutumé à considérer la Russie comme l’état le plus libre de l’Europe, mais le joug que l’empeureur de France fait peser sur tous les états du continent est tel qu’on se croit dans une république dès qu’on arrive dans le pays où la tyrannie de Napoléon ne peut se faire sentir” (*Dix Années d’exil*, 255). She was thus apparently willing to suspend disbelief when encountering the Russian emperor and his talk of reform: “L’Empereur Alexandre me parla de sa nation
avec enthousiasme et de ce dont elle était capable. Il m’indiqua le désir que tout le monde lui connaı\'t d’améliorer l’état des paysans encore soumis au servage” (*Dix Années d’exil*, 291). As Rémi Forycki has noted, although Staël was aware of the eighteenth-century debates among the French philosophes over the nature of the increasingly powerful Russian empire, she had not planned a lengthy stay (her real destination was England), and was thus unprepared for the social and political realities of Russian life, unlike her pre-planned explorations of Italian or German culture: “Son passage à Moscou et à Saint-Pétersbourg, arrangé à la hâte, ne laissait aucune place à une action politique préméditée” (84).

Staël’s perceptions of other countries she visited were similarly influenced by their relative degree of cooperation with, or opposition against, the French empire. In *Dix Années d’exil*, Staël finds support for Napoleon within a resurrected Polish state (under French influence), which had previously been divided between Austria, Prussia, and Russia: “les Polonais sont les seuls Européens qui puissent servir sans honte sous les drapeaux de Bonaparte” (240). A similar comment, concerning Italy, is found in *Considérations*: “Les Italiens, par l’espoir confus d’être enfin réunis en un seul état, les infortunés Polonais qui demandent à l’enfer aussi bien qu’au ciel de redevenir une nation, étaient les seuls qui servissaient volontairement l’empereur” (402). In particular, Staël attributed much of the success of Napoleon’s military campaigns in Italy to the wish for national unity among local elites: “le désir qu’ont eu de tout temps les Italiens éclairés de se réunir en un seul état, et d’avoir assez de force nationale pour ne plus rien craindre ni espérer des étrangers, contribua beaucoup à favoriser les progrès du général Bonaparte. C’est au cri de vive l’Italie qu’il a passé le pont de Lodi, et c’est à l’espoir de l’indépendance qu’il dut l’accueil des Italiens” (328). As Balayé notes in “Madame de Staël et l’Europe napoléonienne” (1994, 155-71), Staël understood that support for Bonaparte among Polish or Italian intellectuals was largely based upon the absence of national unity in these two countries within pre-Revolutionary Europe: “Elle espère donc que l’Italie retrouvera son unité mais par d’autres moyens. Elle pense de même pour la Pologne. Ce sont les deux seuls peuples dont elle comprend les prises de
positions pro-napoléoniennes, parce que les plus malheureux par les conquêtes, les divisions ou les partages” (157).

Exile and Travels

One of the similarities between Staël’s biography and that of Voltaire is the repeated experience of involuntary exile, whether internal (from Paris) or external (from France). An early supporter of the Revolution, Staël became increasingly opposed to its radicalization during the Terror. In 1792, she was forced to flee Paris at the start of the infamous September massacres. As Balayé describes Staël’s exile at Coppet during this period: “Vivre en Suisse, même au sein d’une relative prospérité, n’est cependant pas son idéal. Elle n’est pas vraiment émigrée; elle ne regrette pas l’ancienne monarchie, la féodalité, les privilèges contre lesquels elle a lutté. Elle est la proie d’une autre nostalgie, celle d’une révolution qu’elle croit détournée de son sens, et qui ne lui paraît plus qu’une caricature de la philosophie des Lumières” (1979, 46). Although Staël was able to return to Paris at the start of the Directoire in 1795, she had to leave again a few months later, and in 1796 would have faced being arrested if she had returned to France. After he had seized power, Napoleon first banned Staël from Paris in 1803, thereby cutting her off from the social and literary life she had known. In 1810, after halting the publication of *De l’Allemagne*, he effectively consigned her to Coppet and Geneva. As a measure of intimidation, he also banned from Paris those of her friends (Mathieu de Montmorency and Juliette Récamier) who had dared to visit her. In 1812, Staël was forced to flee to England, by way of Russia and Sweden, in the middle of Napoleon’s campaign against Russia. Staël stayed in Sweden, where the French general Bernadotte had become king, from September 1812 to May 1813. She then moved to Great Britain, where she was at last able to publish *De l’Allemagne*, returning to France after Napoleon’s abdication in 1814.

In “A propos du ‘Préromantisme’: continuité ou rupture chez Madame de Staël,” Balayé contrasts Staël’s forced exile during the Terror in 1792, which was due to her status as an aristocrat, with later periods of exile, which resulted from her political and
literary activities: "L’exil qu’elle connaîtra sous le Directoire et surtout celui beaucoup plus rigoureux dans lequel la maintiendra l’Empire, sera profondément différent. On ne chassait pas le représentant d’une classe, mais un individu gênant par ses idées de progrès que tient pour dangereuses le pouvoir édifié à leurs dépens" (1994, 295). As had been the case for Voltaire, many of Staël’s travels were not undertaken primarily out of choice, but were largely due to the impossibility of returning to Paris. Her 1803-04 stay in Germany, for instance, followed unsuccessful attempts to persuade Napoleon to lift his order banning her from the capital.

While Staël devoted much time and work to learning the languages and cultures of Germany, Italy, and Great Britain, she visited and wrote about several other European countries, with varying degrees of interest or accuracy. Her comments on Russia, while necessarily diplomatic, will find echoes a generation later in Astolphe de Custine’s characterization of the vast country as still largely “Asiatic”—that is, backward and despotic: “On ne saurait trop le répéter, cette nation est composée des contrastes les plus frappants. Peut-être le mélange de la civilisation européenne et du caractère asiatique en est-il la cause” (Dix Années d’exil, 269). She depicts Moscow, where she briefly stopped before its occupation by Napoleon’s invading Grande Armée, as the eastern limit of European influence: “L’Asie et l’Europe se trouvaient réunies dans cette ville” (272). As in other countries, Staël encounters widespread indications of French cultural influence, some of which she finds excessive: “les Russes ont, comme tant d’autres pays du continent, le tort d’imiter la littérature française qui, par ses beautés mêmes, ne convient qu’aux Français” (279).

During her travels across central and eastern Europe, Staël often established comparisons between national cultures, attitudes, and behaviors: “Les Polonais en général aiment mieux les Russes que les Autrichiens. Les Russes et les Polonais sont de la race esclavonne; ils ont été ennemis mais ils se considèrent mutuellement, tandis que les Allemands, plus avancés que les Esclavons dans la civilisation européenne, ne savent pas leur rendre justice à d’autres égards” (257). She had long practiced a similar
comparative process regarding the countries of western Europe, with which she was more familiar:

L’Espagne, aussi étrangère que l’Italie aux travaux philosophiques, fut détournée de toute emulation littéraire par la tyrannie oppressive et sombre de l’inquisition; elle ne profita point des inépuisables sources d’invention poétique que les Arabes apportaient avec eux. L’Italie possédait les monuments anciens, et avait des rapports immédiats avec les Grecs de Constantinople; elle tira de l’Espagne le genre oriental, que les Maures y avaient porté, et que négligeaient les Espagnols. (De la littérature, 1:167)

Unlike Voltaire, Staël wrote relatively little about the rest of the world. With the partial exception of the United States, her novels, essays, and correspondence are definitely centered on Europe. She could at times be flippantly dismissive about much of the rest of the world: “Les vastes contrées de l’Asie se sont perdues dans le despotisme; et, depuis nombre de siècles, ce qu’il y reste de civilisation est stationnaire” (Considérations, 64). Perhaps because she never crossed the Atlantic, Staël tended to represent the United States as having solved many of the political and social problems that continued to bedevil most European countries: “C’est ainsi qu’en Amérique beaucoup de problèmes politiques paraissent résolus; car les citoyens y vivent heureux et libres” (De la littérature, 2:376). While decrying the persistence of slavery, she anticipated Alexis de Tocqueville’s prediction of the rise of the United States as a world power: “Il y a une nation qui sera bien grande un jour: ce sont les Américains” (Considérations, 568).43

Staël’s writings, unlike those of Voltaire, contain only infrequent comments concerning Jews. What few comments she does make, however, are clearly anti-Semitic in nature, reflecting the traditional religious prejudices of her privileged milieu.44 In Considérations, she sadly recounts having noticed during her trip in 1812 that in Poland: “les juifs se sont emparés de tout le commerce” (247). Upon entering Russia, she remarks that the first province she crosses is “inondée de juifs comme la Galicie” (256). French Jews had been conferred citizenship in 1791. This was not one of the accomplishments of the Revolution that Staël lauded. Her call for religious tolerance and cross-cultural influence stopped short of including non-Christians within Europe.
Likewise, her frequent characterization of Napoleon as radically alien to France, due to his geographical origin—"un Corse africain"—carries an overtone of racism, in spite of her campaign for the abolition of slavery.

**North and South**

Nous avons déjà dit que la grande chaleur énervait la force et le courage des hommes; et qu'il y avait dans les climats froids une certaine force de corps et d'esprit qui rendait les hommes capables des actions longues, pénibles, grandes et hardies. Cela se remarque non seulement de nation à nation, mais encore dans le même pays, d'une partie à une autre. (Montesquieu, 630)

In *De l'esprit des lois* (books 14 to 18), Montesquieu developed his widely influential théorie des climats, the long-lived theory of climatic determinism, seeking to explain Europe's relative degree of political freedom by its mostly temperate climate. To these favorable meteorological conditions he opposed the extremes of heat and cold he saw in countries that adjoined one another in Asia, where absolute despotism reigned, unchecked by any separation of powers. Staël adapted this theory in order to explain the differences in terms of political regimes, and especially in terms of literary development, among the countries of Europe. By stressing her Nord/Midi dichotomy, structured around the iconic literary figures of Ossian and Homer, Staël was generally able to systematize her observations on the culture and social mores of the societies that she visited. These observations, while present throughout most of her work, are most clearly found in her second novel, *Corinne ou l'Italie* (1807), and in her 1810 essay devoted to German society and culture.

*Corinne* was even more successful and influential than *Delphine* had been. Through the identification of the title character with her native land, Staël extolled not only Italian literature, but also the spontaneous enthusiasm she perceived in its vibrant, if anarchic culture: "une nation si vive dans l'expression des sentiments qu'elle éprouve" (2, 1). Along with praise for Italian artistic achievements, there are calls for national unity and independence, which would allow the divided country to emulate the politically advanced countries of the north. As Carlo Pellegrini points out, Staël was doing her part
in seeking to “favoriser la formation d’une conscience nationale italienne” (1970, 266). Most infuriatingly for Napoleon—who had crowned himself “king of Italy” in 1805—there is no mention of the French military and political domination in Italy, which was already established during the latter part of the period narrated in the novel (1795-1803), and which, at its height, reduced Rome to the status of Préfecture du Département du Tibre. Staël achieved popular success with a novel that was set outside of France, that did not praise all things French, and that provided both subtle criticism of military dictatorship and a call for Italian national unity.

In Corinne, Staël blends themes and techniques from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries with those that would dominate during the romantic period. It is often associated with Chateaubriand’s René (1802) as one of the two most influential novels of the Napoleonic period. In her second novel, Staël most clearly developed the opposition she perceived between the cultures of northern and southern Europe. The “Nord/Midi” dichotomy, adapted from Montesquieu’s “théorie des climats,” became one of the most common literary topoi among the members of the Coppet group. As Balayé points out, Corinne, “écrit après les voyages en Allemagne et en Italie, prend des dimensions européennes, s’élargit à une sorte de comparatisme des sociétés” (1979, 136). The main characters of Staël’s novel, Corinne and Oswald, as well as d’Erfeüil, represent national types: the vivacious, exuberant Italian (her brooding side is attributed to England), the restrained, melancholic Englishman, and the witty but frivolous Frenchman. As Gutwirth puts it: “Three nations, not just two, are at war in Corinne: if Italy represents beauty, art, higher morality, and England, the good, the real, the ethical realm, then France upholds, if that can be the word, amorality, self-interest, self-love” (233).

In terms of national culture, Corinne is a hybrid character, situated between the Staëlilian categories of the Nord and Midi of Europe: born and raised in Italy by her British father and Italian mother, Corinne also lived in Britain with her father and British stepmother after her mother’s death. Her often painful private status is one of an independent cultural intermediary, not unlike Staël’s real-life role. She is introduced as a
woman with a mysterious past, whose origins and last name are unknown: “Son premier ouvrage avait paru cinq ans auparavant, et portait seulement le nom de Corinne. Personne ne savait où elle avait vécu, ni ce qu’elle avait été avant cette époque; elle avait maintenant à peu près vingt-six ans” (2, 1). She is very much a *self-made* woman, who defines herself by her work and her talent, rather than by her social background or her conjugal status: “la femme la plus célèbre de l’Italie, Corinne, poète, écrivain, improvisatrice, et l’une des plus belles personnes de Rome” (2, 1). She is also independently wealthy, a crucially important condition for a female artist. As English Showalter points out, the character of Corinne, who is clearly introduced as an autonomous woman, constitutes one of the first important examples of such heroines in the history of French novels. As Gutwirth writes, Staël was also an innovator in depicting in Corinne a heroine who was not only a woman of literary genius, but even “the glory of her nation and her age” (204n3). Due to her forthright claim to artistic eminence, the fictional character of Corinne, and of course the well-known female writer who had created her, automatically elicited negative reactions:

[Staël] sought to move woman via the immanent to the transcendent realm and to lay claim to a place for her there. This was a very fragile enterprise, for it challenged every notion of woman’s nature and her place and could only have been attempted by a gifted woman whom life had conspired to make more rich, spoiled, protected, and proud than she was apologetic and humble. Here is a statement that says, “Woman possesses genius.” It is for this unspeakable pretension that posterity has never forgiven Corinne. (Gutwirth, 301).

The most important secondary character in the novel, d’Erfeuil, a social gadfly seeking conversation but no real intellectual exchange, represents the French elite as generous but superficial. Concerned with keeping up appearances, he seeks pleasure, but only in conformity with the strictures of his aristocratic milieu. As the embodiment of the frivolity Staël sees as common among French elites, d’Erfeuil’s attitude is one of mild and fleeting curiosity when encountering any form of artistic or intellectual stimulus: “Le comte d’Erfeuil, après avoir passé quelque temps en Suisse, et s’être ennuyé de la nature dans les Alpes, comme il s’était fatigué des beaux-arts à Rome, sentit tout à coup le désir d’aller en Angleterre, où on l’avait assuré que se trouvait la profondeur de la pensée”
Napoleon would rail against Staël for her depiction of d’Erfeuil and other French characters in *Corinne*: “Je ne puis du reste pardonner à Mme de Staël d’avoir ravalé les Français dans son roman” (Las Cases, 2:187).

In an illustration of Staël’s long-standing cross-cultural interests, *Corinne* includes comparative discussions of English, French and Italian literatures. In the course of these discussions, d’Erfeuil, a Voltairean figure, haughtily upholds classical French theater against the “monstruosités” of Shakespeare: “Notre théâtre est le modèle de la délicatesse et de l’élégance” (7, 2). Predictably, he is similarly dismissive about Italian or, for that matter, any theatrical tradition that deviates from the French model. While the main nexus of Staël’s novel remains the Nord/Midi opposition she had elaborated in *De la littérature*, an opposition here incarnated respectively by Oswald and Corinne and by the nations they embody, a recurring theme is the tendency of the male characters to project their national model, whether it be political or cultural, onto the countries they visit. For these characters, traveling abroad thus becomes, instead of a learning experience, simply a means of reinforcing one’s notion of national superiority and universal validity. As Macherey writes: “On peut unifier les esprits en les soumettant à un modèle commun, c’est-à-dire en leur imposant la forme hégémonique qui appartient spécifiquement à l’un d’entre eux, en en faisant de l’imitation le mode par excellence de la communication culturelle” (1987, 23). In *Corinne*, the French character d’Erfeuil, who is willfully superficial and oblivious to the potential influence of external cultures, incarnates a specifically cultural form of hegemony.

As Balayé points out, the advantages of the orderly and efficient British political and economic model, as compared to both Italy and France, are stressed in *Corinne*: “La supériorité politique de l’Angleterre, pays bien administré, à la société disciplinée, est une constante dans le roman” (1988, 12). Oswald, the representative of the advanced British societal model that Staël admired, is dismayed by much of what he sees within the politically fragmented and relatively less developed Italy. His often peremptory judgments on the countries he visits make no allowances for historical contingencies: “Je suis sévère pour les nations, répondit Oswald: je crois toujours qu’elles méritent leur
sort, quel qu’il soit” (4, 2). It is Corinne who defends her country’s reputation, pointing out its artistic heritage and attributing its ills to the lack of national independence and unity: “Les Italiens sont bien plus remarquables par ce qu’ils ont été et par ce qu’ils pourraient être, que par ce qu’ils sont maintenant” (1, 5). As Arnaud Tripet puts it, Staël perceived and depicted in her second novel “la grandeur et la souffrance d’une Italie déchue, mais prête à renaître” (29).

A sensitive but rigidly conventional character, Oswald recalls Léonce’s obsessive pursuit of honor and duty in Delphine. Unlike Léonce, Oswald’s physical courage is applied to useful purposes. In Corinne, He is twice called upon to show his bravery, while the Italian characters appear all the more helpless by comparison. At great risk to himself, Oswald thus takes the lead in putting out the fire in Ancona (1, 4), and in saving a drowning man in Naples (13, 6). By contrast, the Italian inhabitants ask Oswald not to open the gates of the Jewish ghetto during the fire in Ancona. They would also prefer to let the insane asylum burn down with its patients. Similarly, in Naples, no Italian character attempts to rescue the man who is about to drown. In both cases, Oswald’s bravery and self-abnegation serve to highlight, by contrast, Italian passivity and complacency. The representative of le Nord thus has ample opportunities to show his strength and virility, while the Italian characters, who are embodiments of le Midi, exhibit varying degrees of weakness and feminization.

The causes of the clearly feminized representation of Italy in Staël’s novel are prominent among the topics of discussion and disagreement between the two main characters. In “La Société italienne dans Corinne” (1994, 199-211), Balayé points out that the distinctions between the characters of Corinne and Oswald are more vividly highlighted by their disagreements over Italian society than over its literature. Corinne’s defense of her nation, in response to Oswald’s associated accusations of generalized decadence and lack of virility, is based on Italy’s subjugated status as a conquered and divided country, lacking the stable, representative political institutions from which Great Britain derives its strength and stability. As Gutwirth has noted, Staël associates the historical subjection of Italy with the enforced servitude of women: “Women too are
often held, like Italians, to be childlike, indolent, frivolous, and volatile. Mme de Staël sees such traits as a consequence of the internalized habit of dissimulation imposed upon the defeated” (212). The Staëlilian vision of Italy as politically and socially—but not artistically—degraded was already present in *De la littérature*, where she also found climate and religion to be causal factors:

Les Italiens, si l’on en excepte une certaine classe d’hommes éclairés, sont pour la religion, comme pour l’amour et la liberté; ils aiment l’exagération de tout, et n’éprouvent le sentiment vrai de rien. Ils sont vindicatifs, et néanmoins serviles. Ils sont esclaves des femmes, et néanmoins étrangers aux sentiments profonds et durables du cœur. Ils sont misérablement superstitieux dans les pratiques du catholicisme; mais ils ne croient pas à l’indissoluble alliance de la morale et de la religion. Tel est l’effet que doivent produire sur un peuple des préjugés fanatiques, des gouvernements divers que ne réunissent point la défense et l’amour d’une même patrie, un soleil brûlant qui ranime toutes les sensations, et doit entraîner à la volupté lorsque cet effet n’est pas combattu, comme chez les Romains, par l’énergie des passions politiques. (1:163)

While Staël generally considered Great Britain as a political and economic model, she sharply highlighted its social conservatism in *Corinne*, particularly in terms of the constraints imposed on women’s roles and conduct. Meanwhile, Italy, a divided nation with little political freedom, is presented as allowing relatively more autonomy for individuals, and particularly for women. Staël’s novel thus juxtaposes the twin paradoxes of a “free” British society that severely restricts women’s freedom, and of a conquered Italian society that allows them comparatively more freedom. Through the interplay of the multiple dichotomies represented by the two gendered national entities—freedom/servility, self-restraint/passion, order/imagination, power/sensitivity, politics/art—male achievements and self-realization are portrayed as dependent on female submissiveness. Outside of the political domain, as Gutwirth has detailed, *Corinne* partly reverses the terms of the “Nord/Midi” opposition originally found in *De la littérature*, holding up the south of Europe as a more beneficial environment for artistic and personal development: “England becomes normalcy, continuity, immanence; Italy stands boldly for art and its triumphant victory beyond personal mortality” (208). The foregrounding of the artistic and personal freedom incarnated by “Corinne ou
l'Italie" highlights Staël’s critique of the politically and economically advanced, but socially retrograde, British model—a critique that, with relatively few changes, could also be directed at the norms of social and esthetic conformity enforced within Napoleonic France. As Monika Bosse argues, much of the criticism directed against England in Corinne could be indirectly applied to the rigidly androcentric French Empire:

While Delphine had highlighted the deleterious effects of class-based social determinism on women’s lives, Corinne transposes the weight of assigned gender roles to a form of national determinism, opposing Italian passion and spontaneity to the closed-in, regimented world of English domestic life. The character of Corinne changes radically according to her national setting. While she is triumphant in Italy, she becomes nearly invisible during her trip to England. In book 17, the recurring device of her hiding (in order to discreetly observe Oswald) becomes a metaphor for the social and emotional death she experiences when she leaves her invigorating Italian environment for the androcentric social norms of Great Britain. The nationally-determined patriarchal law is spelled out in a letter written by Oswald’s father to Corinne’s father, explaining why their children would make a mismatched couple: “dans les pays où les institutions politiques donnent aux hommes des occasions honorables d’agir et de se montrer, les femmes doivent rester dans l’ombre” (16, 8). During her trip to Great Britain (book 17), Corinne will indeed remain in the shadows as she observes Oswald from a distance—a stark contrast to the luminous setting in which she had first been introduced during her Roman triumph: “Un soleil éclatant, un soleil d’Italie” (2, 1). The death of Oswald’s father is announced on the first page of Corinne, which will make his presence, in the form of reminiscences and written traces, all the more ponderous throughout the novel. As he had put it in his letter, Corinne is radically unsuited for England: “l’Italie seule lui
convienct” (16, 8). Similarly, Oswald’s inability to adapt to the different values and attitudes Corinne represents is due to his national background: “les Anglais, qui sont accoutumés à vivre entre eux et se mêlent difficilement avec les mœurs des autres peuples” (1, 5).

In Corinne, Staël contrasts the restrictive standards of British society for women with those for men, who are encouraged to participate in public affairs: “Comme il y a partout, en Angleterre, des intérêts de divers genres qui honorent l’humanité, les hommes, dans quelque retraite qu’ils vivent, ont toujours les moyens d’occuper dignement leur loisir; l’existence des femmes, dans le coin isolé de la terre que j’habitais, était bien insipide” (14, 1). In the same chapter, when Corinne’s stepmother invites her neighbors for tea, the deadening impact of rigid gender roles in Britain is illustrated through dialogue which is so absurdly empty that it recalls Eugène Ionesco’s 1950 “antiplay,” La Cantatrice chauve. While Great Britain may be Staël’s political model, it does not constitute an exemplar in terms of the limitations imposed on women. It is, however, the British model of constrained feminine behavior that Oswald asks the independent Corinne to accept, even though he admires her talent: “j’espérerai que l’amour t’y rattachera, et que tu préfèreras le bonheur domestique, les vertus sensibles et naturelles, à l’éclat même de ton génie” (15, 1). As his country’s representative within the novel, Oswald asks an exceptionally gifted character to conform to her proper familial and domestic role, as defined by his society: “England symbolizes the belief that the interests of society must take precedence over those of the individual. Society must be preserved; ergo, marriage and the family” (Gutwirth, 219). The character of Corinne is in between national cultures, and outside of fixed class identities and gender roles. Her eventual downfall, a consequence of her love for the unbending Oswald, illustrates Staël’s ambivalence regarding the viability of relative independence and individual accomplishment for women of letters:

Corinne’s myth is that of a rebellion that fails. Her megalomania and her self-destructiveness both veer toward madness. But the readers are not reconciled to the inevitability of this failure: rather we are led to feel its utter evitability and wastefulness. We are invited to rebel against what has crushed
Corinne: the terror of a woman's partner before the idea of her superiority. (Gutwirth, 256).

As several critics have noted, Corinne is at once a tragic story of star-crossed lovers and an Italian travel guide. Book 4, for instance, includes long descriptions of what would later become a common Romantic topos, the ruins of Roman monuments. The landscape, architecture and monuments of Italy are often used to symbolize the evolution of the unlikely relationship between the lively Italian artist and the brooding British aristocrat. During their travels through the Italian cities and countryside, the often contrasting moods and feelings of Corinne and Oswald are reflected in the natural settings, varying from such extremes as Corinne's illuminated triumph in Rome to the ominously foreboding Mount Vesuvius. In Staël's novel, parts of Italy, and, to a lesser extent, Britain and France, become the hypostatized embodiments of emotional states and intellectual outlooks:

If we think of the great cities alone, Mme de Staël has been truly skillful in depicting something of their spirit. Rome is the place of triumph; Naples, flower of the south—"that happy countryside"—is the place of love's fulfillment, but Vesuvius is there at hand to threaten it; Venice is the frayed grandeur of a noble but fragile past, a fittingly melancholy setting for the parting of the lovers; and Florence, barely breathing in its quiet contemplation of its violent history, is an appropriate frame for Corinne's death. (Gutwirth, 185)

Imagine Germany

One of the consequences of the publication of Voltaire's Lettres philosophiques in 1734 was to make English literature better known in France, where it had been largely ignored. The publication of Staël's De l'Allemagne had a similar effect for German letters—with the important difference that Voltaire was referring to a politically unified country, while "Germany" did not exist in any constitutional or political sense. Staël's lengthy essay also met with a comparable level of censorship as had Voltaire's (it was banned shortly after its initial publication in 1810, and almost all copies were destroyed), and eventually led to her fleeing across central and eastern Europe—a necessarily roundabout means of reaching the haven of Great Britain. It was during her
stay in England that she was finally able to publish it in 1813. French readers would have to wait another year, until the fall of the Empire, to discover Staël’s book. As she had done with Corinne, Staël mixed different genres—travel literature, literary criticism, philosophic considerations, implied political critique, the only exception being romantic intrigue—within her account of what she had discovered, through her travels and texts, about France’s little-known neighbor.

*De l’Allemagne* presented a relatively unknown culture of vitality, enthusiasm, and romanticism to the French reading public. Through her study of Germany, Staël sought to introduce a new respect for a literary tradition that had generally been ignored or discounted in France. Practicing an early form of cultural relativism, she advocated an examination by French readers, without preconceptions, of German literary achievements across several genres (theater, poetry, novels): “C’est le goût national qui seul peut décider de ces différents systèmes dramatiques; mais ce qui est juste, c’est de reconnaître que, si les étrangers conçoivent l’art théâtral autrement que nous, ce n’est ni par ignorance, ni par barbarie, mais d’après des réflexions profondes et qui sont dignes d’être examinées” (1:257). Alongside novelists, poets, and playwrights, Staël introduced German philosophers such as Immanuel Kant and Johann Fichte. She implicitly compared the development of German thought and imagination to the debilitating effects of despotism on French intellectual expression. Throughout the book, there is no mention of the established French influence or domination in Germany, and not a (direct) word about Napoleon—an eloquent silence on the part of the most famous living French writer. In the context of the Napoleonic regime, praise of foreign cultures bordered on treason. In this respect as in many others, Staël was following in Voltaire’s footsteps, by using somewhat idealized foreign countries and cultures as an indirect means of criticizing French institutions.

For Staël, Germany became in the emotional, literary, and philosophical spheres what Great Britain already was in the political domain. Together, the two countries constituted most of the vital “Nord” of her famous European duality. The issue in this section is not the relatively low degree of accuracy of her portrayal of German literature,
philosophy, and society (an issue discussed at length by Isbell and Solovieff), but the role that the image of these two countries played in the Staëlian perspective as embodiments of qualities lacking in France. As Voltaire had done with England, Staël projected onto Germany virtues that the French literary and political culture lacked: individualistic sensibility, oneiric poetry, and intellectual profundity. Onto England she projected much the same love of liberty that Voltaire had posited; however, this positive national trait now manifested itself as resistance to Napoleonic despotism, rather than as aversion to religious intolerance. As Mortier points out (1985-6), Staël’s attempt to fairly evaluate German literary achievements constituted an act of intellectual subversion, by puncturing established notions of French preeminence in literature, as in other cultural fields. By highlighting the virtues she perceived in German literature—enthusiasm, dreaminess, imagination, and sentiment—she undermined the “universal” model of seventeenth-century classical French literature favored by the Empire. Through her introduction of German literature and philosophy to the French reading public, Staël therefore went much further than Voltaire had done with his praise of an English model, which did not question established French esthetic standards.

Just as Voltaire had exaggerated the advantages of the enlightened political, economic, and religious model he had found in Great Britain, Staël amplified the contrast she perceived between “les deux extrémités de la chaîne morale” (De l’Allemagne, 1:46), as represented by France and Germany. Manfred Gsteiger argues that Staël’s dichotomy sets up a relationship of complementarity between the literary traditions of the two nations, at the cost of simplifying each one. With some exceptions, Staël’s method tends to assign an unvarying, homogeneous character to each of the poles of her “deux extrémités,” thereby essentializing not only their literary traditions, but also their culture in general. The emphasis on the contrast between classical French taste and German enthusiasm led to positing the two nations as largely devoid of internal variation. The dangers of such a method would only become evident later in the century. There is not a very large discursive step from the essentialized representation of a national culture to
the myth of an ethnic or national essence in biological or genetic terms, a step that racist propagandists of various stripes would enthusiastically take.

When *De l’Allemagne* was published, Napoleon had already dissolved the last remnant of the Holy Roman Empire. France had annexed the left bank of the Rhine as early as 1795, to which Napoleon added a section of what is now northern Germany, which briefly stretched the French border to the Baltic Sea. French troops had occupied and politically reorganized much of the rest of German territory. The traditional system of semi-independent German states had therefore been totally transformed through the force of French arms, a situation that is largely ignored in Staël’s book, which deals with her vision of “Germany” in both a past and future sense. Staël’s Germany was a personal discursive construct, that corresponded to her polemical intents, rather than a consistent attempt at providing an accurate description of the cities and states she had visited. Within an imprecisely defined territory, she discerned a long-divided cultural and national entity without a state. As Macherey writes: “Les Allemands ont fasciné Mme de Staël, parce qu’elle y a vu le peuple sans patrie, au sens étroit du terme au moins” (1987, 26).

As had been the case with Italy, Staël insists on the political and cultural fragmentation of Germany. Both of these yet-to-be-established countries stood in stark contrast to the highly centralized and uniform French model, which had reached its culminating point with Napoleon’s militaristic regime. While Staël praised the varied artistic achievements of the two nations that lacked unifying state structures, she also lamented their continuing political weakness, which left them vulnerable to Napoleon’s hegemonic aims. As part of her intellectual opposition against the Empire, Staël generally sought to defend individual national cultures against the tide of forced “universalism” embodied by Napoleon’s troops. Ironically, by the end of the nineteenth century, Maurice Barrès, who would severely criticize Staël’s Germanophilia (along with other French writers after the Franco-Prussian War), adopted a similar, if inverted, method, by defending the specificity of French culture against what he considered to be the universalistic pretensions and the intellectual encroachments of the then-dominant German model. Unlike Staël, Barrès would champion the individuality of his national
culture without situating it within a future context of equal and reciprocal influence with its German counterpart.

Staël's use of highly personal presentations of her German literary sources, in order to render them consonant with her polemical purposes, has been detailed by Isbell: "Staël could largely assume total ignorance of the German plays she mentions: the vast majority of her audience would, unlike a modern critic, accept the plots she describes untroubled by any knowledge of the originals. She could thus provide her readers with a corpus of literary creations quite different from those actually written by her sources—a rare privilege for a critic" (1994, 65). In De l'Allemagne, Staël returns to the theme of perfectibility, which she had previously developed in De la littérature: "Ceux qui nient la perfectibilité de l'esprit humain prétendent qu’en toutes choses les progrès et la décadence se suivent tour à tour, et que la roue de la pensée tourne comme celle de la fortune. [...] Mais il n’en est pas ainsi et l’on peut apercevoir un dessein toujours le même, toujours suivi, toujours progressif dans l’histoire de l’homme" (2:229-30). The constant forward movement of progress, if not always linear and direct, is for Staël the characteristic trait of the development of study and learning throughout Europe, her version of the République des lettres:

Enfin, il reste une chose vraiment belle et morale, dont l'ignorance et la frivolité ne peuvent jouir; c’est l’association de tous les hommes qui pensent d’un bout de l’Europe à l’autre. Souvent ils n’ont entre eux aucune relation; ils sont dispersés souvent à de grandes distances l’un de l’autre; mais quand ils se rencontrent, un mot suffit pour qu’ils se reconnaissent. Ce n’est pas telle religion, telle opinion, tel genre d’étude, c’est le culte de la vérité qui les réunit. (2:232)

Within this continual development, she saw contemporary German thinkers and writers as being in the forefront, as opposed to the French, who had lost their way during the second half of the eighteenth century: "Les Allemands méritent à cet égard une reconnaissance particulière" (2:233). In an earlier chapter, Staël insists on the inventiveness and originality of German intellectuals, likening them, in a curiously militaristic metaphor, to explorers or scouts: "Les Allemands sont comme les éclaireurs de l’armée de l’esprit humain; ils essaient des routes nouvelles; ils tentent des moyens inconnus" (1:166). As had been the case with Voltaire, Staël's praise of innovative
foreign achievements implied parallel condemnation of French conservatism. The Staël ideal topos of Germany as the contemporary fountainhead of literary and philosophical innovation is spelled out in a letter to Charles de Villers (1 Aug. 1802), a French émigré who had written a book on Kant’s philosophy:

Je crois avec vous que l’esprit humain, qui semble voyager d’un pays à l’autre, est à présent en Allemagne. J’étudie l’allemand avec soin, sûre que c’est là seulement que je trouverai des pensées nouvelles et des sentiments profonds, mais il manque à ce pays, que les idées puissent influer sur les institutions, et que la méditation puisse conduire à des résultats positifs. Quoiqu’il en soit, c’est le pays du monde aujourd’hui où il y a le plus d’hommes distingués comme philosophes, et comme littérateurs. (Correspondance, 4:541)

In her investigations into German culture and society, Staël was greatly influenced by the literary critic August Wilhelm von Schlegel, the author of *A Course of Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature*, who along with his brother Friedrich was the source of much of the material information on the writers discussed in *De l’Allemagne*. Staël had met A.W. Schlegel during her 1803-04 trip to Germany, after Napoleon had banned her from Paris. Schlegel, who would become a leading member of the Coppet group, was also for several years the tutor of Staël’s children, and assisted Staël in her continuing efforts to learn the German language, which she had begun studying in 1800, during a summer spent at Coppet. In the course of her ten-week stay in Weimar, Staël met several other writers, most notably Goethe and Schiller. She later described her enthusiastic reactions to her encounters with German writers and texts in her unfinished memoir, *Dix Années d’exil*:

Je me rendis à Weimar où je repris courage en voyant, à travers les difficultés de la langue, d’immenses richesses intellectuelles hors de France. J’appris à lire l’allemand, j’écoutai des hommes qui s’exprimait très bien en français, Goethe et Wieland. Je compris l’âme et le génie de Schiller, malgré sa difficulté à s’exprimer en français. La société du duc et de la duchesse de Weimar me plaisait extrêmement et je passai là trois mois pendant lesquels l’étude de la littérature allemande donnait à mon esprit tout le mouvement dont il a besoin pour ne pas me dévorer moi-même. (159-60)

In *De l’Allemagne*, which was to become crucially important for the development of Romanticism outside of Germany, Staël develops an opposition between
classical French literature, characterized by clarity and regularity of form, and the imaginative world of romantic German literary inspiration, characterized by spontaneous enthusiasm and feeling. Staël’s version of Romanticism, it should be noted, was centered around vital, expansive themes such as the exaltation of artistic genius and a lyrical form of religiosity. As Eve Sourian points out, she did not discern or foresee the dark, Gothic incarnations of the Romantic movement: “Mme de Staël n’a pas donné aux Français l’image de ce romantisme allemand, spiritualiste et morbide” (187). Staël’s version of Romanticism is thus, paradoxically, optimistic and forward-looking, a continuation of the Enlightenment, rather than its negation. In the chapter of *De l’Allemagne* entitled “De la poésie classique et de la poésie romantique” (part 2, chapter 11), Staël stresses the distinction between what she sees as the origins of the long-dominant classical literature of Italy and France, as opposed to the emerging romantic literature of Great Britain and especially Germany. The former is traceable to Greek and Roman antiquity, while the latter derives from the Germanic chivalric tradition of the Middle Ages. Staël’s religious and historical dichotomy (Pagan Antiquity/Christian Middle Ages) is thus associated with her established geographical opposition (Nord/Midi). She posited the classical tradition of the south as having reached an enviable but sterile plateau of perfection, while the still-evolving romantic tradition of the north, closer in religious and historical terms, remained vital, innovative, and progressive: “La littérature romantique est la seule qui soit susceptible encore d’être perfectionnée [...] elle exprime notre religion; elle rappelle notre histoire: son origine est ancienne, mais non antique” (1:214).

Instead of John Locke, the foremost guiding light of the eighteenth-century philosophes, Staël chooses Immanuel Kant as a philosophical model. Once again, her contrasting presentations of these two philosophers are in large part determined by her polemical intent, in the twin historical contexts of the excesses of the Revolution and of the Napoleonic conquests. In particular, Staël refuses to accept Locke’s theory of ideas as deriving purely from sensations, a theory which she sees as contributing to the absolute materialism and atheism that she tends to associate with the worst of the
Revolutionary period. Staël presents Kantian philosophy in terms antithetical to the atheistic and materialistic philosophy which, for her, had dominated French thought during the second half of the eighteenth century, and had led to disastrous political consequences. She found in Kant’s work the reconciliation between religion and philosophy, between belief and critical thought, that was consonant with her version of liberal Protestantism—and with her Romantic sensibility: “Il faut une philosophie de croyance, d’enthousiasme; une philosophie qui confirme par la raison ce que le sentiment nous révèle” (De l’Allemagne, 2:138).

Staël described the philosopher from Könisberg as having not only dismantled the intellectual foundations of atheism and materialism, but as also having laid the rational basis for the harmonization of thought and feeling: “L’opposition qu’on a voulu mettre entre la raison et le sentiment conduit nécessairement la raison à l’égoïsme et le sentiment à la folie; mais Kant, qui semblait appelé à conclure toutes les grandes alliances intellectuelles, a fait de l’âme un seul foyer où toutes les facultés sont d’accord entre elles” (De l’Allemagne, 2:139). This portrayal of Kantian philosophy as a revalorization of spontaneous feeling and enthusiasm, within the framework of rigorous reasoning, was long influential in France—although it was in fact closer to Staël’s own synthetic, reconciliatory pattern of thought. In another example of Staël’s tendency to seek harmony between the terms of her oppositions, while maintaining them, she sees no contradiction, in the chapter entitled “De la philosophie française” (third part, chapter 3), between religiosity and philosophical inquiry: “la philosophie consiste à trouver l’interprétation raisonnée des vérités divines” (2:105).

In the last three chapters of De l’Allemagne, Staël defines “enthusiasm” at length, taking care to distinguish it from “fanaticism,” to which the word had been linked since Voltaire: “Le fanatisme est une passion exclusive dont une opinion est l’objet; l’enthousiasme se rallie à l’harmonie universelle: c’est l’amour du beau, la jouissance du dévouement réunis dans un même sentiment qui a de la grandeur et du calme” (2:301). These concluding chapters are in the fourth part of her book, which is devoted to “La Religion et l’enthousiasme.” The two domains are thus explicitly linked, along with the
reconciliation of the Pascalian notions of heart and mind: “l’enthousiasme trouve dans la rêverie du cœur et dans l’étendue de la pensée ce que le fanatisme ou la passion renferment dans une seule idée ou dans un seul objet” (2:306). For Staël, words such as enthusiasm, fanaticism, imagination, and character do not merely denote literary or esthetic concepts. As part of her exposition, she classifies nations according to their degree of both enthusiasm and political liberty: “la pensée n’est rien sans l’enthousiasme, ni l’action sans le caractère; l’enthousiasme est tout pour les nations littéraires; le caractère est tout pour les nations agissantes: les nations libres ont besoin de l’un et de l’autre” (2:303).

While Staël generally praised German literary and philosophical accomplishments, she did not posit any German political model, nor did she portray Germans as generally concerned with the cause of political liberty: “L’amour de la liberté n’est point développé chez les Allemands; ils n’ont appris ni par la jouissance, ni par la privation, le prix qu’on peut y attacher” (1:62). German intellectuality, like Italian artistry, was thus for Staël largely a form of compensation, a way to make up for the lack of national unity and independent political structures. In this respect, she tends to provide a feminized representation of Germany, as she had in the case of Italy. In a letter written to her father shortly after her arrival in Germany (10 Dec. 1803), she insists on the lack of national sentiment or strength among the Germans she has thus far encountered: “Ce n’est pas une nation que les Allemands, et le Premier Consul en peut faire tout ce qu’il veut” (Correspondance, 5:134). As Balayé puts it: “Quant aux Allemands, Mme de Staël constate qu’il leur manque un véritable sens national et patriotique, sauf en Prusse. Comme en Italie, les divisions affaiblissent l’Allemagne” (1979, 193). While she did not foresee or explicitly advocate German national unity, Staël posited German political independence as crucial to the emergence of a Europe free of domination by one country: “L’Allemagne, par sa situation géographique, peut être considérée comme le cœur de l’Europe, et la grande association continentale ne saurait retrouver son indépendance que par celle de ce pays” (1:41).
In *De l’Allemagne*, Staël depicted Germans as generally disinclined towards militarism. For instance, she used the differences in climate in order to try to explain why a German soldier, living in a relatively moderate climate, would be less inured to wartime suffering, by comparison with the Russian soldier who was hardened by his country’s more bitter cold (1:60). Needless to say, many French writers would take a different view after 1870 and the subsequent wars between France and Germany, leading to the long-held stereotype of Germans as aggressively regimented and militaristic. Since the publication of Staël’s book in France coincided with the fall of the Empire and the presence on French soil of foreign—including German—troops, her lenitive characterization of German dreaminess and introspection, which had been written during the high point of Napoleon’s domination over much of Europe, was not well received in many French circles.

Sourian has detailed the response to *De l’Allemagne* elaborated by the poet Heinrich Heine, who wrote a polemical book on the topic of Staël’s representation of Germany in 1835—in French, and with the same title. Heine’s critique of Staël’s idealized representation of Germany became highly influential in France, especially after the 1870 Franco-Prussian War. In particular, Staël was portrayed as having been oblivious to the rising tide of aggressive nationalism among German intellectuals (the forerunner of which was Johann Fichte’s 1807-08 *Addresses to the German Nation*), a portrayal which accounts for many of the often vicious attacks directed at her work and influence. According to this widespread discourse, Staël, blinded by romantic illusions about German idealism, and by her systematic opposition to Napoleon’s regime, lulled the French public into a dangerously false appreciation of what would later become belligerent, expansionist German militarism. The author of *De l’Allemagne* was thus largely faulted for having foreseen neither the aggressive form of German nationalism that largely developed as a reaction against Napoleonic expansionism, nor the French defeat that occurred sixty years after the initial publication of her book. As Sourian points out (105), Heine sounded a prophetic note in his own *De l’Allemagne* when he announced the renewal of an age-old Germanic lust for war, of the awakening of “les
vieilles divinités guerrières” (1:182). That Staël did not foresee this awakening led to her being represented as somehow complicit with the long-term consequences of jingoistic German nationalism.

Among all of Staël’s texts, *De l’Allemagne* produced the harshest reaction from Napoleon’s regime, which not only banned her from France but effectively consigned her to Coppet and Geneva, and prevented most of her friends from visiting her (even sending into internal exile some of those who did). While in Coppet, she was constantly watched by the French police; her letters were also opened and read. This situation led to her escape to England, via Russia and Sweden, in 1812. In the preface, written in London in 1813, to *De l’Allemagne*, Staël includes the infamous letter from Napoleon’s Minister of Police, General Savary (24 Sept. 1810), notifying her to leave France within a week: "votre exil est une conséquence naturelle de la marche que vous suivez constamment depuis plusieurs années. Il m’a paru que l’air de ce pays-ci ne vous convenait point, et nous n’en sommes pas encore réduits à chercher des modèles dans les peuples que vous admirez. Votre dernier ouvrage n’est point français” (1:39). As Staël indicates in a note to her 1813 edition, the following passage, which concludes her book, was particularly irksome to Napoleon’s censors:

Oh France! terre de gloire et d’amour! Si l’enthousiasme un jour s’éteignait sur votre sol, si le calcul disposait de tout et que le raisonnement seul inspirât le mépris des périls, à quoi vous servirait votre beau ciel, vos esprits si brillants, votre nature si féconde? Une intelligence active, une impétuosité savante vous rendraient les maîtres du monde; mais vous n’y laisseriez que la trace des torrents de sable, terribles comme les flots, arides comme le désert! (*De l’Allemagne*, 2:316)

In her preface, Staël was somewhat disingenuous in her protestations of political innocence, claiming that her book was merely concerned with literary matters, that she had noncommittally maintained “le même silence sur le gouvernement actuel des Français que dans mes écrits précédents” (1:37), and that she had avoided “toute réflexion sur l’état politique de l’Allemagne” (1:38). Had Staël’s book truly lacked political relevance, Napoleon’s censors would not have paid her the backhanded compliment of seizing and destroying all the copies they could find. In fact, *De l’Allemagne* is profoundly political,
an indirect, but far-reaching indictment of the repressive, rigidly conservative social and political system in France (as Voltaire's Lettres philosophiques had been). It is also political in the sense that it depicts the development of German literature and philosophy within the broader historical context of a German societal entity that had yet to achieve national unity.

In his well-known 1882 lecture at the Sorbonne—"Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?"—Ernest Renan posited a degree of historical inaccuracy as necessary for the establishment of shared emotional connections, forged upon a selectively remembered past, among the generally disparate members of an emerging national entity: "L'oubli, et je dirai même l'erreur historique, sont un facteur essentiel de la création d'une nation" (891). Benedict Anderson, in his influential Imagined Communities, built on Renan's insight to elaborate on the processes leading to the formation of modern nation-states, built on the notion of a largely imagined or creatively misremembered past. Anderson's analytical framework, with its emphasis on the cultural dimension of nationalism (especially in its early stages), can be usefully applied to Staël's discourse of revalorization of individual national cultures, within the context of intellectual resistance to Napoleon's ever-expanding transnational Empire.

In the cases of Italy and especially of Germany, Staël provides a unique instance of a foreign intellectual actively participating in the process of national formation. The errors and omissions of her representations of foreign cultures, that several critics have pointed out, were in fact coherent within the polemical purposes of her rhetorical model. While inaccurate or exaggerated, her portrayals of Germans as introspective and Italians as feminized provided myths, or common discursive sources of pride or shame, which were applicable to an entire "imagined community," to use Anderson's term. In De la littérature, Staël had already linked the creation of an emotional sense of national commonality or interconnections to the development of literature and the arts: "L'éloquence, l'amour des lettres et des beaux-arts, la philosophie, peuvent seuls faire d'un territoire une patrie, en donnant à la nation qui l'habite les mêmes goûts, les mêmes habitudes et les mêmes sentiments" (1:36). Her presentation of the culture of what was
not yet “Germany” was enormously influential (in both positive and negative terms), not just in France but, as the example of Heinrich Heine indicates, also among German writers. By implicitly calling for the unity and independence of both Italy and Germany, and basing the coherence of these two future national entities on their internal cultural links (whether real or imagined), Staël, the multilingual cosmopolitan with no fixed national identity, became one of the initiators of nationalism as an intellectual discourse and a political movement.

**Coppet: A European literary retreat**

Shortly after Staël’s untimely death, in a famed passage of the August 6, 1817 entry of *Rome, Naples et Florence*, Stendhal—who would later be more critical of Staël and of her opposition to Napoleon’s regime—referred to Coppet as “les Etats Généraux de l’opinion européenne,” and praised “la femme illustre que la France pleure” (364). As a result of Staël’s forced exile, her home in Switzerland had become a multinational meeting place for writers from several European countries. Much of the group also followed her during her travels. A unique literary circle, Coppet did not revolve around a review or a clear political or esthetic manifesto. It was in many ways a European extension of Staël’s Parisian literary salon, and thus an indication of the degree of her influence. The only woman writer in the group, Staël was its pivot. Representing a combination of political liberalism and multilingual artistic diversity, Coppet became, geographically and metaphorically, “un carrefour des chemins qui traversent l’Europe du nord au sud” (Hoock-Demarle, 78). Aside from Benjamin Constant, this amorphous “group”—which varied greatly over time—included among its more regular members A.W. Schlegel, Zacharias Werner, Charles de Bonstetten, Prosper de Barante, and Léonard de Sismondi.

As Macherey points out, the members of the multinational Coppet group achieved a unique status as cultural intermediaries within Western Europe: “par leur position marginale, sur les frontières qui partageaient l’Europe politique, poétique et savante, étrangers et familiers aux genres et aux formes d’expressions de plusieurs...
nations, ils ont contrôlé les principaux points de passage par lesquels pouvait s’effectuer à leur époque une communication culturelle” (1990, 23). In terms of equal and reciprocal multicultural exchange, Staël’s Swiss home was more influential than Voltaire’s Ferney had been. Instead of being dominated by a single figure, Coppet, with its constant stream of guests and visitors from several countries, became one of the relatively few places in which the intellectual elites of Europe could meet and converse freely, a situation which facilitated the propagation of new ideas and movements. As Lilian Furst writes: “Coppet was the central fulcrum for cultural interaction and for the transmission of German ideas to the French avant-garde at a time when the German romantic movement was in full flower while its French counterpart, held back by the Revolution and censorship as well as by a conservative attachment to the native neoclassical tradition, was still in a state of gestation” (100).

The intellectual pursuits and activities among the participants of the Coppet circle were varied. Some common thematic strands, however, emerge from the lists of their publications, both before and after Staël’s death. A shared topic of interest was comparative cultural history, an example of which is found in Sismondi’s *De la littérature du Midi de l’Europe*. The complementary themes of European diversity and unity, sometimes naïvely based on climatic determinism (as illustrated by Bonstetten’s *L’Homme du midi et l’homme du nord, ou l’influence du climat*), were articulated by several members of the group.68 One of the other important aspects of the self-assigned cross-cultural role of the Coppet group, as Bann has shown, was the practice of translation, as a means of disseminating literary productions across national and linguistic borders. *Wallstein*, Constant’s 1809 adaptation of Schiller’s play in three parts, *Wallenstein* (1798), was less a translation than a transformation of the original German model, a transformation that, to its detriment, largely adhered to the rules of classical French theater. In 1816, Staël devoted one of her last texts, *De l’esprit des traductions* (*OC* 2:294-7; also found in Kadish and Massardier-Kenney, 287-92), to the question of translating literary texts.69 Translation is both a plot device and a metaphor in Staël’s *Corinme*. The title character, who embodies two national cultural traditions, has
translated Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* into Italian, and wants to play Juliet, with Oswald among the audience (7, 3). Staël also made use of her home, as had the “Patriarche” of Ferney, in order to indulge and promote her interest in the theater, by staging, and acting in, her own plays—and those of Voltaire, among others.

The diffuse but palpable political dimension of the Coppet circle should not be overlooked. Since it became an unofficial meeting place for some of the leading representatives of the liberal opposition (particularly, of course, Staël and Constant), Coppet, with its multilingual milieu of unorthodox writers and political figures, was viewed with suspicion—and quite rightly so—by Napoleon’s regime, which increasingly sought to isolate Staël from her friends and correspondents, after having exiled her from Paris. In the preface to his 1830 play, *Hernani*, Victor Hugo defined Romanticism as “le libéralisme en littérature” (8:539), and linked political change to artistic innovation, in the context of the repressive monarchy of Charles X. It is a definition and a program that, a generation and a political regime earlier, could well apply to Staël, and to the literary circle which revolved around her home. As Balayé writes: “Le romantisme est issu pour l’essentiel de la classe libérale à laquelle appartient le groupe de Coppet. On ne peut le réduire à être le résultat des malheurs de l’aristocratie; la force qui l’a créé vient du XVIIIᵉ siècle et passe par la connaissance positive d’autres sociétés, d’autres philosophies, et par l’espérance en un avenir meilleur” (1979, 115).

**Conclusion**

Through her constant interest in the literary productions of neighboring countries, Staël gradually developed a vision, or “spirit,” of Europe within the context of the domination of much of the continent by one country, which extended the presumed universalistic principles of its Revolution by force of arms. As a reaction to both the stifling legacy of traditional French cultural preeminence and the enforced political uniformity of the Napoleonic period, she sought to revalorize individual national cultural traditions and modes of expression. In the ongoing historical dialectic of European unity and fragmentation, Staël’s work therefore represents a renewed level of appreciation of
the value and fruitfulness of diversity in terms of cultural expression and political structures.

Staël could not have foreseen that the revalorization of individual national cultures could also contribute, via the organic model of cultural nationalism, to enduring nationalistic hatreds and wars. Ironically, by the end of the century, Maurice Barrès, who would severely upbraid Staël for her literary Germanophilia, would claim the legacy of cultural nationalism for France, arguing that it was German philosophers who had come to incarnate a pernicious form of domineering intellectual universalism. Staël’s framework of resistance against the reductively homogenizing effects of an allegedly universal cultural model was thus adopted by some of her most severe critics, who would simply invert the national poles of her universalism/particularism continuum. Barrès’s inversion of the terms of this perceived cultural opposition reflected the historical shift in the balance of military and political power between France and Germany during the nineteenth century.

Staël’s pro-European legacy is today more relevant than her praise of individual national cultures. By stressing the need for continuous exchange on an equal and reciprocal basis, Staël envisioned a peaceful, multipolar European cultural field, a vision that Victor Hugo would later draw upon. Due to her background and interests, Staël was well suited for the role of cultural intermediary she increasingly undertook. Through her work, she rejected the widely accepted notion of cultural preeminence or leadership by any one national tradition, while constantly seeking points of contact and interpenetration between cultures. In so doing, she straddled a fine line between illusory universalism and reductive particularism, between aggressive cultural imperialism and reactionary forms of cultural obscurantism, a line that remains relevant nearly two centuries later.

A literary innovator, Staël was the first exponent of what would later become the French Romantic movement, a literary and political movement of which Victor Hugo would become the undisputed leader. As had Staël, Hugo would be fascinated by, and involved in, transnational cultural and political issues throughout his life. In 1842, he
would also produce the most influential book on Germany published in France since Staël's *De l'Allemagne: Le Rhin*. The next chapter will explore the European theme that is present in much of Hugo’s work—a theme within which the issue of future European unity is explicitly addressed and enthusiastically promoted—against the backdrop of increasing rivalry between France and Germany.
Chapter 4

Victor Hugo's European Utopia

On July 17, 1851, the Député Victor Hugo of the short-lived Second Republic gave a lengthy speech (Actes et Paroles I, 10:270-98), in the course of which he used the term “les Etats-Unis d’Europe” (10:275) at the National Assembly for the first time—and to which most members of the Assembly reacted with either disbelief or ridicule. One reason was that Hugo prophesied in lyrical terms, before a mostly conservative audience, that the future European entity would be the logical and necessary outcome of the quasi-messianic role he saw the people of France—or, more specifically, of Paris—as playing since the 1789 Revolution. Another, more immediate reason for the Assembly’s generally hostile reaction lay in the fact that he was arguing against a proposed revision of the constitution, which would have allowed the President of the Republic, Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte, to run for reelection. This speech illustrates Hugo’s apparently effortless capacity to concurrently carry out both vatic and political functions, and to express each of them in similarly elevated language, blending Biblical imagery and Revolutionary references.

A Child of the Century

Hugo’s life (1802-85) spanned all the successive political regimes and revolutions in France during the nineteenth century: the Napoleonic Consulat (1799-1804) and Empire (1804-15); the royalist restoration that followed Napoleon’s defeat (with the interlude of the “Cent Jours”); the revolutionary “Trois Glorieuses” of 1830, which
produced the July Monarchy;² the two revolutions of 1848, leading to the Second Republic, which was cut short in 1851 by the second military coup organized by a Bonaparte, who would in turn establish the Second Empire; the Franco-Prussian War and the ill-fated Paris Commune in 1870-1, which were followed by the Third Republic, whose principal patron saint Hugo would, perhaps unwittingly, become. He preceded or accompanied these changes at the national level with his own successive political transformations. In a sequence of personal revolts, the youthful ultra-royalist became fascinated with the figure and myth of the usurper, Napoleon. The admirer of the conquering Emperor eventually became a liberal republican, with pacifist and even socialist tendencies.

In Les Misérables, the character of Marius, who in many ways resembles the young Hugo, delivers an impassioned panegyric of Napoleon’s legacy that is worthy of some of Maurice Barrès’s most lyrical passages: “Je vous croyais des jeunes gens. Où mettez-vous donc votre enthousiasme? et qu’est-ce que vous en faites? qui admirez-vous si vous n’admirez pas l’empereur? et que vous faut-il de plus?” (2:532-3). The curt rejoinder to Marius’s lengthy speech by one of his friends—“Etre libre” (2:534)—leads him toward a reevaluation of his uncritical admiration for Bonaparte. In the same novel, Hugo provides a paired set of descriptions (in the form of oxymorons, as is often the case in his texts) that sums up the early part of his own political evolution: “Les opinions traversent des phases. Le royalisme voltairien, variété bizarre, a eu un pendant non moins étrange, le libéralisme bonapartiste” (2:513). Hugo’s political and social contradictions—the embodiment of bourgeois respectability, as well as the people’s poet—would only be partly bridged through his self-representation as a prophetic visionary, at once the spokesman of the masses and an isolated genius.

Throughout most of his work, Hugo identified himself with his century, and with the progressive, indeed historically providential role he saw being accomplished by the people of Paris through the continuation, in its various forms, of the 1789 Revolution.³ The steadily growing vatic function of Hugo the poet was largely transposed into his political role, which involved on the one hand the denunciation of the injustices of the
present, and the exaltation of a radiant future—usually designated as the twentieth century—on the other. As Claude Digeon puts it, Hugo progressively elaborated “un idéal d’avenir qui se présente comme un au-delà de l’histoire, fondé sur la récusation du passé” (17). In his preface to *Le Rhin*, Hugo used a geological metaphor to characterize his persistent intellectual approach to seemingly intractable historical dilemmas: “La goutte d’eau qui tombe du rocher perce la montagne; pourquoi la goutte d’eau qui tombe d’un esprit ne percerait-elle pas les grands problèmes historiques?” (13:4). Hugo was not the only major French writer of his century to attempt to both interpret the course of universal history and influence it through his textual production. As Suzanne Nash writes:

> During the first half of the nineteenth century—especially before the abortive revolution of 1848—the notion of a utopian world to be realized through the inspired teaching of the poet was a popular one in France. Hugo, Lamartine, and Vigny were all dedicated to the belief in the redemptive power of language as a means of altering the course of history. Unlike traditional metaphysical poets, the younger generation of Romantics believed that once man understood his place within the Divine Scheme, he would and should alter his conduct in such a way as to help realize the city of God in the here and now. For them politics was very much a part of the poet’s domain. (1976, 17)

Although he lived through several revolutions, and directly participated in crushing one in 1848, Hugo, as both a pacifistic idealist and a practical-minded property-owner, did not advocate the accomplishment of societal transformation through violent means: “Ni despotisme, ni terrorisme. Nous voulons le progrès en pente douce” (*Les Misérables*, 2:675). Progressive, peaceful evolution had not, however, characterized French history since the Revolution of 1789. For Hugo, the long series of bloody fratricidal struggles, such as those depicted in his last novel, *Quatrevingt-treize* (a spelling he insisted on using), posed the thorny problem of the integration of the turbulent, often senseless past into his providential vision of the future. In his insightful discussion of the representation of history in *Les Misérables*, Alexander Welsh, quoting Enjolras’s speech to his fellow revolutionaries before the final assault on the doomed barricade they are defending (2:939-42), discerns a teleological thrust: “Again and again the novelist preaches of the future. All of the violence, commotion, frustration, political
mishap, escapes and near escapes of the action, which spans the first part of the century, will be made good in some indefinite future time” (153). During his speech, the character Enjolras delivers a stirring vision of the future that is similar, in terms of its intensity and its specific examples, to what the political figure Hugo expounded in several speeches and texts:

Citoyens, vous représentez-vous l’avenir? Les rues des villes inondées de lumière, des branches vertes sur les seuils, les nations sœurs, les hommes justes, les vieillards bénissant les enfants, le passé aimant le présent, les penseurs en pleine liberté, les croyants en pleine égalité, pour religion le ciel. Dieu prêtre direct, la conscience humaine devenue l’autel, plus de haines, la fraternité de l’atelier et de l’école, pour pénalité et pour récompense la notoriété, à tous le travail, pour tous le droit, sur tous la paix, plus de sang versé, plus de guerres, les mères heureuses! Dompter la matière, c’est le premier pas; réaliser l’idéal, c’est le second. [...] La civilisation tiendra ses assises au sommet de l’Europe, et plus tard au centre des continents, dans un grand parlement de l’intelligence. (2:940)

Enjolras’s speech is more than a simple plot device designed to comfort the revolutionaries who know they will soon die, or to reassure the reader that the sacrifice of these characters will not be in vain. It unequivocally foretells of a predestined redemptive culmination for history, not merely a possible outcome. As Welsh puts it: “Like Kant, Enjolras seems especially uncomfortable with the role of chance in human events” (154). The ideal that Enjolras believes is worth fighting for represents nothing less than Hugo’s secularized version of Christian eschatology, a transposition of messianic beliefs into and beyond the convulsive historical events of the nineteenth century. This fervent Hugolian wish to confer an overarching meaning or design on the direction of human history shares a common teleological objective with the Marxist fallacy that was born during the same period. As Patricia Ward points out, Hugo’s poetic notions of cosmic finality were interrelated with his political positions: “Hugo shared with others of his century the obsession with discovering the laws of historical development. But much of this interest in finding the end of history stemmed from personal convictions that the future must justify his own political choices” (1975, 85). While Enjolras’s impassioned speech does not envision the final transcendence of class struggles through the creation of a classless society, it does propound a future—the
twenty-first century—that radically breaks with the absurd cycle of suffering and injustice of its present:

Citoyens, le dix-neuvième siècle est grand, mais le vingtième siècle sera heureux. Alors, plus rien de semblable à la vieille histoire; on n'aura plus à craindre, comme aujourd'hui, une conquête, une invasion, une usurpation, une rivalité de nations à main armée, une interruption de civilisation dépendant d'un mariage de rois, une naissance dans les tyrannies héréditaires, un partage de peuples par congrès, un démembrement par écloulement de dynastie, un combat de deux religions se rencontrant de front, comme deux boucs de l'ombre, sur le pont de l'infini; on n'aura plus à craindre la famine, l'exploitation, la prostitution par détresse, la misère par chômage, et l'échafaud, et le glaive, et les batailles, et tous les brigandages du hasard dans la forêt des événements. On pourrait presque dire: il n'y aura plus d'événements. On sera heureux. (2:941)

Happiness therefore coincides with tranquility, as those who are about to die on the barricades imagine a future in which others will live uneventfully ever after. Along with a meaningful finality to history, Hugo is contemplating a useful end or objective for his fictional text, which provides a clear and glowing vision for others to emulate: "Oui, le peuple, ébauché par le dix-huitième siècle, sera achevé par le dix-neuvième. Idiot qui en douterait! L'éclosion future, l'éclosion prochaine du bien-être universel, est un phénomène divinement fatal" (2:791). In Hugo’s reading of historical development, the centuries unfold like events in a narrative, leading toward an ineluctable dénouement of the plot, albeit not in linear fashion. As a reader and seer, the poet’s role is to seek out the direction, and point the way for the People, perhaps even lead them. The opening poem of the 1840 collection, Les Rayons et les ombres, aptly entitled “Fonction du poète” (4:921-9), provides an early version of this self-appointed role, even though Hugo was at the time a firm supporter of the July Monarchy, and depicted the People as an unthinking, benighted mass:

Peuples! écoutez le poète!  
Ecoutez le rêveur sacré!  
Dans votre nuit, sans lui complète,  
Lui seul a le front éclairé!  
Des temps futurs perçant les ombres  
Lui seul distingue en leurs flancs sombres  
Le germe qui n’est pas éclos.  
Homme, il est doux comme une femme.
Dieu parle à voix basse à son âme
Comme aux forêts et comme aux flots! (4:929)

In Hugo's political speeches and texts, the Hegelian concept of the "end of history" increasingly came to be embodied by what he famously called the United States of Europe, with the age of peace such an ideal promised, and with its concomitant technical and social advancements. As a liberal republican, Hugo became increasingly concerned with the role of the People—as opposed to the exceptional Great Men, such as Napoleon, that he had long admired—in shaping this historical end. As Victor Brombert writes: "By the time of Les Misérables, he had developed the theory of an epic concerned with the great adventure of mankind, in particular with the destiny of the oppressed, redeemable, and ultimately redeeming peuple, toward whom his deepest reactions remained, however, characteristically ambiguous" (99). It should be noted that despite Hugo's recurring image as an uncritically sentimental champion of the suffering masses, he did not simply demonstrate in his later work an "unironic, utopian faith in le peuple, in progress, in providential history" (Brombert, 234). Distinguishing between "le peuple" and the unthinking "foule," the opening poem of L'Année terrible, "Les 7.500.000 oui" (6:7-12), is directed at the mass of French voters who docilely supported, through successive plebiscites, the Bonapartist regime that had abolished the Second Republic:

Quant à flatter la foule, ô mon esprit, non pas!
Ah! le peuple est en haut, mais la foule est en bas. (6:7)

As a practical historical goal, linked to the ideals of the French Revolution, Hugo's Europe was endowed with religious symbolism and value. In his early revalorization of religion against part of the revolutionary legacy, Hugo was close to Germaine de Staël. However, Hugo would gradually become much more direct in his linkage of religious sentiment with popular progress. As Brombert writes: "Hugo sees an essential tie between religion and democracy, not simply because republican fervor is compatible with faith but because belief in the Supreme Being legitimizes the principles of equality and justice. In Hugo's metaphysical perspective, infinity is identifiable with
progress” (119). Although he became increasingly anticlerical, in the Voltairean tradition,\(^6\) in his later years—“Ecraser les fanatismes et vénérer l’infini, telle est la loi” ([Les Misérables, 2:409])—Hugo never abandoned his deistic faith, and never contemplated any authentic contradictions between his faith and his political ideals: “Ce que Révolution veut, Dieu le veut” ([Paris, 10:24]). In an early chapter of [Les Misérables, Bishop Myriel reluctantly calls on a dying old man who had been a member of the Convention, and who had voted for the death of King Louis XVI. The dialogue between the two characters allows Hugo to cross-examine the mixed legacy of the French Revolution, including the Terror. The former “conventionnel,” who is depicted as at least equal in saintliness to the Bishop, affirms, in unmistakably Hugolian terms: “quoi qu’on en dise, la révolution française est le plus puissant pas du genre humain depuis l’avènement du Christ. Incomplète, soit; mais sublime” (2:34).\(^7\)

**L’Homme qui écrit**

Hugo’s unstable childhood was marked by trips to Italy and Spain with his mother and brothers, in quest of his father, a Napoleonic army officer who would gradually rise to the rank of general and baron (as part of the *noblesse d’Empire*).\(^8\) To some extent, these difficult and often dangerous trips constituted attempts, on the part of his parents, at salvaging their failing marriage, which was marked by early discord and lengthy periods of separation. As recounted by Adèle Hugo (186-7), the young Victor was particularly struck by the sight of a dismembered corpse during the return trip from Spain to France. He would, however, never fully acknowledge his father’s role in the savage repression by French occupying troops.\(^9\) Despite his early exposure to Mediterranean countries, or to Staël’s category of “le Midi de l’Europe,” Hugo’s principal literary influences and political writings would derive from “le Nord.”

Raised by his mother as an admirer of the former glory of monarchical France, Hugo gradually evolved towards nostalgic reverence for part of Napoleon’s legacy, and especially for the historical myth of the fallen Emperor, which became a looming subversive figure during the 1815-30 royalist Restoration. As Hugo would later write in
Les Misérables: “La défaite avait grandi le vaincu. Bonaparte tombé semblait plus haut que Napoléon debout” (2:278-9). Irrespective of his own mythical status, the fall of Napoleon’s multinational empire represented a momentous change for the continent: “Fin de la dictature. Tout un système d’Europe s’écroula” (2:277). For the young writer, the symbolic displacement of one past by another, the Ancien Régime by the Empire, prefigured his more decisive shift to what might be called an ideology of the future. Unlike many successful writers, as Hugo evolved from the leading rebel of the young Romantics into a bourgeois patriarch and pillar of a regime, he became all the more forward-looking.10

The discontinuities of Hugo’s extended parliamentary career mirrored the constitutional transformations of successive French regimes during the nineteenth century. In 1845, the successful writer, who was already a member of the Académie française, was named Pair de France by King Louis-Philippe, a privileged status which allowed Hugo to sit in the July Monarchy’s equivalent to the British House of Lords, and which saved him from prosecution when he was caught in flagrante delicto with Léonie Biard—she, by contrast, was incarcerated for several months. During the short-lived Second Republic (1848-51), Hugo was twice elected Député, successfully managing the transition from aristocratic dignitary to representative of the people. Within the Assembly, Hugo was an isolated centrist in a highly polarized political climate, after the failed workers’ revolution of June 1848.11 As Robb puts it, Hugo hoped to defuse “the time-bomb of socialism by adopting moderate socialist measures” (283). After the fall of Napoleon III, Hugo would briefly return to the National Assembly in 1871, only to quickly resign in protest over the humiliating terms of the peace treaty with Germany. His final parliamentary position, to which he was elected in 1876, was in the upper house of the Third Republic, the Sénat.

Through his phenomenal literary production and constant political activity, Hugo achieved a unique historical status in France and Europe, which can only be compared to that of Voltaire a century earlier.12 Like his predecessor, Hugo became one of the most famous individuals in the continent during his lifetime, and also managed to amass a tidy
fortune. As had Voltaire, Hugo became the self-appointed conscience of his age, to which he added a prophetic function, an evolving blend of humanism and mysticism. As Brombert puts it, through his writing, Hugo “converts politics into myth, much as he translates private obsessions into collective symbols. This transformational thrust is made possible by an exceptional stylistic and formal range” (7). Hugo’s stylistic range was unparalleled during his long lifetime: “He is the only major French nineteenth-century writer to have felt equally at home in lyric and epic poetry, in the novel, and in the theater—and to have made a powerful impact in all these genres. No similar claims, whatever their genius, can be made for Stendhal, Balzac, Flaubert, Zola, Dickens, Dostoevsky, or Tolstoy” (Brombert, 10).

Hugo’s successive literary transformations are even more complex than the stages of his political evolution. While his poetic output was relatively continuous, it underwent substantial thematic and formal changes, such as his use of broken rhythms for the classic alexandrine, or his incorporation of popular speech. He continued to write innovative plays even after his career as a playwright ostensibly ended with the lack of success of Les Burgraves (9:151-260) in 1843. His novels—in which he famously sought to achieve at total work blending history, philosophy, and epic—varied greatly in terms of length, setting, and narrative technique. As for his speeches, essays, and polemical texts, they seem to cover almost every aspect of French literary and political life in the nineteenth century. Alongside his diverse activities as a writer, Hugo also produced a sizable collection of drawings.13

Hugo’s first two novels are set on the fringes of Europe, in geographic or colonial terms. The 1823 Han d’I slande (1:5-272) is a paroxysmal Gothic novel, horrific to the point of parody: Mephistophelean laughter echoing through damp caves littered with human remains, with the fiendish title character drinking blood from a skull. Set in the most distant part of Staël’s literary “Nord,” with its extremes of cold and desolation, Hugo’s satanic tale, which nevertheless includes a romantic subplot, bears traces of his readings of Goethe and Schiller, as Charles Dédéyan has shown (1:70-95). This novel most clearly reflects the influence of Charles Nodier and the “frenetic” literature of the
early Romantic period.\textsuperscript{14} *Bug-Jargal* (1:275-397; the second version was published in 1825) also contains elements of Gothic horror and cruelty, but already includes such Hugolian thematic elements as universal brotherhood and the possibility of redemption through friendship or love. Set in Saint-Domingue, which is now Haiti, it depicts the slave revolt of 1791 against the French colonists, with atrocities committed by both sides. While Hugo takes note of the abolition of slavery during the French Revolution, there is no mention of its re-establishment by Bonaparte (which re-ignited the struggles that ultimately led to Haitian independence).\textsuperscript{15}

Hugo’s constant opposition to the death penalty, as well as his advocacy of judicial reform, are visible in such early texts as the 1829 *Le Dernier Jour d’un condamné* (1:401-87) and the 1834 *Claude Gueux* (1:861-879),\textsuperscript{16} in the diverse prison images found in *Notre-Dame de Paris* (1:491-859), in the scene of legally-sanctioned torture of *L’Homme qui rit* (3:623-33), in the traveling guillotine of *Quatrevingt-treize* (3:985-6), and of course in the relentless pursuit of Jean Valjean by Javert throughout *Les Misérables*. On the social issue of crime, which he linked to widespread poverty, Hugo was consistently progressive and outspoken within both his literary and political functions.\textsuperscript{17} One of his early speeches at the National Assembly (15 Sept. 1848) was devoted to the issue of the death penalty: “Je vote l’abolition pure, simple et définitive de la peine de mort” (*Actes et paroles I.*, 10:181).

**An Engaged Poet**

The “Hugo” entry of Gustave Flaubert’s “Dictionnaire des idées reçues” reads as follows: “Grand poète, quel dommage qu’il ait fait de la politique!” (528). Among nineteenth-century French writers, Hugo was certainly one of the most widely and constantly politically engaged. Of course, continuous political engagement did not entail invariable or even consistent political views. Although he would later retrospectively celebrate his own role as a daring artistic and political revolutionary, Hugo’s first sustained literary efforts, within a fashionably ultra-royalist journalistic publication, were those of a zealous reactionary, devoted to the restored alliance of “Throne and Altar.”
As Graham Robb outlines in his excellent biography, most of the young Victor Hugo’s written work in the journal he founded and ran with his brothers Abel and Eugène, *Le Conservateur Littéraire* (which lasted from 1819 to 1821), was ardently conservative in terms of form and substance:

It says much about the reactionary nature of early French Romanticism that its future leader was the most conservative of the Conservateurs. As books came in for review, he scoured them for grammatical mistakes, puns, peculiar images, neologisms, vulgarisms, barbarisms, and any trace of literary and linguistic revolution. This incredibly, is the writer who claimed, in a famous poem published in 1856, to have “placed the red cap of the Revolution on the old dictionary.” (75)

Hugo’s early poetic talent was also devoted to upholding the monarchic regime, producing most notably a celebration of the coronation of Charles X in 1825 (4:171-6). In the 1834 preface (12:47-61) to *Littérature et philosophies mêlées*, Hugo explained that he had brought together his varied journalistic and critical texts of the previous fifteen years—unsurprisingly, several of the texts had been reworked—as an attempt at a personal “examen de conscience,” a retrospective examination of his artistic and political evolution, by juxtaposing *Journal d’un jacobite de 1819* (12:63-118) and *Journal d’un révolutionnaire de 1830* (12:119-38). Some of the fragments in the latter collection constitute markers of his personal transformations: “Mon ancienne conviction royaliste-catholique de 1820 s’est écroulée pièce à pièce depuis dix ans devant l’âge et l’expérience. Il en reste pourtant encore quelque chose dans mon esprit, mais ce n’est qu’une religieuse et poétique ruine” (12:122).

As a playwright, Hugo achieved celebrity by transgressing (or at least claiming the right to do so) the elaborate rules that governed officially sanctioned French theatrical and poetic expression, rules that Voltaire had staunchly defended against the incursions of Shakespearean barbarity. The influence of Shakespeare on Hugo’s plays is visible, for instance, in the variations in level of language, in the instances of comic relief, and in the grotesque characters who complement the hero. Hugo’s championing of creative artistic freedom, unhampered by political censorship and outdated stylistic rules, was already present in the 1827 *Préface de Cromwell*: “Il y a aujourd’hui l’ancien régime
littéraire comme l’ancien régime politique. Le dernier siècle pèse presque de tout point sur le nouveau” (12:37). Through his famous pairing of the grotesque and the sublime, his series of juxtaposed antithetical esthetic categories, and his attacks on two of the theatrical Unités (time and place), Hugo epitomized the artistic revolt of the French Romantics, a revolt that would quickly spill over into the political domain, despite the partly reactionary origins of the movement. His newfound progressive liberalism would be more forcefully and succinctly affirmed in the 1830 preface to Hernani, in which he symbolically severed any connections between the Romantic movement and conservative royalism: “la liberté littéraire est fille de la liberté politique. Ce principe est celui du siècle, et prévautra” (8:540).

Roughly coinciding with the political revolution of 1830, Hugo’s celebration of artistic innovation and renewal was heavily influenced by Staël’s contrasted presentations of Classical and Romantic poetry, which she had found best illustrated by the cases of France and Germany, respectively. In the chapter of De l’Allemagne entitled “De la poésie classique et de la poésie romantique” (1:211-4), she characterized appreciation for French poetry as limited to a small elite:

La poésie française étant la plus classique de toutes les poésies modernes, elle est la seule qui ne soit pas répandue parmi le peuple. Les stances du Tasse sont chantées par les gondoliers de Venise, les Espagnols et les Portugais de toutes les classes savent par cœur les vers de Calderon et de Camoëns. Shakespeare est autant admiré par le peuple en Angleterre que par la classe supérieure. Des poèmes de Goethe et de Bürger sont mis en musique, et vous les entendez répéter des bords du Rhin jusqu’à la Baltique. Nos poètes français sont admirés par tout ce qu’il y a d’esprits cultivés chez nous et dans le reste de l’Europe; mais ils sont tout à fait inconnus aux gens du peuple et aux bourgeois même des villes, parce que les arts en France ne sont pas, comme ailleurs natifs du pays même où leurs beautés se développent. (1:213-4)

This characterization of French literary production as inherently elitist, by comparison with the situation in most of the neighboring countries, obviously influenced the young generation of French Romantics. Hugo, their acknowledged standard-bearer, expressed the hope in his preface to Hernani that the nineteenth century would be marked by a democratization of the poetic form in France, a hope formulated in a phrase
with obvious political implications: "qu'à une littérature de cour succède une littérature du peuple" (8:541). In addition to theatrical and poetic formal structures, the French language itself, whose level of perfection Voltaire had lauded, would have to be regenerated through this reversal of values, by means of an infusion of popular vocabulary and syntax. In his preface to *Littérature et philosophie mêlées*, Hugo saw the French language as having been successively "filtered" of many of its rougher original elements between the sixteenth and the eighteenth centuries, thereby losing in poetic richness what it had gained in clarity and precision:

De là cette langue du dix-huitième siècle, parfaitement claire, sèche, dure, neutre, incolore et insipide, langue admirablement propre à ce qu’elle avait à faire, langue du raisonnemenet et non du sentiment, langue incapable de colorer le style, langue encore souvent charmante dans la prose, et en même temps très haïssable dans le vers, langue de philosophes en un mot, et non de poètes. Car la philosophie du dix-huitième siècle, qui est l’esprit d’analyse arrivé à sa plus complète expression, n’est pas moins hostile à la poésie qu’à la religion; parce que la poésie comme la religion n’est qu’une grande synthèse. Voltaire ne se hérisse pas moins devant Homère que devant Jésus. (12:53-4)

**A Popular Epic**

Drawing on the Bakhtinian concepts of subversive carnivalesque and the regenerative power of laughter, Brombert has provided a reading of Hugo’s novels that privileges the popular, progressive elements of his redemptive vision of historical progress. Referring to the pervasive underground imagery of *Les Misérables* (sewers, mines, catacombs, etc.), Brombert points out that Hugo’s well-known dialectic of the sublime and the grotesque is fraught with violently transformational implications: “The lowest stratum of society is also the revolutionary mine where utopias are elaborated” (114). Hugo repeatedly expressed his pride at having delved into the “lowest stratum,” highlighting, in his own self-representation, the symbolic chasm between the upper-class context and values of his literary beginnings and his transformation into a poet of the people. In “Ecrit en 1846” (*Les Contemplations*, 5:423-32), a poem which was in fact written eight years later, Hugo responds to an apocryphal letter from a purported
"marquis" who accuses him of having become an anarchistic demagogue, pandering to
the vulgar tastes of the masses:

J'ai, dans le livre, avec le drame, en prose, en vers,
Plaidé pour les petits et pour les misérables;
Suppliant les heureux et les inexorables;
J'ai réhabilité le bouffon, l'histrion,
Tous les damnés humains, Triboulet, Marion,
Le laquais, le forçat et la prostituée; (5:430)

In his analysis of the 1866 novel, Les Travailleurs de la mer, Brombert highlights
the "démesure" of this darkly eroticized epic of struggle within and against the ocean,
which is, in the Hugolian tradition, both a creative and destructive force: "Great art, for
Hugo, is orgiastic; it has profound affinities with the carnival, the Mardi Gras. The
mysterious, ferocious laughter of art is the manifestation of an excess of vitality" (167).
Especially in such later novels as Les Travailleurs, Hugo's treatment of the epic genre is
revolutionary in that it reverses the traditional perspective of the conquering warrior-
hero, embarking on a perilous journey or accomplishing mighty tasks. His Christlike,
self-sacrificing characters, Jean Valjean and Gilliatt, who are lowly embodiments of the
People, nevertheless achieve a form of greatness, indeed an apotheosis, not through
conquest or victories, but through renunciation and acceptance. Similarly, in the 1874
novel, Quatrevingt-treize, the character of Gauvain, who is linked by his name to a
bygone epic tradition, chooses not to vanquish his enemy (who is also his uncle), but to
free him. Gauvain thereby accepts his own death as a secular saint. Hugo often
expressed this reversal of values in his poetry, such as in "Les Malheureux" (Les
Contemplations, 5:456-64):

Le sublime est en bas. Le grand choix,
C'est de choisir l'affront. De même que parfois
Le pourpre est déshonneur, souvent la fange est lustre.
La boue immérité atteignant l'âme illustre,
L'opprobre, ce cachot d'où l'aurore sort,
Le cul de basse-fosse où nous jette le sort,
Le fond noir de l'épreuve où le malheur nous traîne,
Sont le comble éclatant de la grandeur sereine. (5:461)
The plot outline of *Les Travailleurs*—an isolated man on a barren rock, struggling against the *ananké* of the vast ocean—derives from Hugo’s years as an exiled resident of the Channel Islands, a *proscrit*, patiently waiting for the ignominious end of Bonaparte’s regime. Franck Laurent has traced the evolution of the representation, in Hugo’s fictional texts, of the historical “Grand Homme”—the best example of which is found in his long-term fascination with the figure of Napoleon I. One of the main characteristics of the early Hugolian Great Man, for good or ill, is the capacity to disregard national borders, to extend his power or influence across Europe: “ce grand bûcheron de l’Europe qu’on appelait Napoléon” (*Les Misérables*, 2:242). Aside from Napoleon, the characters of Cromwell, Charles V, and especially Charlemagne are depicted as lengthening their reach beyond the borders of the lands they rule. In *Hernani*, the soliloquy of Don Carlos (Charles V) in front of Charlemagne’s tomb, associates across the centuries two emperors who sought to achieve a universal monarchy (Napoleon is also implicitly associated):

Ah! c’est un beau spectacle à ravir la pensée
Que l’Europe ainsi faite et comme il l’a laissée! (8:626)

As Laurent shows, the experience of exile, along with the revulsion towards the new French regime, was one of the main factors that led to a shift in Hugo’s work, away from his previous exaltation of the exceptional individual, and toward a new central role for the people and their symbolic representatives: “de la fascination à la condamnation du grand individu historique, de la grandeur d’un seul à celle de tous, approchée sinon exprimée par celle des génies, des proscrits et des petits” (88). For Hugo, a practitioner of the epic genre, the representation of exceptional achievement or heroic grandeur became increasingly situated either among lowly outcasts or within the collective genius of the people of Paris. His choices in terms of characterization thus mirrored his political evolution, from ultra-royalist to liberal republican.

Hugo’s writing while in exile, and especially his concept of the historical role of “le Grand Homme,” was obviously influenced by the new, less-than-glorious reality of the Second Empire, a sham reflection of the literary mythology that had accreted (partly...
because of Hugo himself) around the First. The Great Man, especially the warrior and conqueror, was supplanted in the Hugolian pantheon by the People and the Genius—which represented different kinds of myths: “Les sabreurs ont fini, c’est le tour des penseurs” (Les Misérables, 2:277). In William Shakespeare (1864), despite some obvious personal nostalgia for the genre, Hugo sought to displace what he saw as a defunct form of historiography, centered on the celebratory depiction, in the Homeric tradition, of the Great Man’s words and bloody deeds:

Il y a les capitaines, les conquérants, les puissants de la guerre, les civilisateurs de la force, les laboureurs du glaive.

Ceux-là, nous les avons rappelés tout à l’heure; les vraiment grands parmi eux se nomment Cyrus, Sésosstris, Alexandre, Annibal, César, Charlemagne, Napoléon, et, dans la mesure que nous avons dite, nous les admirons.

Mais nous les admirons à condition de disparition.

Place à de meilleurs! place à de plus grands! (12:444)

Hugo’s “plus grands,” those who were not part of “Les gestes royaux, les tapages guerriers” (12:444), the creators and innovators who would replace the traditional destructive heroes, would be found among artists and scientists, thinkers and inventors: “l’écritoire devant détruire l’épée” (12:453). In the Hugolian inversion of values, historians and poets would no longer emphasize royal successions, such as “comment François II succède à Henri II, Charles IX à François II et Henri III à Charles IX,” but would instead trace the progress of the “mystérieuse dynastie de génies,” of those whose inventions improved the lives of the people, or “comment Watt succède à Papin et Fulton à Watt” (12:449).

The chapter entitled “Ceci tuera cela” of Notre-Dame de Paris (1:618-28) presents the technical evolution of art forms as the adumbration of societal transformation: easily duplicated print will supersedes unique architectural achievements, and democracy will similarly replace monarchy/theocracy. As Nash has argued, Hugo, an admirer of Gothic architecture, was torn between his love for the enduring relics of the past and his exaltation of future progress: “Hugo’s glorification of the iconoclastic forces of change is rendered ambiguous by a nostalgia, felt on the level of both theme and imagery, for the permanence of an essential order” (1988, 183). One can only
wonder how Hugo would have characterized the expanding audio-visual culture in our own day, and the concomitant displacement of literary production from its previously central role.

Another form of “Ceci tuera cela” is found in the reiterated Hugolian prediction of an end to wars and to the glorification of warriors. Linked to the topos of European peace and unification, Hugo’s affirmation of the future disappearance of conquerors, whom the people obeyed out of fear, was accompanied by an exaltation of the role of writers who would serve as guides, not masters. As Brombert points out, the new role of writers and artists was for Hugo an exalted one:

Like others in the post-Napoleonic era, Hugo believed that the pen should replace the sword. (That his own father had been a general under Napoleon invested the opposition of warrior and poet with added significance.) Hugo’s was not an ordinary literary ambition, however. More intensely and more consistently than others, he believed that writers had a mission, that they were to be the educators and leaders of the recently awakened peuple, that they were to regenerate society, prepare the future, and write, as it were, on paper and in life, the immanent epic of humanity’s progress. (11-12)

Hugo’s notion of the poet’s “mission” in his century derived from his vision of the people’s historical role, in the aftermath of the Revolution, and the expectations it had raised:

Les écrivains et les poètes du dix-neuvième siècle ont cette admirable fortune de sortir d’une genèse, d’arriver après une fin de monde, d’accompagner une réapparition de lumière, d’être les organes d’un recommencement. Ceci leur impose des devoirs inconnus à leurs devanciers, des devoirs de réformateurs intentionnels et de civilisateurs directs. Ils ne continuent rien; ils refont tout. (William Shakespeare, 12:434)

Hugo’s exaltation of the redemptive historical role of the people, and of the poets who guide them, can easily be seen as self-serving or aggrandizing, and has contributed to many negative assessments of his work by critics. The Hugolian incantation of the poet as herald of a shining new age has become known as one of the many bizarre idiosyncrasies of an author who seemed to cultivate them, from a penchant for inserting the letters of his name into his works, to a period of obsession with turning tables. However, Hugo’s visionary notions of the poet, the people, and the divinely-ordered
course and purpose of history are interrelated into, if not a philosophical system, at least an inspired process of fictional re-creation. Few writers have been so industrious in attempting to create a "total work" for a new age, the reality of which could not possibly keep up with his vision.

A Republican Saint

Hugo was one of the main speakers and living symbols during the 1878 commemorations linked to the twin centennials of the deaths of Voltaire and Rousseau. As Goulemot and Walter have detailed (403-8), Hugo inaugurated the institutionalized republican "culte des grands hommes"—which would allow the still-fragile regime to impose its own ostentatiously ceremonial values, by replacing the traditional veneration for kings and saints with its corresponding secular pageant of writers and scientists. In 1885, Hugo himself would spectacularly join that pageant: "Quand, le 30 mai [1878], il commémore Voltaire, son geste semble préfigurer ses propres funérailles, la foule immense du 1er juin 1885 fêtant l'apothéose conjointe du Génie, de la Nation et du Peuple souverain" (403). Hugo's death became a moment of triumph for the Third Republic, whose bourgeois, secular values he had come to incarnate. In a lavish and lengthy ceremony, his body was transferred from the Arc de Triomphe to the Panthéon—a former church which had been, once again, re-commissioned for the occasion as the final resting place of republican symbols. The event drew an unprecedented crowd of mourners and onlookers, that was greater in numbers than the entire population of Paris.

As will be further discussed in the next chapter, Maurice Barrès privileged the patriotic component of the Hugolian heritage, which he integrated into his revanchist discourse. In chapter 18 of Les Déracinés, entitled—with no apparent irony—"La Vertu sociale d'un cadavre" (3:325-45), Barrès used the trope of Hugo's deceased body (much as he did Napoleon's) as a fulcrum for the accomplishment of an exclusionary form of national unity, detailing the effect of the grandiose funeral ceremony on one of the main characters of the novel, Sturel. One of the seven "uprooted" young men from Lorraine
who have been transplanted to Paris, Sturel will experience, in a pivotal episode of Barrès’s novel, a complete sense of identification with “la terre et les morts,” with the collective expression of the national will emanating from the assembled mass of mourners. Sturel had been agonizing over a moral, and tribal, dilemma: whether to inform the police that the assassins of his onetime lover, a foreign woman of Armenian descent, were none other than two of his former friends, two of the seven “Déracinés” from Lorraine.

When faced with a stark choice of loyalties towards either a foreigner or two of his fellow countrymen, Sturel comes to understand, during the long communal wake for the deceased national poet, the inextricable links that bind him to the aggregated “sève nationale” (3:335). His former friends, murderers though they may be, nevertheless remain part of the collective body politic—while the murdered victim was immutably alien to it. Sturel will therefore decide to keep silent, thereby illustrating the power of instinctual identification with the broader national entity (as embodied by the two million mourners) over any abstractly universalistic notion such as truth or justice. In Barrès’s novel, the shared experience of Hugo’s ostentatiously republican funeral is thus appropriated and recast as a revelatory high point of nationalistic fervor—with the expulsion of foreign elements as a necessary corollary. As Avner Ben-Amos points out, the Barrésian interpretation of Hugo’s funeral ceremony eliminates the liberal, cosmopolitan aspect of the Hugolian heritage, and transforms the event into a reductively nationalistic celebration: “le paradoxe d’une cérémonie républicaine qui amène le héros de Barrès à adhérer à une doctrine antirépublicaine” (513).³⁴ Barrès’s posthumous celebration of Hugo’s life and work privileges the image of the mystical poet, the prophetic seer whose “prodigieux génie verbal” helped to bind all Frenchmen within an eternal collective whole:

A cette fraternité, à cette communion, les mots maniés, assemblés, restitués dans leur jeune splendeur par Hugo nous font participer: c’est directement que leur force mystique agit sur notre organisme; par l’agencement et la force de son verbe, Hugo dilate en nous la faculté de sentir les secrets du passé et les énigmes du futur; il jette des lueurs sur les étapes de nos origines et sur la direction de l’avenir... (Les Déracinés, 3:334)

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Even before his death, Hugo would become the principal secular patron saint of the Third Republic, although he had become politically marginalized by publicly calling for amnesty for the Communards after the savage repression by the Versaülais troops. The final decree of amnesty would not be promulgated until 1880, well after any “Red menace” had been thoroughly eradicated. As Robb has detailed (511-6), Hugo gradually allowed himself to be completely appropriated by the regime that had been born in a blood bath, that was ruthlessly expanding its colonial empire: “Hugo had given the Third Republic its mythology: its evil Ancien Régime was the Second Empire, its savage but necessary Revolution was the Paris Commune” (513).

It was in part his status as a living statue, as the deified embodiment of the embattled and inherently conservative Third Republic, that contributed to Hugo’s decline, in terms of critical appreciation, during much of the twentieth century. The new age of peace, brotherhood, and progress, which he had so eloquently predicted for the century that followed his, failed to materialize, leaving him with the retrospective image of yet another naïve and pompous dreamer of a bygone positivistic period. The official adulation that accompanied his later years, and only increased with his death, had the effect of occluding the dark, sardonic elements of his work, while highlighting his iconic representation as the prophet of uncritical scientism and maudlin morality. Hugo’s funerary praise for Voltaire was perhaps more self-reflexive than he had intended. Just as Voltaire had become, for part of the Romantic generation, the contemptible embodiment of all that had been destructive within the heritage of the Enlightenment (and its bastard offspring, the Revolution), Hugo turned into a negative reference for many later poets and novelists, who would renounce the model of the writer—part populist visionary, part solitary demigod—that he had come to incarnate.

**Europe as an Extension of France**

Hugo’s ostensibly “English” novel, *L'Homme qui rit* (1869), in fact has very little to do with Great Britain. Its convoluted plot is, as Brombert puts it, “provokingly preposterous” (171). While specifically set in England, Hugo’s oneiric narrative is closer
to a Gothic version of a fairy tale than to the traditional standards of nineteenth-century realist novels. One of the few realistic elements, the social critique of a repressive society marked by extreme inequalities of wealth, seems to be directed at the Second Empire that had exiled Hugo. In terms of this political context, it is not difficult to find French equivalents for some of the characters of the novel. As Michel Granet points out: “Jacques II dans L’Homme qui rit connote Napoléon III et Lord Clancharlie Victor Hugo” (21). Many of Hugo’s other foreign characters are in fact projections of French models: Cromwell recalls Napoleon I; the commoner-heroes of the ostensibly “Spanish” plays, Hernani (an outlaw) and Ruy Blas (a servant), are emblematic of le peuple oppressed by monarchs; and Gilliatt is linked through his mysterious mother to the French Revolution.

The centrality of France and French characters in Hugo’s fiction reflected his oft-expressed political and historical Francocentrism, an expansive form of ideologically-motivated patriotism that he projected onto the rest of the continent: “La France, c’est déjà l’Europe” (Choses vues, 11:1336). In “Souvenir d’enfance” (Les Feuilles d’automne, 4:635-8), Hugo depicts his father, glowingly describing Napoleon’s intentions for the future of the continent:

Et tout l’avenir germe en son cerveau profond.
Déjà, dans sa pensée immense et clairvoyante,
L’Europe ne fait plus qu’une France géante, (4:637)

There is a natural progression within Hugo’s epic of human progress, from the French Revolution to European unity, and onwards toward Humanity: “Ce qui arrive à la France arrive au monde entier” (Choses vues, 11:1327). Throughout these stages, the French People, the initiators of the Revolution, are presented as playing a leading role: “La loi de l’Europe est de se développer selon la France” (Choses vues, 11:1313). As early as the Journal d’un révolutionnaire de 1830, Hugo had posited France as the political center of Europe: “Le mouvement se propage du centre à la circonférence; le travail se fait en dessous, mais il se fait. Les pères ont vu la révolution de France, les fils verront la révolution d’Europe” (12:130). In his last novel, Quatrevingt-treize, Hugo
depicts Danton admonishing Robespierre as to the real danger for the Revolution. The list of monarchical foes surrounding the Republic accentuates the centrality of France:

Voilà qui est fort! s’écria-t-il, voir la catastrophe à l’ouest quand elle est à l’est. Robespierre, je vous accorde que l’Angleterre se dresse sur l’Océan; mais l’Espagne se dresse aux Pyrénées, mais l’Italie se dresse aux Alpes, mais l’Allemagne se dresse sur le Rhin. Et le grand ours russe est au fond. Robespierre, le danger est un cercle et nous sommes dedans. (3:875)

Hugo consistently put France, since the advent of the Revolution, at the vanguard of historical progress: “la France étant toujours ce qui commence. Quand le maître tombe en France, il tombe partout” (Les Misérables, 2:888). As the originator of the Revolution, France had molded the course of the new century: “le dix-neuvième siècle a une mère auguste, la Révolution française. Il a ce sang énorme dans les veines. [...] Le dix-neuvième siècle est un enfantement de civilisation. Il a un continent à mettre au monde. La France a porté ce siècle, et ce siècle porte l’Europe” (William Shakespeare, 12:431). The Hugolian conception of France as the focal point of European history in the nineteenth century is retrospectively applied to the seventeenth in his unfinished 1839 play, Les Jumeaux, in which Cardinal Mazarin, the Prime Minister of the young Louis XIV, is depicted as dreaming of a Europe reorganized around France: “Europe, voûte énorme à la France appuyée!” (9:685). With more cosmic ambition, Napoleon I, in the famous 1852 poem, “L’Expiation” (Les Châtiments, 5:126-35), is pictured as seeking to spread abroad the progressive spirit of Paris, albeit through despotic means:

Ainsi qu’en une urne profonde,
Mêler races, langues, esprits,
Répandre Paris sur le monde,
Enfermer le monde en Paris! (5:132)

The city of Paris, as the starting point of the Revolution, is situated in Quatrevingt-treize at the epicenter of concentric circles of struggle, radiating outward towards the rest of France and Europe:

93 est la guerre de l’Europe contre la France et de la France contre Paris.
Et qu’est-ce que la Révolution? C’est la victoire de la France sur l’Europe et de
Paris sur la France. De là, l’immensité de cette minute épouvantable, 93, plus grande que tout le reste du siècle. 
Rien de plus tragique, l’Europe attaquant la France et la France attaquant Paris. Drame qui a la stature de l’épopée. (3:865)

Paris and France are central to European and world history because of the importance of the Revolution, an idea which Hugo emphasizes by beginning the chapter entitled “La Convention” (Quatrevingt-treize, 3:891-911) with a series of short single-sentence paragraphs:

Nous approchons de la grande cime.
Voici la Convention.
Le regard devient fixe en présence de ce sommet.
Jamais rien de plus n’est apparu sur l’horizon des hommes.
Il y a l’Himalaya et il y a la Convention.
La Convention est peut-être le point culminant de l’histoire.

As part of his strategy of attempting to exert influence within France, even during his self-imposed exile, Hugo wrote an introduction to a “guide” to Paris published for the World’s Fair of 1867, in which he suggested that the main exhibition hall should house the statues of a short list of European artists, each representing the best of their respective nations: Homer, Dante, Shakespeare, and Beethoven. However, the last statue, that of Voltaire, was to be physically and figuratively set apart. In Hugo’s ideal exhibit, Voltaire is not simply the representative of France, but of humanity. To paraphrase the last remaining, and altered, Commandment in George Orwell’s Animal Farm (114)—without seeking to ascribe any totalitarian intention to Hugo—all geniuses are apparently equal, but some are more historically equal than others:


A similar Hugolian representation of French universalism, this time at the level of nation-states, is found in an 1855 speech commemorating the seventh anniversary of the
February 1848 revolution. Hugo envisions what Europe might have become if Bonaparte and other crowned despots had not halted the course of the revolution, that had briefly spread throughout the continent: “Le continent serait un seul peuple; les nationalités vivraient de leur vie propre dans la vie commune; l’Italie appartiendrait à l’Italie, la Pologne appartiendrait à la Pologne, la Hongrie appartiendrait à la Hongrie, la France appartiendrait à l’Europe, l’Europe appartiendrait à l’Humanité” (Actes et paroles II, 10:483). This vision was more than simply a presentation of the French civilizational model as primus inter pares. The sequence France-Europe-Humanity, each term successively conditioning the next, and which might be preceded by “Paris,” reflected both the established centralization of French society and Hugo’s view of the fundamental importance of the French Revolution for world history.

From his exile in Guernsey, Hugo begins his long introduction to Paris (fittingly, both the book and the city) with a prophecy that is relatively precise, temporally and spatially: “Au vingtième siècle, il y aura une nation extraordinaire” (10:3). Combining lyricism with concern for property rights, he explains how this exceptional nation will necessarily eliminate war, poverty, and ignorance: “Le continent fraternel, tel est l’avenir. Qu’on en prenne son parti, cet immense bonheur est inévitable” (10:6). He also highlights the role of Paris—“la Jérusalem humaine” (10:26)—as the center and exemplar for Europe:

Cette nation aura pour capitale Paris, et ne s’appellera point la France: elle s’appellera l’Europe.
Elle s’appellera l’Europe au vingtième siècle, et, aux siècles suivants, plus transfigurée encore, elle s’appellera l’Humanité.
L’Humanité, nation définitive, est dès à présent entrevue par les penseurs, ces contemplateurs des pénombres; mais ce à quoi assiste le dix-neuvième siècle, c’est à la formation de l’Europe. (10:6)

Paris as the future capital of a united Europe, in Hugo’s detailed prophecy, represents the natural continuation of his constant fascination with the city in his fictional work. While it may be neither the richest nor the most beautiful of the continent’s major cities, it is where human history took a decisive turn: “Qu’a donc Paris? La Révolution. Paris est la ville pivot sur laquelle, à un jour donné, l’histoire a tourné” (10:19). The
metropolis that destroyed the Bastille and proclaimed the principles of the Revolution, that replaced oppressive stone with liberating ideas, prefigures the decisive progress that Hugo’s Europe will constitute: “Avant d’avoir son peuple, l’Europe a sa ville. De ce peuple qui n’existe pas encore, la capitale existe déjà” (Paris, 10:6). Belonging to all of Europe, Paris announces its unity:

Que l’Europe soit la bienvenue.
Qu’elle entre chez elle. Qu’elle prenne possession de ce Paris qui lui appartient, et auquel elle appartient. Qu’elle ait ses aises et qu’elle respire à pleins poumons dans cette ville de tous et pour tous, qui a le privilège de faire des actes européens! (Paris, 10:35)

Hugo concludes Paris with the apotheosis of France:

Phénomène magnifique, cordial et formidable, que cette volatilisation d’un peuple qui s’évapore en fraternité! O France, adieu! Tu es trop grande pour n’être qu’une patrie. On se sépare de sa mère qui devient déesse. Encore un peu de temps, et tu t’évanouiras dans la transfiguration. Tu es si grande que voilà que tu ne vas plus être. Tu ne seras plus France, tu seras Humanité; tu ne seras plus nation, tu seras ubiquité. (10:42-3)

The peaceful universalism that Hugo saw as incarnated by Paris and France turned out to be quite compatible with the violent enterprise of colonization carried out by its successive regimes. In particular, the Third Republic, which sought to figuratively annex the Hugolian heritage through its public celebrations, would greatly expand the French colonial empire, in the name of its civilizing mission. For his part, Hugo consistently approved the principle of French colonialism, particularly in Africa, while deploring the brutality of its methods:

La barbarie est en Afrique, je le sais, mais que nos pouvoirs responsables ne l’oublient pas, nous ne devons pas l’y prendre, nous devons l’y détruire; nous ne sommes pas venus l’y chercher, mais l’en chasser. Nous ne sommes pas venus dans cette vieille terre romaine qui sera française inoculer la barbarie à notre armée, mais notre civilisation à tout un peuple; nous ne sommes pas venus en Afrique pour en rapporter l’Afrique, mais pour y apporter l’Europe. (Choses vues, 11:951)
European Evangelism

In his first speech at the Chambre des Pairs in 1846, Hugo denounced Austrian oppression within what had once been Poland: "Ce qui fait qu’aujourd’hui j’élève la parole, c’est que le frémissement généreux de la France je le sens comme vous tous; c’est que la Pologne ne doit jamais appeler la France en vain; c’est que je sens la civilisation offensée par les actes récents du gouvernement autrichien" (Actes et paroles I, 10:125). In an interesting choice of words, Hugo’s declared his sympathy for Polish nationalists to be motivated by the former country’s long-standing service to “la communauté européenne” (10:124). As would often happen, Hugo’s speech was not well received by his generally more conservative parliamentary colleagues. Hugo would revisit the issue of nationalistic opposition to the Austrian empire—this time in Italy—in his speech of 19 Oct. 1849 (10:207-15), when he unsuccessfully called for French troops to support republican principles by countering both Austrian expansionism and Papal repression. In each case, Hugo was defending the concepts of national independence and unity, as well as attacking a multinational empire that had been one of the foes of the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic regimes. In 1856, in a letter of support for Greek independence, when he was already calling for European unity, he still saw the goals of national independence movements as worthy intermediate steps, to which he added the restoration of the republic in France:

L’esprit de l’Europe doit planer aujourd’hui et remplacer dans les âmes l’antique esprit des nationalités. C’est aux nations les plus illustres, à la Grèce, à l’Italie, à la France, qu’il appartient de donner l’exemple. Mais d’abord et avant tout, il faut qu’elles redeviennent elles-mêmes, il faut qu’elles s’appartiennt; il faut que la Grèce achève de rejeter la Turquie, il faut que l’Italie secoue l’Autriche, il faut que la France déchire l’empire. Quand ces grands peuples seront hors de leurs linceuls, ils crieront: Unité! Europe! Humanité! (Actes et paroles II, 10:510)

Through his calls for European unity, Hugo integrated his support for oppressed nationalities, his view of the French Revolution as inaugurating a new age, and his vision of the people’s redemptive historical role. Focused on the need to finish the work of the Revolution by abolishing the reactionary kingdoms that had cynically divided up ethnic
and linguistic groups, Hugo, like Staël, did not anticipate that nineteenth-century
movements of national independence and unity could in turn become aggressive,
imperialistic forces. In its purest form, Hugo’s European utopia represented the main
objective of historical development, if not the final culmination, which was its extension
to the rest of humanity: “la république sociale et démocratique, l’immense bonne
nouvelle, la formule suprême et l’idée définitive du progrès, le grand fait-droit qui
s’appelle dans l’absolu Liberté-Egalité-Fraternité et dans le successif France-Europe-
Humanité” (Choses vues, 11:1313). For Hugo, the goal of European unification
represented more than the sort of sentimental idealism of which he has often been
accused. It was an essential and necessary element of his eschatological vision of
technical and social progress.

In Hugo’s passionate vision—“Car Dieu le veut, ce but sublime!” (10:302)—
which he first delivered, fittingly enough, at a peace conference in Paris in August 1849,
the diverse peoples inhabiting the European states will peacefully agree to coalesce into a
multinational unit, just as the provinces had earlier combined in order to form French
unity. Combining practicality with fervent prophecy, he pointed out, in a familiar
argument, that European unity would provide the means to end a long series of wars,
and thus at last allow its inhabitants to enjoy the fruits of peace: “c’est là pour ma part le
but auquel je tendrai toujours, extinction de la misère au dedans, extinction de la guerre
au dehors” (“Discours d’ouverture. Congrès de la paix à Paris,” Actes et paroles I,
10:304). During his speech at the conference, of which he was the president, Hugo
called for, among other things, the transfer of military budgets to civilian purposes, the
development of education, technology, and commerce—and the continuation of colonial
expansion as a means of alleviating “la misère” within Europe. He figuratively placed
France at the political center of a Europe-wide federal structure that would be as vast,
geographically and demographically, as the United States of America, an implicit
example, if not a model, for the future European federation. Hugo’s conception of a
united and peaceful Europe, built along the lines of the French political and cultural
model—with of course Paris as a common capital—is based on the French people’s historical role since the Revolution:

Un jour viendra où vous France, vous Russie, vous Italie, vous Angleterre, vous Allemagne, vous toutes, nations du continent, sans perdre vos qualités distinctes et votre glorieuse individualité, vous vous fondrez étroitement dans une unité supérieure, et vous constituerez la fraternité européenne, absolument comme la Normandie, la Bretagne, la Bourgogne, la Lorraine, l’Alsace, toutes nos provinces, se sont fondues dans la France. Un jour viendra où il n’y aura plus d’autres champs de bataille que les marchés s’ouvrant au commerce et les esprits s’ouvrant aux idées. [...] Un jour viendra où l’on verra ces deux groupes immenses, les Etats-Unis d’Amérique, les Etats-Unis d’Europe, placés l’un en face de l’autre, se tendant la main par-dessus les mers, échangeant leurs produits, leur commerce, leur industrie, leurs arts, leurs génies, défrichant le globe, colonisant les déserts, améliorant la création sous le regard du Créateur, et combinant ensemble, pour en tirer le bien-être de tous, ces deux forces infinies, la fraternité des hommes et la puissance de Dieu! (10:301)

The Paris conference was held in the aftermath of the wave of democratic and nationalistic revolutions which had swept much of the continent in 1848. Although the insurrections were eventually crushed, they contributed to the feeling of anxious anticipation that Hugo’s speech reflects. He would return to the theme of European unification in numerous speeches and texts, using similarly prophetic imagery. Written in Guernsey, apparently before the stated date of July 14, 1870, the poem “En plantant le chêne des Etats-Unis d’Europe” (Les Quatre Vents de l’esprit, 6:1367-73) is a lyric hymn to the future:

Semons! — Semons le gland, et qu’il soit chêne immense!
Semons le droit; qu’il soit bonheur, gloire et clarté!
Semons l’homme et qu’il soit peuple! Semons la France,
Et qu’elle soit l’Humanité! (6:1373)

Over time, Hugo devised a variety of designations for his evolving European topos: “la république d’Europe,” “les Peuples-Unis d’Europe,” “la Communauté européenne,” “les Etats-Unis d’Europe,” etc. Whatever the appellation, the grand Hugolian objective, to transcend national borders and hatreds through a process of unification, was always the same: “Ne soyons plus anglais ni français ni allemands.
Soyons européens. Ne soyons plus européens, soyons hommes — soyons l’humanité. Il
nous reste à abdiquer un dernier égoïsme: la patrie” (*Choses vues*, 11:1313). The means, however, was not always peaceful. In 1854, during a speech commemorating the anniversary of the February 1848 revolution in France (*Actes et paroles II*, 10:463-6), Hugo provided another impassioned prediction of European unity. Unlike his 1849 speech, however, using the inauspicious term “la grande guerre,” he foresaw this goal being accomplished through war and violent revolution:

Ah! l’instant s’avance! je vous l’ai déjà dit et j’y insiste, citoyens! dès que les chocs décisifs auront lieu, dès que la France abordera directement la Russie et l’Autriche et les saisira corps à corps, quand la grande guerre commencera, citoyens! vous verrez la Révolution luire. C’est à la Révolution qu’il est réservé de frapper les rois du continent. L’Empire est le fourreau, la République est l’épée.

Donc, acclamons la date future! acclamons la Révolution prochaine! souhaitons la bienvenue à cet ami mystérieux qui s’appelle Demain!

Que la date future soit splendide! que la prochaine Révolution soit invincible! qu’elle fonde les États-Unis d’Europe! (10:464)

In 1869, one year before the Franco-Prussian War, Hugo began a letter to the participants of a peace congress in Lausanne with: “Concitoyens des États-Unis d’Europe” (*Actes et paroles II*, 10:623). As in his 1854 speech, he was not optimistic for the near term: “Qu’une dernière guerre soit nécessaire, hélas! je ne suis, certes, pas de ceux qui le nient” (10:623). This war would be the fault of kings who wished to “diviser pour régner” (10:624). Although a war remained likely, its aftermath—in a prefigurement of the slogan, “la Der des Ders,” used during the First World War—would be lasting peace, which Hugo described, blending prophetic millenarianism with very practical economic liberalism:

La civilisation tend invinciblement à l’unité d’idiome, à l’unité de mètre, à l’unité de monnaie, et à la fusion des nations dans l’Humanité, qui est l’unité suprême. La concorde a un synonyme: simplification; de même que la richesse et la vie ont un synonyme: circulation. La première des servitudes, c’est la frontière.

Qui dit frontière, dit ligature. Coupez la ligature, effacez la frontière, ôtez le douanier, ôtez le soldat, en d’autres termes, soyez libres; la paix suit.

In 1874, Hugo sent to the participants of a peace congress in Geneva a letter of support that began in a similar fashion: “Chers concitoyens de la république d’Europe” (Actes et paroles III, 10:882). After the French defeat and the annexation of Alsace-Lorraine, the author of L’Armée terrible did not show the same level of enthusiasm for the future: “Toute la situation actuelle est une sombre et sourde haine. Haine du soufflet reçu” (10:882). He predicted that the humiliating terms imposed on France would lead to another war—from which would nevertheless result the United States of Europe. Hugo was not blindly idealistic, and did not predict an unbroken and peaceful linear path toward his goal of European unity, but he never lost sight of it. Along with the completion of the ideals of the French revolution, it had become the central element of his vision of a redemptive historical finality:


Europe, Within and Without

For a committed European, Hugo wrote relatively little about other European countries, with the major exception of Germany. Despite his stays in Italy and especially Spain during his childhood, he did not make Mediterranean countries the focus of his travels as an adult. While he wrote three plays set in Spain (Hernani, Ruy Blas, and Torquemada), the first two were interpreted by audiences as projections of French issues and concerns. He attempted no equivalent to Le Rhin for Spain, Italy, or Great Britain. As will be discussed, the conclusion to that book, based on trips to the region, essentially limited Europe to the Franco-German alliance Hugo called for, while hardly mentioning the smaller neighboring countries (an eloquent silence which even includes Italy). Spain,
classified as largely African, was symbolically distanced from Europe, and paired with Turkey, the representative of Asia. Great Britain constituted a looming foreign presence, allied with an even more menacing Russia.

During his long period of exile in the Channel Islands, Hugo, the admirer of Shakespeare, did not take the opportunity to travel extensively through Great Britain, or even to become proficient in English. He simply used British ports as way stations on his trips to French-speaking Belgium. Sheila Gaudon has detailed the largely negative Hugolian representation of France’s British neighbor, which had been the enemy of Napoleon I and had become the ally of Napoleon III. Hugo’s notion of geographic determinism (which he would apply, by contrast, in order to figuratively unite France and Germany) tended to separate Britain from Europe: “L’égoïsme est une île. Je viens d’écrire là l’histoire d’Angleterre” (Choses vues, 11:1288). Paired with Russia in Le Rhin, Britain was for Hugo similarly inimical to national independence movements: “L’Angleterre qui reproche à la Russie sa Pologne, ne voit pas l’Irlande qu’elle a dans l’œil” (Choses vues, 11:1324).

The prophet of European unity would only fully integrate Britain into his vision by distinguishing between the British people and their monarchical form of government. Hugo was obviously conscious of Great Britain’s long-standing geopolitical superiority over France. In Les Travailleurs de la mer, Hugo listed several examples of “la suprématie britannique” during Cromwell’s rule (3:475-6). He similarly supplies a list of British naval victories during Queen Anne’s reign (3:499-500). Unlike Voltaire, however, Hugo did not systematically posit Great Britain as a model of tolerance and progress. In the century that followed Voltaire’s, these values had in Hugo’s work largely crossed the Channel (with such major exceptions as the Second Empire). In L’Homme qui rit, Hugo provides an account of the absurd ceremonial at the House of Lords in scathing detail (3:705-14), an account which can be compared to Voltaire’s focus on what he considered progressive British institutions.

One of the consistent aspects of Hugo’s social and political thought, as has been mentioned, was his support for movements seeking national independence and/or unity,
particularly in Greece, Italy, Poland, and Germany. In the tradition of Romantic activism best illustrated by Byron, he repeatedly attacked, in political speeches as well as in fictional texts, the empires that had carved up, and were oppressing, national entities, particularly Turkey, Austria, and Russia. The plight of divided Poland figures prominently, in Les Travailleurs de la mer, among a list of what Hugo considers as crimes committed by despotic rulers: “[Czar] Nicolas assassinant la Pologne à la face de la civilisation” (3:171-2). In the same novel, a principled character, Lethierry, indignantly turns down a lucrative offer to participate in “une grosse fourniture d’armes au czar en train de réprimer la Pologne” (3:188). The distant Russian empire itself is for Hugo a vast mechanism for repression: “On transporte par an en Sibérie 14.000 condamnés, la plupart politiques” (Choses vues, 11:1336).  

While Hugo often expressed his support for national entities that lacked democratic state institutions, he displayed, until the latter part of his career, clear signs of traditional religious prejudice in the case of Jews, a minority with no fixed national home in Europe. The historical figure of Manassé Ben-Israël is turned into an utterly dehumanized version of Shylock in Cromwell: “Juif immonde, à pendre entre deux chiens!” (8:86). Marie Tudor (8:1079-185) also includes the typical caricature of a Jewish usurer. In Les Burgraves, the character of Job tells of his long-lost son, apparently the victim of a “ritual murder” committed by Jews:

Je l’avais nommé George... — Un jour, — pensée amère! —  
Il jouait, dans les champs... — Oh! quand tu seras mère,  
Ne laisse pas jouer tes enfants loin de toi! —  
On me le prit. — Des juifs, une femme! Pourquoi?  
Pour l’égorger, dit-on, dans leur sabbat. — Je pleure,  
Je pleure après vingt ans comme à la première heure. (9:208)

Aside from Hugo’s historical plays, the poem, “A l’homme qui a livré une femme” (Les Chants du crépuscule, 4:719-21) provides a portrait of a nineteenth-century Jew who is grasping, cowardly, and treacherous. Ironically for an ultra-royalist, Hugo, in his early “Journal d’un jeune jacobite de 1819,” appears Voltairean in terms of his derogatory characterization of Jews: “Il y aurait un livre curieux à faire sur la condition des juifs au moyen âge. Ils étaient bien hâts, mais ils étaient bien odieux; ils
étaient bien méprisés, mais ils étaient bien vils” (*Littérature et philosophie mêlées*, 12:66). With the experience of exile and the crystallization of his ideology of a European republic, however, Hugo began to include Jews in his humanitarian appeals. His condemnation of religious intolerance is vividly articulated in the play he wrote in 1869, *Torquemada* (9:263-377). It was published in 1882, as part of one of Hugo's last public appeals (*Actes et paroles IV*, 10:1070-1), in which he called for an end to the wave of pogroms that had been encouraged by Russian authorities after the assassination of Czar Alexander II.

While the development of Hugo's Europeanism was a major factor in the evolution of his attitudes towards internal minorities, it did not transform his view of what Rudyard Kipling infamously called the “white man's burden” abroad. In the conclusion to *Le Rhin*, Hugo had already predicted that the civilizing mission of Europe would ultimately be completed by France: “Désormais, éclairer les nations encore obscures, ce sera la fonction des nations éclairées. Faire l'éducation du genre humain, c'est la mission de l'Europe. [...] L'enseignement des peuples a deux degrés, la colonisation et la civilisation. L'Angleterre et la Russie coloniseront le monde barbare; la France civilisera le monde colonisé” (13:432). In his 1879 “Discours sur l’Afrique” (*Actes et paroles IV*, 10:1008-12), Hugo praised his friend and fellow former *proscrit*, Victor Schoelcher, for his leading role in the campaign to abolish slavery. Hugo then proceeded to contrast Europe and Africa: “d'un côté toute la civilisation, et de l'autre toute la barbarie” (10:1010). Unabashedly exalting the ongoing colonial enterprise, he depicted Europe as acting generously in order to regenerate the African continent: “Refaire une Afrique nouvelle, rendre la vieille Afrique maniable à la civilisation, tel est le problème. L'Europe le résoudra” (10:1012). Through the presumably peaceful economic development of Africa, Europe could also alleviate its own social problems: “Versez votre trop-plein dans cette Afrique, et du même coup résolvez vos questions sociales, changez vos prolétaires en propriétaires” (10:1012).

Hugo's paternalistic presentation of Europe peacefully bringing the benefits of civilization to a benighted Africa illustrates the political contradictions in France after the
Franco-Prussian War. While much of the political right wanted the country to remain focused on "la ligne bleue des Vosges," the republican left—whose icon Hugo had become—spearheaded a massive colonial effort as a means of strengthening the still-fragile Third Republic. Somewhat fittingly, Hugo died shortly after the close of the 1884-85 Berlin Conference, which set the stage for the final division of Africa between the European colonial powers.

Along the Rhine

As a young Romantic, Hugo followed in Germaine de Staël's footsteps by privileging, among his literary influences, German and British works, the principal incarnations of her category of the Romantic "Nord." Staël's De l'Allemagne, as has been mentioned, was for Hugo a major reference in terms of what might be called comparative literary theory, as well as an introduction to German Romantic literature. In his 1824 preface to Odes et ballades (4:56-62), Hugo, referring to Staël's famous book, praised her as "une femme de génie, qui, la première, a prononcé le mot de littérature romantique en France" (4:57). However, Hugo found that her definitions of the categories of "Classicism" and "Romanticism," representing respectively the sensibilities of the eras before and after the establishment of Christianity, were no longer applicable. By 1830, he was defining Romanticism through a political analogy, as "le libéralisme en littérature" ("Sur M. Dorvalle," Littérature et philosophies mêlées, 12:176). Dédéyan has detailed the evolution of German literary influences on Hugo, and of the representation of Germany in his works, a representation which, predictably, became distinctly negative after the Franco-Prussian War.47

The result of the trips he made with Juliette Drouet, Le Rhin is an exception within the Hugolian corpus, his only major publication that derived from voluntary travels outside of France. It should be noted that Hugo, who never ventured far from France, did not travel as frequently, as widely, or as enthusiastically as Staël had.48 The publication of Le Rhin also closely followed its author's accession to the Académie
Française in 1841. As Nicole Savy has detailed, most of Hugo’s travels as an adult were centered in northern Europe:

Victor Hugo est un homme du Nord, passionné d’architecture gothique et médiévale. La place des burgs rhénans dans son œuvre graphique atteste sa sensibilité à ces monuments et à ces paysages des bords du Rhin. [...] C’est donc autour du Rhin, et du Nord-Ouest de l’Europe, qu’il porte inlassablement ses pas, à la recherche d’une vérité qui, bien au-delà du plaisir esthétique, relève pour lui de l’histoire passée, de la politique, et de l’histoire à venir. Il va méditer et écrire là où il pense que l’essentiel doit advenir, quelque part entre Bruxelles et Strasbourg. (14)⁴⁹

Part travel literature, part political essay, Le Rhin constitutes one of Hugo’s main attempts to weigh in on the debate over France’s contested eastern border, a border which during the Revolutionary period had been along the Rhine, until Napoleon’s second abdication in 1815. The principal section of the text is composed of a series of “lettres à un ami,” which were ostensibly written while traveling, and which were later considerably reworked. Hugo’s reactions as a visitor to the region, his detailed idiosyncratic descriptions of its cities, its ruins and monuments, as well as its legendary past, make up the bulk of the letters.⁵⁰ Aside from Le Rhin, Hugo’s interest in the region is also visible in the 1843 play, Les Burgraves, which marked the end of his career as a successful playwright.⁵¹

The long conclusion, in eighteen parts, to Le Rhin is devoted to Hugo’s forays into European history and geopolitics. Unlike Staël, who during a period of forced exile had made use of her trip to Germany in order to deepen her ongoing study of German literature, Hugo did not seek to organize his travels along the Rhine into opportunities for systematic encounters with his German counterparts and their works. Another difference between Hugo and his French literary predecessor was that the military and political balance between France and Germany (which would not become a fully unified country until the Franco-Prussian War) had been transformed after the fall of the Napoleonic Empire. An increasingly powerful Germany was gradually replacing Great Britain as the geopolitical arch-rival, the “ennemi héréditaire” of France.
The publication in 1842 of Hugo’s writings on the Rhine as the “natural border,” as well as the uniting, not dividing line between France and Germany, occurred within the context of an already raging debate within France, and between writers of both countries. Alfred de Musset’s poem, “Le Rhin allemand” (187), was a sardonic reply to a bombastic 1840 song by Nicholas Becker, whose Rheinlied had affirmed the disputed river to be strictly, and forever, German: “Ils ne l’auront pas, le libre Rhin allemand, jusqu’à ce que les ossements du dernier homme soient ensevelis dans ses vagues” (translated in Musset, 187). A year later, Musset replied sarcastically, recalling that both the left and right banks of the river had been French possessions during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic periods:

Nous l’avons eu, votre Rhin allemand,
Il a tenu dans notre verre.
Un couplet qu’on s’en va chantant
Efface-t-il la trace altière
Du pied de nos chevaux marqués dans votre sang? (187)

Aside from the bloody imagery and retrospective saber-rattling, Musset’s defiant 1841 poem was also partly a rebuke, directed at Alphonse de Lamartine, for his far more irenic poem of the same year, La Marseillaise de la paix (1173-7), which, as did most of Hugo’s writings, posited the Rhine—”le Nil de l’Occident”—as a site of peaceful exchange, instead of nationalistic struggle:

Et pourquoi nous haïr, et mettre entre les races
Ces bornes ou ces eaux qu’abhorre l’œil de Dieu?
De frontières au ciel voyons-nous quelques traces?
Sa voûte a-t-elle un mur, une borne, un milieu?
Nations, mot pompeux pour dire barbarie,
L’amour s’arrête-t-il où s’arrêtent vos pas?
Déchirez ces drapeaux; une autre voix vous crie:
“L’égoïsme et la haine ont seuls une patrie;
La fraternité n’en a pas!” (1174)

Musset was not the only French writer to criticize Lamartine (to whom Becker had originally sent his Rheinlied) for what was widely perceived in France as an overly conciliatory reply to an aggressive taunt. The same year, Edgar Quinet, a historian who, like Hugo, would be exiled during the Second Empire, also weighed in with his “Le
Rhin. A M. de Lamartine.” Quinet’s avian metaphors, likening Germany to an aggressive vulture and Lamartine’s France to a graceful but timorous swan, implicitly recalled the fallen Napoleonic eagle. Apostrophizing Lamartine, Quinet recalled French claims to the left bank of the Rhine:

Au premier coup de bec du vautour germanique,
Qui vient te disputer ta part d’onde et de ciel,
Tu prends trop tôt l’essor, roi du chant pacifique,
Noble cygne de France, à la langue de miel.

Ah! qu’ils vont triompher de ta blanche élégie!
Que l’écho de Leipzig rira de notre peur!

Le Rhin sous ta nacelle endort-il son murmure?
Que le Franc y puisse boire en face du Germain.
L’haleine du glacier rouillant leur double armure,
Deux races aussitôt se donneront la main.
Nous ne demandons pas tout l’or de la montagne.
Du Nil de l’Occident nous ne voulons qu’un bord,
Pour que les cieux de France et les cieux d’Allemagne,
Roulent ensemble au même port. (149-51)

Couched in quaintly elegant poetic language, the aggressive posturing, on either side of the disputed river, of the “Querelle du Rhin” in the early 1840s reflects the nationalistic tensions of post-Napoleonic Europe, tensions that would culminate in the long-sought completion of German unity—through a war with France in 1870-1. Hugo was obviously conscious of these tensions, and of the importance of the issue of Franco-German relations, the crux of which he saw along the Rhine: “cet admirable fleuve laisse entrevoir à l’œil du poète comme à l’œil du publiciste, sous la transparence de ses flots, le passé et l’avenir de l’Europe” (Le Rhin, Preface, 13:3). At once mirror and window, the river became for Hugo the instrument through which he could peer into the continent’s future.

In spite of the emotionally-charged nationalistic context of the “Querelle du Rhin,” Hugo presented himself as an unabashed admirer of German culture: “Quant à l’Allemagne, qui est à ses yeux [l’auteur] la collaboratrice naturelle de la France [...]
L’Allemagne, il ne le cache pas, est une des terres qu’il aime et une des nations qu’il admire. Il a presque un sentiment filial pour cette noble et sainte patrie de tous les penseurs. S’il n’était pas Français, il voudrait être Allemand” (13:9). However, emotional affinities did not cancel out historical disputes. Even before the concluding section of his book, which is devoted to political issues, Hugo was very clear on the question of where the border between France and Germany should lie: “La géographie donne, avec cette volonté inflexible des pentes, des bassins et des versants que tous les congrès du monde ne peuvent contrarier longtemps, la géographie donne la rive gauche du Rhin à la France” (13:108).

As Savy points out, Hugo’s writings on the Rhineland were mainly motivated by internal French concerns and by his growing preoccupation with the region’s vitally important position within Europe: “Victor Hugo visite la Rhénanie comme une province française: celle où se joue l’avenir de l’Europe. Dans une vision aussi structurale, le Rhin — autre paradoxe — est un livre sur la France” (143). In this text, Hugo’s typically Romantic fascination with tombs, ruined castles, and Gothic legends is intermingled with the political considerations of his day. Even in his most lyrical passages, he thus tended to remind his readers of his view that the long-disputed river should be equally and peacefully shared by the two countries: “c’est un noble fleuve, féodal, républicain, impérial, digne d’être à la fois français et allemand. Il y a toute l’histoire de l’Europe considérée sous ses deux grands aspects, dans ce fleuve des guerriers et des penseurs, dans cette vague superbe qui fait bondir la France, dans ce murmure profond qui fait rêver l’Allemagne” (13:99-100). What Hugo found along the Rhine, which he saw mainly as a border region, tended to parallel his view of past historical events in France. Germany thus became, as Nash puts it, “une sorte d’énorme palimpseste de la France prérévolutionnaire” (1985, 352), its ruined medieval monuments pointing the way towards the Revolution.

Germany and France are linked through their greatest imperial rulers, and through the related numerological analogies which Hugo finds significant. In Letter 9 of Le Rhin, Hugo describes his visit to Charlemagne’s tomb, and draws a parallel, across
the centuries, between two empires: "Chose remarquable, et qui me vient ici en passant, en 814 Charlemagne mourut, Mille ans après, en quelque sorte heure pour heure, en 1814, Napoléon tomba" (13:68).\(^{56}\) Hugo returns to the parallel in part 9 of his lengthy conclusion, presenting Charlemagne and Napoleon as having both tried to constitute a version of the Europe he calls for, structured around the alliance of France and Germany, with the Rhine as a uniting, not dividing, line. Hugo finds in the two former emperors, one Germanic, one French, personifications of his future Europe: "Peut-être faudra-t-il que l’œuvre de Charlemagne et Napoléon se refasse sans Napoléon et sans Charlemagne" (13:405).\(^{57}\)

Hugo’s positions on Franco-German relations, and on the issue of the Rhine as a border between the two countries, did not lack originality. In the conclusion to *Le Rhin*, he provided a curious historical and geopolitical review, presenting Europe in the seventeenth century as besieged from the east and the west by two external empires, Spain and Turkey. The nucleus of Europe, meanwhile, was in fact limited to France and Germany, which he saw as natural partners, united by the Rhine (whose left bank should logically revert to France), against the twin external dangers. In Hugo’s historical model, therefore, Europe had been, and remained, threatened by two neighboring but foreign empires, one on either side of the continent. In the seventeenth century, “Ces deux empires inspiraient à l’Europe, l’un une profonde terreur, l’autre une profonde défiance. Par la Turquie, c’était l’esprit de l’Asie qui se répandait sur l’Europe; par l’Espagne, c’était l’esprit de l’Afrique” (13:378). In the nineteenth century, new empires had arisen, but in the Hugolian schema Europe was still hemmed in from the east and west, the twin threats having shifted towards the north: "A la Turquie a succédé la Russie; à l’Espagne a succédé l’Angleterre” (13:387).

After supplying a list of smaller European states that had either disappeared or been diminished by the middle of the nineteenth century, Hugo proceeds to identify most of the Europe of his day to the French-German partnership—which he correspondingly calls for—and to assign roles for each country, based on their established traits (which recall Staël’s formulation):
Que reste-t-il donc de tout ce vieux monde? Qui est-ce qui est encore debout en Europe? Deux nations seulement: la France et l’Allemagne.

Eh bien, cela pourrait suffire. La France et l’Allemagne sont essentiellement l’Europe. L’Allemagne est le cœur; la France est la tête.

L’Allemagne et la France sont essentiellement la civilisation. L’Allemagne sent; la France pense.

Le sentiment et la pensée, c’est tout l’homme civilisé.

Il y a entre les deux peuples connexion intime, consanguinité incontestable. Ils sortent des mêmes sources; ils ont lutté ensemble contre les Romains; ils sont frères dans le passé, frères dans le présent; frères dans l’avenir.

Leur mode de formation a été le même. Ils ne sont pas des insulaires, ils ne sont pas des conquérants; ils sont les vrais fils du sol européen. (13:403-4)

The Hugolian division of roles and qualities between France and Germany, expressed as a linked set of anatomical metaphors (the mind and the heart of the European body), is marked by the influence of Staël’s depiction of Germans as generally oriented towards dreams and sentiments. In this schema, Hugo correspondingly ascribes logic and rationalism to the French. Once the national dichotomies are in place—France/head/thought vs. Germany/heart/feeling—an apparently symmetrical division of civilizational labor can be assigned. Aside from Hugo’s previously discussed Francocentrism, which undergirds the obvious hierarchy of this complementary set, the Franco-German alliance he advocates has an unmistakably modern ring, even if its dual defensive purpose seems farfetched:

Quand l’Europe centrale sera constituée, et elle le sera un jour, l’intérêt de tous sera évident; la France, adossée à l’Allemagne, fera front à l’Angleterre, qui est, comme nous l’avons déjà dit, l’esprit de commerce, et la rejetera dans l’Océan; l’Allemagne, adossée à la France, fera front à la Russie, qui, nous l’avons dit de même, est l’esprit de conquête, et la rejetera dans l’Asie. [...]


Hugo saw whatever antagonism existed between the natural allies, France and Germany, as resulting from the Machiavellian power politics of the two external empires, after the fall of the Napoleonic empire. Due to British and Russian pressure at the Congress of Vienna in 1815, the left bank of the Rhine had been detached from France and given to Prussia, precisely as a means of sowing discord between France and
Germany: “il y avait une pensée profonde, une pensée anglaise et russe qui s’exécutait, disons-le, aussi bien au dépens de l’Allemagne qu’aux dépens de la France. Le Rhin est le fleuve qui doit les unir; on en a fait le fleuve qui les divise” (13:411). In order to counteract the effects of the British and Russian attempt to drive a wedge between France and Germany, it was therefore in Germany’s own interest to renounce its claim on the left bank of the Rhine:

La désunion de la France et de l’Allemagne, c’est la dislocation de l’Europe. L’Allemagne hostilement tournée vers la France laisse entrer la Russie; la France hostilement tournée vers l’Allemagne laisse pénétrer l’Angleterre.

Donc, ce qu’il faut aux deux états envahisseurs, c’est la désunion de l’Allemagne et de la France.

Cette désunion a été préparée et combinée habilement en 1815 par la politique russe-anglaise.

Cette politique a créé un motif permanent d’animosité entre les deux nations centrales.

Ce motif d’animosité, c’est le don de la rive gauche du Rhin à l’Allemagne. Or cette rive gauche appartient naturellement à la France.

Pour que la proie fût bien gardée, on l’a donnée au plus jeune et au plus fort des peuples allemands, à la Prusse. (13:427)

The Hugolian analysis of history and geopolitics led to a clear conclusion: in order to redress the balance within Europe, Germany would have to accept ceding the left bank of the Rhine to France, which would be content at having reached its “natural border” to the east. However, this transfer should be accomplished peacefully, through a realization of the common interests of the two countries. Furthermore, according to Hugo, there would be no real prejudice for Germany, which, secure along the Rhine, could concentrate on completing its process of unification and expansion toward the Danube. Great rivers thus conditioned a form of geographic determinism for the Franco-German duopoly, with each country unified within natural borders, and allied against external threats. The perspective of German unification was for Hugo linked to a mutually beneficial alliance with France, which would make the Franco-Prussian War, or the achievement of German unity against France, all the more traumatic. Overall, his detailed plan for a Franco-German alliance, based on the concept of an equally shared
Rhine river, was of course less than realistic. It did, however, posit the two countries as the nucleus of a future united Europe.

In the 1843 preface to what would be his last staged play, *Les Burgraves*, Hugo returned to a broader concept of Europe. Comparing individual nations within nineteenth-century Europe to the city-states of ancient Greece, he found more factors of commonality than of differentiation: “En effet, il y a aujourd’hui une nationalité européenne” (9:156). Referring to the recent “Querelle du Rhin,” he stressed the historical and cultural links that transcended national borders: “Quelles que soient les antipathies momentanées et les jalousies de frontières, toutes les nations policingies appartiennent au même centre et sont indissolublement liées entre elles par une secrète et profonde unité. La civilisation nous a fait à tous les mêmes entrailles, le même esprit, le même but, le même avenir” (9:156). The central theme of the conclusion to *Le Rhin* had been the need for a defensive alliance between France (with its eastern border on the Rhine) and a united Germany occupying most of central Europe. The twin central nations would thus be in a position to counter the aggressive ambitions of the two external powers, Russia and Great Britain. With the preface to *Les Burgraves*, however, the practical notion of a European equilibrium built around competing alliances is replaced by a vision of wholeness, with the continent’s various nationalities intrinsically linked and subsumed into a European collectivity. In this perspective, German national unity simply constituted one prefiguration, along with Italian or Polish unity, of the future European political entity. For Hugo, the original model remained France, which had already successfully (if not altogether peacefully) aggregated its various provinces into a coherent whole.

As I have argued, the European topos became in Hugo’s writings an essential aspect of his prophetic vision of a peaceful, prosperous future, in which the seemingly absurd vicissitudes of history would be decisively brought to a close. His efforts to integrate the apparent chaos of human events into a wider meaning or finality were sorely tested by the French defeat of 1870, the siege of Paris, and the forcible annexation of Alsace-Lorraine. Immediately upon his arrival in France, after nineteen years of exile,
Hugo fruitlessly attempted to call for an end to the fighting. His 1870 “Lettre aux Allemands” (Actes et paroles III, 10:725-8), published in French and German, was written shortly after the fall of the Second Empire, when Prussian troops were closing in on Paris. Using the familiar thesis that Paris belonged to all of humanity, Hugo argued, predictably in vain, that the fall of Bonaparte’s regime had removed any justification for the continuation of a war which, in L’Année terrible, he characterized as an absurd fratricidal conflict:

Vision sombre! un peuple en assassine un autre.
Et la même origine, ô Saxons, est la nôtre!
Et nous sommes sortis du même flanc profond!
La Germanie avec la Gaule se confond
Dans cette antique Europe où s’ébauche l’histoire. (6:47-8)

As is attested in most of L’Année terrible, this most sorrowful of historical junctures was exceedingly difficult to inscribe within a providential design. While the alliance of France and Germany had been central to his conception of Europe, Hugo could no longer foresee its occurrence before another bout of warfare. Although he had previously supported the concept of German national unity, he could not accept that it had been achieved against France (and not just against Napoleon III). The grand design of the Hugolian vision, the redemptive power of his poetic discourse, had been confronted with precisely the sort of bloody, meaningless historical events whose end he had been prophesying. France’s putative friend and ally had become its pitiless arch-enemy. In a bitter 1871 poem entitled “A ceux qui reparlent de fraternité” (L’Année terrible, 6:81), written in the aftermath of the Franco-Prussian War, Hugo shelved his calls for reconciliation, which he could not envision before another war. This poem provides an early literary example of the use of the term “revanche,” which would come to occupy a prominent place in the French political lexicon until the First World War:

Quand nous serons vainqueurs, nous verrons. Montrons-leur
Jusqu’là, le dédain qui sied à la douleur.
[...]
Aimer les Allemands? Cela viendra, le jour
Où par droit de victoire on aura droit d’amour.
La déclaration de paix n’est jamais franche
De ceux qui, terrassés, n’ont pas pris leur revanche;
Attendons notre tour de barrer le chemin.
Mettons-les sous nos pieds, puis tendons-leur la main,
Je ne puis que saigner tant que la France pleure.
Ne me parlez donc pas de concorde à cette heure;

In February 1871, Hugo was elected to the National Assembly that would have to negotiate the terms of surrender with the Prussian occupiers. He resigned a few days later, after having vainly opposed the humiliating treaty worked out between Bismarck and the future president who would crush the Paris Commune, Adolphe Thiers: “Je ne voterai point cette paix, parce que, avant tout, il faut sauver l’honneur de son pays; je ne la voterai point, parce qu’une paix infâme est une paix terrible” (Actes et paroles III, 10:755). In an astonishing section of this speech (1 March 1871) that anticipates Maurice Barrès’s revanchist discourse, Hugo called for all-out war against the new German Empire, apparently hoping the defeated French army, bolstered by the sort of mass conscription that had fueled Revolutionary victories, could somehow re-conquer not just Alsace and Lorraine, but all the left bank of the Rhine: “On verra la France se redresser, on la verra ressaisir la Lorraine, ressaisir l’Alsace. Et puis, est-ce tout? Non... saisir Trèves, Mayence, Cologne, Coblenz, toute la rive gauche du Rhin... Et on entendra la France crier: ‘C’est mon tour’” (10:756). In the aftermath of this highly imaginative Hugolian epic, Germany would become a republic, France would willingly return its occupied territory, and the borders between the two countries would be abolished in an outbreak of generalized brotherhood... A call for total war, to be immediately followed by wholehearted and everlasting reconciliation, all couched in lofty Hugolian rhetoric: “Plus de frontières! Le Rhin à tous! Soyons la même République, soyons les Etats-Unis d’Europe, soyons la fédération continentale, soyons la liberté européenne, soyons la paix universelle!” (10:756). This is one of the few cases where Hugo’s biographer refers to him as a “megalomania” (Robb, 461).

Hugo’s fierce call to arms, in the context of the French defeat, can be compared to the sort of bellicose rhetoric Maurice Barrès would later specialize in. Hugo would not, however, consistently deny any possibility of future reconciliation with Germany. In 1872, he sent a message from Guernsey to the participants at a peace congress in
Lugano. Beginning with “Mes compatriotes européens,” this short text (Actes et paroles III, 10:858-9) shows that, despite the annexation of Alsace-Lorraine, he had not lost his vision of a peaceful, united Europe. Nevertheless, he predicted another war or revolution before it could occur:

Donc nous aurons l’Europe république.
Comment l’aurons-nous?
Par une guerre ou par une révolution.
Par une guerre, si l’Allemagne y force la France. Par une révolution, si les rois y forcent les peuples. Mais à coup sûr, cette chose immense, la République européenne, nous l’aurons.

Against the Second Empire

In his 1852 pamphlet, Napoléon-le-petit, Hugo contemptuously compared Napoleon III—“un malfaiteur de la plus cynique et la plus basse espèce” (11:8)—to the historical stature of his uncle, Napoleon I: “Ah! Français! regardez le pourceau couvert de fange qui se vautre sur cette peau de lion” (11:86). Hugo had first used the derisive epithet in a speech at the National Assembly (17 July 1851) that drew continuous jeering from the right-wing majority: “Quoi! parce que nous avons eu Napoléon le grand, il faut que nous ayons Napoléon le Petit” (Actes et paroles I, 10:290). As previously mentioned, this was the same speech in which Hugo first spoke of “les Etats-Unis d’Europe” at the Assembly. Although he had indirectly supported, through the newspaper L’Evénement, Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte’s candidacy in the 1848 presidential election, Hugo objected to attempts at revising the constitution, which would have allowed the single-term President of the Republic to run for reelection, and which, Hugo implied, betrayed Bonaparte’s ambitions of unlimited personal power. The sham constitutional issue was rendered moot by the military coup (2 Dec. 1851) organized by Bonaparte, and by the ensuing crackdown on his political opponents. The Second Empire would soon follow.

Hugo exhibited a high level of personal courage in his unsuccessful attempts to rally popular opposition to the coup, but was forced to flee the country. As had Staël, Hugo, although never a real threat, would remain a symbolic thorn in the side of the
Bonapartist regime. His long period of exile in the Channel Islands turned the former royalist and admirer of Napoleon I into the embodiment of republican opposition to the new regime, and hastened the evolution of his utopianism toward political objectives at the European level. France was now fully part of the reactionary coalition of monarchs that had rolled back the revolutionary tide which had swept Europe in 1848. Hugo would thus tend to foresee any future revolutionary shift to a republic in France as spreading to its neighbors.

A masterpiece of oppositional literature, *Napoléon-le-petit* announces (in unallegorical form), as Robb points out (309), George Orwell’s depiction of totalitarian practice and propaganda in *Animal Farm*, in which facts would be cynically and endlessly manipulated to suit the dictator’s needs of the moment: “Cet homme ment comme les autres hommes respirent” (*Napoléon-le-petit*, 11:16). Unlike *Napoléon-le-petit*, which had a huge clandestine success during the early years of the Second Empire, the even more scathing *Histoire d’un crime* was not published, for reasons that remain unclear, until 1877. One of the major reproaches Hugo hurled at Napoleon III was that his dictatorial regime had halted the forward march of progress incarnated by the French language and “spirit.” In a passage reminiscent of Rivarol, Hugo posited the former Assembly of the Republic as having propagated progressive universalism from Paris, through the unrestrictedly accessible medium of the French language (which was suitable for both of Staël’s categories):

Lentement et par degrés, l’esprit français, pour le progrès universel, s’assimilait les nations. Grâce à cette admirable langue française, composée par la Providence avec un merveilleux équilibre d’assez de consonnes pour être prononcée par les peuples du Nord, et d’assez de voyelles pour être prononcée par les peuples du Midi, grâce à cette langue qui est une puissance de la civilisation et de l’humanité, peu à peu, et par son seul rayonnement, cette haute tribune centrale de Paris conquérait les peuples et les faisait France. La frontière matérielle de la France était ce qu’elle pouvait; mais il n’y avait pas de traités de 1815 pour la frontière morale. La frontière morale reculait sans cesse et allait s’élargissant de jour en jour, et avant un quart de siècle peut-être on eût dit le monde français comme on a dit le monde romain. (*Napoléon-le-petit*, 11:94).
In his response to Bonaparte’s bloody coup and restoration of the Empire, Hugo was in something of a logical, and self-inflicted, bind. It was mainly due to his kinship with Napoleon I that the new Bonaparte had been democratically elected President of the Second Republic in 1848. Even before he orchestrated the official constitutional switch to the Second Empire, Napoleon III relied on the symbols and mythology of the original Napoleonic epic in order to prop up his regime and whatever legitimacy it could muster. The myth of “Napoléon le Grand” had precisely been nurtured and expanded by Romantic artists, of whom the most prominent was none other than Victor Hugo. It could in fact be argued that Hugo indirectly contributed to the fall of the Republic by glorifying the figure of the uncle, without whom the nephew would not have gained power. Even when insisting on the contemptible nature of the Second Empire, Hugo was still magnifying the First by contrast:

Le premier Bonaparte voulait réédifier l’empire d’Occident, faire l’Europe vassale, dominer le continent de sa puissance et l’éblouir de sa grandeur, prendre un fauteuil et donner aux rois des tabourets, faire dire à l’histoire: Nemrod, Cyrus, Alexandre, Annibal, César, Charlemagne, Napoléon; être un maître du monde. Il l’a été. C’est pour cela qu’il a fait le 18 brumaire. Celui-ci veut avoir des chevaux et des filles, être appelé monseigneur et bien vivre. C’est pour cela qu’il a fait le 2 décembre. (Napoléon-le-petit, 11:14)

In a famous passage of his 1869 preface to The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte, Karl Marx disparaged the superficial nature of Hugo’s attacks on the new Bonapartist regime, which in Marx’s view merely tended to personalize the broader historical shifts he saw as resulting from class struggles: “[Hugo] sees in [the coup d’état] only the violent act of a single individual. He does not notice that he makes this individual great instead of little by ascribing to him a personal power of initiative such as would be without parallel in world history” (8). Hugo, whose lifetime spanned a bewildering series of political transformations in France, tended to privilege the importance of the country’s constitutional transition from monarchy to republic, which corresponded well to his providential vision of history. In this perspective, the forced transition from republic to empire, by contrast, constituted a historical regression, a crime against the march of political and moral progress. Hugo remained largely oblivious
to the degree of social, economic, and even institutional continuity that persisted in France throughout the variations in constitutional regimes during the nineteenth century. It is telling that he did not display similar levels of moral outrage when the workers’ uprising of June 1848 was crushed (indeed, Hugo took part in the repression), or when the Communards were systematically executed in 1871, as he did in the case of Bonaparte’s coup d’état.

For Hugo, the bitter historical irony of the new political situation was overwhelming: the grotesque reality of the Second Empire had caught up with the sublime fiction of the First. Other ironies abounded. The technical, scientific, and economic advancements lauded by Hugo were among the hallmarks of the new regime, during which France began industrializing at a rapid pace, although it was still decades behind Great Britain. The railway system, which Hugo saw as leading to peace and reconciliation through the abolition of national borders, was greatly expanded—and would of course also be used for military purposes. In a ruthless campaign of urban destruction and renewal, the city of Paris that Hugo posited as the center of Europe was radically transformed, modernized, and made safer for cavalry charges, by Bonaparte’s Prefect, Baron Haussmann.

From Technical to Social Progress

Although Hugo never simply equated the two, nor naïvely posited one as deriving in a direct and unimpeded fashion from the other, he did present scientific progress as facilitating and reinforcing social progress. His fascination for technical innovations reflected the social changes brought about during the nineteenth century by some of its most spectacular examples, particularly in the domains of transportation and communication. For Hugo, the political revolution of 1789 would be completed by the industrial revolution, which was abolishing borders and linking regions and nations. The train, steamship, and telegraph would thus participate in facilitating contacts and reducing suspicions and hatreds. Hugo makes this argument in the conclusion to Le
Rhin, apparently unwilling to consider that technological progress can also facilitate wars and make them more efficiently murderous:

Utopie, soit. Mais qu’on ne l’oublie pas, quand elles vont au même but que l’humanité, c’est-à-dire vers le bon, le juste et le vrai, les utopies d’un siècle sont les faits du siècle suivant. Il y a des hommes qui disent: cela sera; et il y a d’autres hommes qui disent: voici comment. La paix perpétuelle a été un rêve jusqu’au jour où le rêve s’est fait chemin de fer et a couvert la terre d’un réseau solide, tenace et vivant. Watt est le complément de l’abbé de Saint-Pierre. (13:429)

Along with quicker, more efficient means of transportation, a common language would facilitate the peaceful exchange of ideas:

Ces deux véhicules, qui tendent à effacer les frontières des empires et des intelligences, l’univers les a aujourd’hui: le premier, c’est le chemin de fer; le second, c’est la langue française.

Tels sont au dix-neuvième siècle, pour tous les peuples en voie de progrès, les deux moyens de communication, c’est-à-dire de civilisation, c’est-à-dire de paix. On va en wagon et l’on parle français.

Le chemin de fer règne par la toute-puissance de sa rapidité; la langue française par sa clarté, ce qui est la rapidité d’une langue, et par la suprématie séculaire de sa littérature. (13:429)

Hugo was following an established tradition when he posited the French language as the logical and efficient vehicle for intercommunication within Europe. He added to this topos his vision of a United States of Europe, patterned after France, with Paris as its capital. The former ultra-royalist traditionalist, who had campaigned for the preservation of medieval monuments, quickly became the herald of the onrushing process of modernization that characterized the bourgeois age. In Hugo’s linkage of the scientific and the moral domains, economic and technical progress will combine to free humans from long and backbreaking toil, thereby allowing them to devote more time and energy to higher pursuits. It is this linkage that is, to say the least, difficult to accept in our day:

Qui oserait nier ceci? Les cercle des lecteurs s’élargissant, le cercle des livres lus s’accroîtra. Or, le besoin de lire étant une trainée de poudre, une fois allumé il ne s’arrêtera plus, et, ceci combiné avec la simplification du travail matériel par les machines et l’augmentation du loisir de l’homme, le corps moins fatigué laissant l’intelligence plus libre, de vastes appétits de pensée s’éveilleront
dans tous les cerveaux; l’insatiable soif de connaître et de méditer deviendra de plus en plus la préoccupation humaine; les lieux bas seront désertés pour les lieux hauts, ascension naturelle de toute intelligence grandissante; *William Shakespeare*, 12:292)

Richard Grant has pointed out that the work and inventiveness of Mess Lethierry and especially Gilliatt in *Les Travailleurs de la mer* illustrates Hugo’s interrelated notions of technical progress and social amelioration: “the sea also represents that area of the world that has not come under man’s civilizing influence, his enlightened progress towards the good. Hence the vital importance of the steamship, which can subdue the elements and bring freedom and prosperity” (107-8). The modern steamship is thus part of a pioneering enterprise of settlement or colonization, a taming and organizing of the brutish wilderness. In Hugo’s epic of work and ingenuity, the innovative steam engine that Gilliatt labors so long and hard to free from the grasp of the ocean and its reefs is endowed with a symbolic ethical function of struggle against, and ultimate triumph over, the chaos of harsh natural forces. As David Charles has detailed, the technical creative imagination exhibited by Gilliatt, coupled with his sheer tenacity, eventually translates into social achievements:

*Les Travailleurs de la mer* forgent ainsi l’union des arts et de l’industrie, dans une représentation où l’art emprunte son principe à l’industrie, où l’industrie trouve son intégration à l’histoire. Cet emprunt fait du roman une machine — la métaphore est si courante que sa pertinence doit être vérifiée de temps à autre — employée à appliquer la loi du progrès, et à produire la République dans la fiction. (109)

As a modern Prometheus, Gilliatt is made to suffer for having wrested progress from the blind *ananké* of the ocean. As a partial outcast in the small, close-knit island community, he represents the universalism of progress against local conservatism and resistance: “Le bateau à vapeur des *Travailleurs de la mer* soumet l’archipel de la Manche à la loi du progrès” (Charles, 81). Staël had contrasted the more recent romantic literature of “le Nord” to the classical tradition of “le Midi.” In his later years, Hugo would link Romanticism with technical and social progress, and later with the ideal of a transnational Europe (as opposed to the local specificity of Classicism). In an 1846
fragment, Hugo links technical innovations, again particularly in the domains of transportation and communication, to social advancement in international terms, and even to literary progress. In the process, he occludes the violence by which linguistic and national unity was achieved within France:

Les chemins de fer tendent à mêler les peuples, à effacer les frontières, à placer les nations actuelles dans la relation où sont aujourd’hui entre elles les anciennes provinces, à faire par exemple que dans un siècle l’Allemagne soit à la France ce qu’est aujourd’hui la Bourgogne à la Picardie, à constituer l’unité européenne, et à créer au-dessus de toutes les nationalités circonscrites du temps présent la grande nationalité continentale, de même qu’aujourd’hui par exemple la nationalité française décompose, résume et domine toutes les nationalités provinciales. Ceci est la marche naturelle de la civilisation. Mais ce qui semble étrange et ce qui est pourtant bien vrai, c’est que les chemins de fer travaillent pour l’avenir de la poésie contemporaine. La révolution littéraire actuelle n’est autre chose en effet que la lutte du génie européen, dit romantique, contre le génie local, dit classique. (Choses vues, 11:937)

In the section entitled “Le Beau serviteur du vrai” of William Shakespeare (1864), Hugo propounded his view of the mission of the poet, and of artists in general: “Ah! esprits! soyez utiles! servez à quelque chose. Ne faites pas les dégoûtés quand il s’agit d’être efficaces et bons. L’art pour l’art peut être beau, mais l’art pour le progrès est plus beau encore, Rêver la rêverie est bien, rêver l’utopie est mieux” (12:399). By this time, he was defending the usefulness of artistic expression—“le Beau Utile”—against the various versions of Art for Art’s sake, represented by such younger poets as Leconte de Lisle, Charles Baudelaire, or Théophile Gautier: “L’art doit aider la science. Ces deux roues du progrès doivent tourner ensemble” (12:400). For Hugo, the conjoined efforts of artists and scientists would contribute to greater mutual tolerance and peace: “Plus de frontières; ceci est déjà presque obtenu; le va-et-vient des locomotives trousse et disloque les limites de peuple à peuple, le rail mêle l’homme à l’homme; la vie en commun de l’humanité commence; les poètes, les écrivains et les philosophes ont prêché la croisade sublime de la paix” (“La Civilisation,” Proses philosophiques de 1860-1865, 12:608).

Hugo was quite detailed in his linkage of technical and social progress, which can be described as a virtuous circle of reinforcing causes and effects. Just as more advanced
systems of transportation and communication would eliminate borders and contribute to peace and unity, these lasting benefits would in turn encourage (with the added bonus of reduced military expenditures) the sort of economic growth necessary to bridge the growing gap between rich and poor. Unity at the European level would thus ease tensions between social classes. In an 1855 speech commemorating the revolution of February 1848, Hugo illustrated the advantages of a common currency, which would facilitate transnational economic exchanges and growth, thereby reinforcing European unity: "En monnaie, comme en toute chose, circulation, c'est unité" (Actes et paroles II, 10:484).

Scientific and technical progress, economic growth, reconciliation between nations and social classes, and the elimination of war all contributed to, and were in turn reinforced by, European unification. The visionary and hortatory functions of artists in this Hugolian pattern of progress have already been mentioned. Hugo set an example through his constant calls for reconciliation at both the vertical (across social classes) and horizontal (across national borders) levels. In a fragment written after the savage repression of the Commune, he attempted to lenitively characterize the opposition between workers and the bourgeoisie as a mere "misunderstanding" between family members, that could be bridged through mutual tolerance:

Tout le péril de la situation actuelle est dans un malentendu. On croit que la division de la France en deux morceaux existe encore. On se trompe.

Autrefois il y avait l’aristocratie et le peuple. Aujourd’hui on dit: il y a la bourgeoisie et le peuple. Donc la situation est la même.

Erreur.

L’aristocratie et le peuple, c’est d’un côté le maître, de l’autre l’esclave; c’est-à-dire l’antagonisme. La bourgeoisie et le peuple, c’est d’un côté le frère aîné, de l’autre le frère cadet; c’est-à-dire la famille.

Autrefois deux ennemis, aujourd’hui deux frères. Profonde différence.

La solution politique, la voici: réconcilier ces deux frères.

Est-ce possible? Certes.

Autrefois entre le noble et le non-noble, il y avait un mur. Aujourd’hui entre le bourgeois qui est l’ouvrier arrivé et l’ouvrier qui est le bourgeois en marche, il n’y a qu’une main à tendre.

Je la tends. (Choses vues, 11:1335)
Hugo’s liberal pronouncements, such as calls for integration of workers into the propertied classes, made him a highly visible target for attacks from both the right and left. He thus acquired complementary political images, on one hand as an irresponsible demagogue verging on anarchism, and as a muddled idealist on the other, providing ideological cover for a bourgeois system that was pursuing imperialism abroad and repression at home. These dual lines of political criticism reflect the inherent contradictions, not just of Hugo, but of the republican left during the Third Republic. Hugo’s social ideal is exemplified by Jean Valjean, the proletarian and former convict who starts a rigidly paternalistic company that brings jobs, prosperity, and bourgeois morality to a poverty-stricken town. When he is forced to leave, the company folds, and the social ills Hugo often decried, such as crime and prostitution, quickly return. The workers, who were not owners, and who lacked the guiding hand of their providential innovator, leader, and father-figure—“Il s’appelait le père Madeleine” (2:128)—were unwilling or unable to run the company on their own: “la faûilte vint. Et puis plus rien pour les pauvres. Tout s’évanouit” (2:287).

Although Marxist critics would later attempt to classify Hugo as sharing ideological affinities with communism, there is no doubt that he differed fundamentally from Marx and other nineteenth-century secular prophets on the issue of private property and enterprise: “Propriété et société sont deux termes identiques. La société parfaite, ce serait tout homme propriétaire. C’est là qu’il faut tendre” (“La Civilisation,” Proses philosophiques de 1860-1865, 12:606). In Choses vues, Hugo provided the following definition: “Communisme: rêve de quelques-uns et cauchemar de tous” (11:1242). He also devised a sardonic rejoinder to Pierre-Joseph Proudhon’s famous dictum: “La propriété — de l’oiseau — c’est le vol” (11:999). Hugo consistently denied any legitimacy to communism as a historical continuation or achievement of the French Revolution:

Les communistes nous invitent à méditer cette règle de trois:
Le communisme sera à la république ce que la république a été à la quasi-monarchie.
Je les invite à méditer celle-ci:
L'état sauvage sera au communisme ce que le communisme est à la république. (*Choses vues*, 11:1153)

For Hugo, the role of the propertied classes was to assist workers in climbing the economic ladder, just as Europe would help Africa climb the rungs of civilization. And just as the people looked to a visionary poet to guide them toward the future, workers needed a capable, devoted manager to direct them. Hugo's faith in economic and historical progress, while glowingly advocated, was neither simple nor self-fulfilling. In a secularized transposition of priestly service to a deserving congregation, it predicated paternalistic, well-intentioned leaders who would willingly assist followers, who would in turn accept the higher ethical or civilizational standards exemplified by their leaders. In the conclusion to *Le Rhin*, Hugo's political liberalism was combined with his version of the Staëlilian Nord/Midi dichotomy:

Autrefois, du temps où vivaient les antiques sociétés, le midi gouvernait le monde et le nord le bouleversait; de même, dans un ordre de faits différent, mais parallèle, l'aristocratie, riche, éclairée et heureuse, menait l'état, et la démocratie, pauvre, sombre et misérable, le troublait. Si diverses que soient en apparence, au premier coup d'œil, l'histoire extérieure et l'histoire intérieure des nations depuis trois mille ans, au fond de ces deux histoires il n'y a qu'un seul fait: la lutte du malaise contre le bien-être. A de certains moments, les peuples mal situés dérangent l'ordre européen, les classes mal partagées dérangent l'ordre social. Tantôt l'Europe, tantôt l'état, sont brusquement et violemment attaqués, l'Europe par ceux qui ont froid, l'état par ceux qui ont faim; c'est-à-dire l'une par le nord, l'autre par le peuple. Le nord procède par invasions, et le peuple par révolutions. (13:433)

The Hugolian solution to the twin problems of war and social injustice was to willingly integrate, politically and economically, the northern countries and the lower classes:

Le nord et le peuple sont les réservoirs de l'humanité. Aidons-les à s'écouler tranquillement vers les lieux, vers les choses et vers les idées qu'ils doivent féconder. Ne les laissons pas déborder. Offrons, à la fois par prudence et par devoir, une issue large et pacifique aux nations mal situées vers les zones favorisées du soleil et aux classes mal partagées vers les jouissances sociales. Supprimons le malaise partout. Ce sera supprimer les causes de guerres dans le continent et les causes de révolutions dans l'état. Pour la politique intérieure comme pour la politique extérieure, pour les nations entre elles comme pour les classes dans le pays, pour l'Europe comme pour la société, le secret de la paix est
peut-être dans un seul mot: donner au nord sa part de midi et au peuple sa part de pouvoir. (13:434)

The geographical axis of Hugo's recommendations could be inverted, for example in order to justify the colonization of Africa. However, the basic Hugolian pattern of reconciliation between classes and nations—in the idealized form of selfless assistance from one to the other—through material and moral progress, would be reaffirmed throughout most of his work. The accelerating rate and increased visibility of technological transformations in his century would only reinforce what for Hugo seemed to be a historical predestination.

Conclusion

The vision of a united, peaceful, and prosperous Europe gradually became central to Hugo's providential projection of historical finality, his secularized version of Christian eschatology. Unity would bring peace to the often warring continent, which would allow new resources and energies to be devoted to economically useful endeavors, which would in turn end the vicious generational cycle of endemic misery endured by a large part of the population. Among all the prophets of European unity, Hugo delivered the most vivid and eloquent pronouncements, thereby producing impossibly high expectations as to its potential value. Outside of Hugo's demiurgic discourse, no form of political organization could embody such an auspicious vision of historical finality.

Although it was sometimes shaken by catastrophic historical events, particularly during and immediately after the Franco-Prussian War, Hugo's abiding faith in the future reconciliation of often warring European nations remained intact throughout his life. His uninterrupted belief in the necessity and inevitability of European union coexisted, quite openly and candidly, with a Francocentric orientation that made the future organization of Europe appear in clear terms: it would have Paris as its capital, the Declaration of the Rights of Man as its political basis, and French as its common language. This particular combination of opposites, a utopian vision of Europe and a latent form of nationalism,
reflected other clashing Hugolian juxtapositions, such as triumphant rationalism and lingering mysticism, or nostalgic medievalism allied with forward-looking liberal republicanism.

In the aftermath of the Franco-Prussian War, the united German Empire became the dominant political and economic power in continental Europe. Instead of the alliance between France and Germany that Hugo had envisioned, the smoldering rivalry between the two countries—with the issue of the annexed regions of Alsace-Lorraine as a catalyst—would obviate any possibility of a European union for decades to come. For a significant cross-section of French intellectuals, the dream of la Revanche would displace revolutionary and constitutional disputes as the crucial issue bequeathed by history. The next chapter will examine the work of the author who best exemplified that dream, and who was also largely responsible for popularizing the term “les intellectuels”—which he meant as an insult. While an admirer of part of Hugo’s legacy, Maurice Barrès came to represent in his literary and political activities the negation of the Hugolian vision of a united Europe.
Chapter 5

The Shrunken Europe of Maurice Barrès

C’est que la place occupée par Barrès prosateur, ce sont les hommes de La Nouvelle Revue Française, pratiquant comme personne la méthode de l’ôte-toi de là que je m’y mette, qui l’ont les premiers, et à leur profit personnel, niée. La critique sans mesure de Barrès n’a fait place nette qu’au Nathanaël des Nourritures terrestres, que Gide n’aurait jamais enfanté tout seul, et qui a vilainement renié ce qu’il devait à son véritable père, Barrès. Mais enfin, de Barrès à Gide, l’homme ne monte pas: il descend. Quant à l’écrivain, il n’est qu’à voir le désossement progressif de la prose française, faute d’autres maîtres que des escamoteurs, pour ressentir l’absence de Barrès, que n’a pu combler Giraudoux. Un jour viendra où l’on relira Barrès, en faisant à ses idées aussi peu de place que l’on en donne à celles de Saint-Simon, quand on va chez ce grand seigneur chercher des leçons de langage. Ce jour-là, plus personne depuis longtemps ne lira Le voyage d’Urien ni La Porte étroite ni La Symphonie pastorale et M. Gide ne comptera plus dans l’histoire de la prose française où il aura rejoint son vieil ennemi Rémy de Gourmont. Ce jour-là, le récit de Mme Aravian dans Les Déracinés, l’extraordinaire page sur les derniers jours du Tasse ou Le Regard sur la prairie dans Du Sang, de la Volupté et de la Mort, tel moment du Jardin de Bérénice ou d’Amori et dolori sacrum, livreront à l’écrivain de l’avenir les secrets d’un métier, qu’on ne peut apprendre sans tenir compte de cette étape barrésienne, de cette science barrésienne de la phrase, de ce sens barrésien de la musique dans les mots. (Aragon, Préface, 2:xii-xiii)

I begin this chapter with Louis Aragon’s preface to volume 2 of L’Œuvre de Maurice Barrès for three main reasons. It is indicative of Barrès’s immense stature as a novelist during and after the Belle Epoque, including among those who opposed him politically, such as, aside from Aragon himself, Marcel Proust and Léon Blum. His other admirers included Jean Cocteau, André Malraux and Henri de Montherlant. Referring to his generation, François Mauriac wrote in the preface to volume 1 of L’Œuvre: “Barrès
demeurait pour nous le maître" (xi). Even those who reviled his pervasive influence in French letters and politics negatively confirmed Barrès’s crucial role. As the most influential advocate of “la Revanche,” as the most relentlessly enthusiastic supporter of the French war effort, Barrès was a natural target for the postwar Dadaists, who staged his “trial” in 1921 for “crimes contre la sûreté de l’esprit.” This rejection of a prewar literary giant can be compared to the symbolic expulsion of Anatole France by the Surrealists in their 1924 pamphlet, *Un Cadavre* (Nadeau, 197-200). Another famously negative portrayal of Barrès’s influence is found in Jean-Paul Sartre’s *L’Enfance d’un chef*.

Aragon’s effusive praise for the literary talent of Barrès is also a contrapuntal starting point for more recent critical evaluations of Barrès’s work, which have generally dealt less with his undeniable talent as a stylist than with his political significance as a precursor of modern European fascism. Despite the prediction of the former surrealist who converted to communism, Barrès is read today—almost exclusively by historians and literary critics—precisely for his ideas. Stewart Doty defines him as a “counterrevolutionary;” Robert Soucy presents the “case” of Barrès in *Fascism in France*; while David Carroll lists him as one of the “fathers of literary fascism.” The most thorough and insightful of the more recent examinations of Barrès’s work has come from Zeev Sternhell. Through four books, starting with *Maurice Barrès et le nationalisme français*, Sternhell has convincingly established Barrès as one of the most coherent and influential of the pre-fascist intellectuals.

Finally, Aragon’s comparison of Barrès and Gide recalls the controversy over the nationalistic “rootedness” that Barrès championed, starting with his second trilogy, *Le Roman de l’énergie nationale*. Gide’s *Les Nourritures terrestres* was published in 1897, the same year as Barrès’s *Les Déracinés* (which would be followed by *L’Appel au soldat* in 1900 and *Leurs Figures* in 1902). With this novel, Barrès inaugurated a long series of texts in which he stressed an unwavering adherence to a fixed personal identity firmly grounded, or subsumed, in a larger, all-encompassing collective entity: “C’est tout un vertige où l’individu s’abîme pour se retrouver dans la famille, dans la race, dans la
nation” (Scènes et doctrines du nationalisme, 2:32). Gide’s work, meanwhile, was in a way similar to the individualistic Culte du Moi of Barrès’s first trilogy—Sous l’œil des barbares (1888), Un Homme libre (1889), Le Jardin de Bérénice (1891). Gide found freedom and cultural enrichment precisely in the pluralistic “uprootedness,” or in the “cosmopolitanism,” that Barrès had come to despise. This opposition, which is directly linked to the theme of Europe, was developed in Prêtétextes, where Gide responded to Barrès’s sustained botanical metaphors with his own: “Né à Paris, d’un père Uzétien et d’une mère Normande, où voulez-vous, Monsieur Barrès, que je m’enracine?” (51). Of course, a similarly absurd question could have been formulated for Barrès, who lived in Paris, and whose ancestors came from Auvergne as well as Lorraine.

Barrès represents a break with “l’esprit européen” of Germaine de Staël, and with the pan-European humanism of Victor Hugo (despite his frequent praise for Hugo as a poet). In many ways he is, through his restrictive, jingoistic form of nationalism, the ultimate anti-European, notwithstanding the attempt of his son to link him to the Gaullist concept of “l’Europe des patries” after the Second World War. Despite his early enthusiasms for the cultural influences of Spain and Italy, Barrès’s theory of rootedness led him to an increasingly reductive, narrowly construed view of a timeless, unchanging French national identity. After Barrès systematized his nationalism, applying it to the cultural and economic realms as well as the political, he was less given to praising the influences of other countries. The only exceptions were a few “hommes de génie.”

Ridiculing the Nietzschean concept of the “good European,” Barrès represented individual national cultures as inherently self-contained and largely impenetrable for most outsiders, thereby limiting his Europe to a select group of Great Men who transcended their national origin:

Barrès provides one of the main links between the positivistic scientism of Hippolyte Taine and Ernest Renan and the more radical forms of social Darwinism of the later, openly fascist writers. Maurice Barrès and Charles Maurras, despite their obvious differences, were the most influential French writers whose revanchist rallying cries preceded and prefigured a curious mutation of the European topos: fascist Europe. Later represented by younger authors such as Robert Brasillach and Pierre Drieu la Rochelle, as well as by the special case of Louis-Ferdinand Céline, this form of literary ultranationalism and fascism (the variations of which Carroll has examined at length) paradoxically veered into the tacit acceptance of a "new European order" built around a dominant nazi Germany—and, in large part, around a shared exclusionary hatred of Jews. The epigones of the most vitriolic advocates of war against Germany before World War One consequently descended into collaboration with the German occupiers during World War Two, thus transcending their ultra-patriotism through ideological convergence with their nazi and fascist counterparts.

**Literature and Politics**

Not content with being one of the most influential French writers of his day, Maurice Barrès (1862-1923) was also an active politician for most of his adult life. Born in the Lorraine region, 8 years before the disastrous Franco-Prussian War, Barrès is one of the best representatives, in his literary and political activities, of a significant intellectual current of patriotic mysticism in turn-of-the-century France that urged the defeated nation to focus its moral and military energies on "la ligne bleue des Vosges." While he did live to see the French recapture of Alsace and Lorraine with the end of World War One, he was less successful in the other political causes he championed as an anti-Dreyfusard and in his calls for an authoritarian republic with a strong, Napoleonic leader.

A staunch defender of the values of French traditionalism and nationalism, Barrès hated the parliamentary republic that followed the humiliating defeat of 1870—and that he considered hopelessly weak and corrupt. However, he refused to participate in the
royalist "nationalisme intégral" of Charles Maurras’s *Action française*, specifically because he believed that the principle of republican governmental institutions had become an inescapable part of the traditions of France. In *Scènes et doctrines du nationalisme*, which was published in 1902, he called for an acceptance of the republican constitutional system—although not in its parliamentary incarnation—precisely for conservative reasons: “Vous pensez que la Révolution a fait dévier les destinées du peuple français? Eh bien! considérez que, telle quelle, la France est la conséquence de ces événements que vous déplorez. Vous ne pouvez pas, sous peine de la ruiner, chercher à effacer en elle le principe qui anime ses institutions et son esprit” (5:78).

Barrès’s embrace of Catholicism derived less from deeply held religious faith than from a similar principle, that of upholding established French traditions: “Que me demande-t-on si je crois? Je suis sûr que j’appartiens à la civilisation du Christ, et que c’est mon destin de la proclamer et de la défendre” (*La Grande Pitié des églises de France*, 8:158-9). He often expressed his nationalism in quasi-religious terms, thus endowing his political views with a metaphysical, absolute aura: “J’ai ramené ma piété du ciel sur la terre, sur la terre de mes morts” (*Scènes*, 5:25). Conversely, he tended to nationalize his religious faith, and to downplay the universalistic aspect of Catholicism. Admiring a mass for children in the Reims cathedral, which had long been the site for royal coronations, Barrès links religious tradition to nationalist rootedness, and in particular to French military heroes:

“J’admire l’intensité de la formation qu’ils subissent. Ce qui vient de leur être départi d’une manière mystérieuse, le jeune abbé le leur éclaire dans un petit discours entraînant qui s’achève sur ces mots: ‘Nous disons hautement, à la Bayard, à la Duguesclin, à la Jeanne d’Arc: Vive le Christ!’ Où trouver un plus beau patronage sous lequel placer un jeune Français? (*La Grande Pitié des églises de France*, 8:160)

Barrès was an early follower of General Boulanger, the former Defense Minister who made an unsuccessful attempt at turning the parliament-centered Third Republic into an authoritarian regime with a dominant executive branch. He saw in Boulanger the sort of strong leader who could reverse previous French setbacks: “ces ondes pourront bouleverser l’Europe et relever le niveau descendant de la France” (*L’Appel au soldat*, 178).
3:459). Elected Député from Nancy in 1889 as a member of the Boulangist movement, Barrès was, at the age of 26, the youngest member of the National Assembly (as well as an already famous novelist). His electoral platform, predictably enough, included a protectionist call for unspecified measures “pour garantir les travailleurs français contre la concurrence des ouvriers étrangers” (Girardet, 137). Boulangism clearly constituted for him an innovative approach to the historical cycle of seemingly perennial constitutional crises and alternating political regimes in France since the 1789 Revolution, one that promised to privilege a newfound sense of national cohesion over the inherited partisan rivalries: “Que nous font à nous, nouveaux venus, ces vieilles querelles: républicains, royalistes ou bonapartistes?” (“Boulangisme. Notes d’un lettré,” 1:512). After Boulanger’s suicide in 1891 and the collapse of his movement, Barrès found another political home in Paul Dérouléde’s Ligue des Patriotes, becoming its leader after Dérouléde’s death in 1914. The literary and political career of Maurice Barrès covered some of the most turbulent events of recent French history. Aside from the tragicomic episode of the Boulangist movement, there was the scandal over the financing of the Panama Canal (during which Barrès honed his antiparliamentary rhetoric), the traumatic Dreyfus Affair, the ensuing battle over the separation of Church and State, colonial entanglements (including French rivalries with Great Britain at Fachoda, and with Germany over Morocco), and World War One and its aftermath (when Barrès sought to separate the Rhineland from Prussia).

Barrès’s hatred of the parliamentary regime, which he expressed often and virulently—especially in Leurs Figures, Une Journée parlementaire, and Dans le cloaque—rested on a paradox: it was precisely the sort of strong, populist leader he called for who had lost the regions of Alsace and Lorraine during the Franco-Prussian War, while it was the “weak,” “corrupt” parliamentary Third Republic that eventually waged a long and very bloody war in order to recover them. Of course, by the beginning of the First World War, Barrès had already been reelected as a Député after a long absence from the National Assembly, and had to a certain extent muted his revolutionary rhetoric and activities. After the war, he would even form a temporary electoral alliance
with members of that embodiment of the parliamentary regime he had sought to
overthrow, the Radical Party. Although he initially represented a district of Lorraine,
Barrès lost his seat in 1893. His subsequent campaigns for parliamentary office in Nancy
were all unsuccessful. It was not until 1906, the year he was elected to the Académie
française, that he managed to return to the Palais-Bourbon—as a representative, 
ironically, of Paris, a seat he held until his death.

Like most writers, Maurice Barrès embodied his share of contradictions: he
opposed the parliamentary regime of the Third Republic while repeatedly running for
parliamentary office; he mythologized his self-proclaimed “rootedness” in his native
Lorraine, but spent most of his life in cosmopolitan Paris; and he promoted rigorous
intellectual elitism alongside ostensibly classless nationalism. He was also capable of
forming temporary alliances with a wide range of political friends and adversaries, as
when he directed La Cocarde, the newspaper Sternhell identifies in La Droite
révolutionnaire (62-4) as a forerunner of the ideological alliance of nationalism and
socialism. However, Barrès was extremely consistent, even predictable, once his
nationalist doctrine had become established. It colored nearly all his texts, whether
journalistic or more purely literary, and was expressed throughout his political life. He
applied his exclusionary form of nationalism to culture and economics as well as politics,
both at home and abroad. Barrès thus defined the “violentes passions nationalistes” of his
generation: “c’est l’antisémitisme, c’est l’antiprotestantisme, c’est une protestation
contre l’accession des étrangers aux charges de l’État; c’est encore un mouvement
provincialiste. Ces mouvements, ces passions, il faut les justifier et les hausser à la
dignité de vérités françaises” (Scènes, 5:109). Just as he sought French—not universal—
truths, he strove to find harmony with all forms of thought and action that were specific
to his country:

Il me faut m’asseoir au point exact que réclament mes yeux tels que me
les firent les siècles, au point d’où toutes choses se disposent à la mesure d’un
Français. L’ensemble de ces rapports justes et vrais entre des objets donnés et un
homme déterminé, le Français, c’est la vérité et la justice française, trouver ces
rapports, c’est la raison française. Et le nationalisme net, ce n’est rien d’autre que
de savoir l’existence de ce point, de le chercher et, l’ayant atteint, de nous y tenir
pour prendre de là notre art, notre politique et toutes nos activités. (5:27)
It comes as no surprise that Barrès did not trust the post-World War One Society of Nations (which was based in Geneva), and saw little usefulness for it in terms of the interests of his country: “Je suis nationaliste et je ne vois rien qui puisse me donner confiance dans le courant internationaliste” (Mes Cahiers, 20:83). The concept of a multinational organization was opposed to his politics; and its symbolism went against his esthetic of rootedness: “les difficultés françaises doivent être résolues par rapport à la France, pour le bien de la France. A Genève, on peut ramasser des éléments de connaissance; les décisions doivent toujours être prises par des Français, en ayant égard d’abord à l’intérêt français” (20:83).

Barrès’s life overlapped the half-century between the beginning of the Franco-Prussian War and the Treaty of Versailles that formally ended the First World War. Starting in 1914, sensing the possibility of seeing Alsace and Lorraine liberated at last, he unswervingly praised the French war effort in his speeches at the National Assembly, and in an monumental series of articles published in L’Echo de Paris, which were later collected in Chronique de la Grande Guerre. Barrès was not the only French writer to support the war by word or deed: Charles Péguy and Alain-Fournier were killed at the front, and Guillaume Apollinaire was wounded. However, in his triple role as politician, journalist, and celebrated novelist, Barrès was the most visible and perhaps the most enthusiastic proponent of “la revanche,” in spite of the war’s unprecedented cost in human lives: “Cette guerre des tranchées est sainte; elle est tout imprégnée de sang, elle est tout imprégnée d’âme” (Les Traits éternels de la France, 8:301). Other evaluations of the war and its results were often less sanguine. Paul Valéry’s “La Crise de l’esprit” begins with a new realization of Europe’s fragility: “Nous autres, civilisations, nous savons maintenant que nous sommes mortelles” (988). Published shortly after the war, this text reflects a collective shudder at the length and extent of the carnage, and its effects on Europeans’ perceptions of the value of their civilizations: “Tout ne s’est pas perdu, mais tout s’est senti périr” (989). During the conflict, in “Aux Peuples assassinés,” Romain Rolland, one of the few openly pacifist writers (and thus a direct enemy of Barrès), had put it more directly: “La civilisation d’Europe sent le cadavre”
In part, the postwar Dada and Surrealist movements constituted an expression of revulsion with this “European civilization,” which, despite its professed values, had culminated in such methodical and senseless warfare.

**European Nationalisms**

Surprisingly, the concept of Europe looms large in the work of Maurice Barrès, although its representation is, on balance, mostly negative. This ultra-nationalist had a lifelong fascination with the cultures of several European countries, a fascination demonstrated in the intertwined skein of his travels, writings and political activities. Thus, while looking inward for renewed national strength in his political activities, Barrès was also looking outward as a writer of lyrical fiction and essays, particularly towards Spain and Italy, in which he saw natural sources of the sort of moral and instinctual vitality which an excessive degree of Germanic intellectual influence had weakened in France. The Europe of Barrès was first and foremost an extension of his view of nationalism as the driving force of the modern world. An examination of the European theme must therefore encompass Barrès’s elaborate concept of modern nationalism, and specifically of French nationalism. His work represents a significant reaction against the universalistic tendencies which he linked to a misreading of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution. For Barrès, the Revolutionary and, in particular, Napoleonic legacy was mainly the reorganization of Europe according to national groupings, instead of outmoded multi-ethnic states. The modern nation-state, and not a political ideology with universalistic pretensions, was the real result of the Revolution:

*La Révolution française a simplement dit que les Droits de l’Homme et du Citoyen étaient les mêmes partout, parce que ce sont des droits qui tiennent à la qualité d’homme, mais il ne s’ensuit aucune conséquence sur la manière dont l’humanité s’organisera. Invitée à s’organiser, l’Europe s’est groupée selon le principe des nationalités. (Scènes, 5:420-1)*

In this particular reading of post-Revolutionary history, the torch of nationalism, ignited in France, had therefore been passed on to other peoples by armies united under a
strong, purposeful leader (the sort of proto-fascist leader Barrès called for in his day), at a time when France was not lacking in “énergie nationale.” Ignoring the fact that Napoleon had attempted to establish a multinational empire dominated by France, Barrès confused the Emperor’s presumed intent with the series of nationalistic reactions that resulted from his policies of conquest, occupation, and annexation. Europe has only twice been “united” by military means in the course of modern history: under Napoleon and under Hitler. An unabashed admirer of the Emperor, Barrès offered in *Les Déracinés* a veritable panegyric of his historical role:

Les peuples non plus ne se trompèrent pas — Français, Allemands, Italiens, Polonais, Russes — quand chacun d’eux crut Napoléon né spécialement pour l’électriser: car cela est exact qu’il a tiré de leur léthargie les nationalités. Toutes les nationalités en Europe et, depuis un siècle, chaque génération en France! Aux libéraux de la Restauration, aux romantiques de 1830, aux messianistes de 1848, aux administrateurs du second Empire, aux internationalistes qui rêvent d’obtenir du prolétariat européen l’empire de Charlemagne — à ces Sturel, préoccupés d’allier l’analyse à l’action, il donne la flamme. (3:166-7)\(^\text{18}\)

The brave new nationalistic world ushered in by the Revolution and by the Napoleonic epic was not one of peace and prosperity, and especially not one of inter-ethnic *fraternité*. The corollary of each national group’s self-affirmation was hostility towards competing nation-states. Strangely prescient—in light of the recent bloody disintegration of multi-ethnic Yugoslavia—Barrès foresaw lasting hatreds and struggles between established or emerging nationalities, who would affirm their internal identity through violent rejection of the Other:

Le principe des nationalités, voilà la conséquence immédiate de la Révolution française, conséquence inaperçue des acteurs même de la Révolution, mais tout à fait logique dans l’ordre politique. [...] Une même langue, des légendes communes, voilà ce qui constitue les nationalités. La nationalité tchèque, l’irlandaise, etc., etc., reparurent. Et comment s’affirment-elles? Par la haine du voisin. Examinez tous ces peuples sortis de l’oppression turque: que font-ils d’abord? Serbes, Grecs, Bulgares: ils se persécutent. (*Scènes, 5:420*)

Barrès saw the turn of the century as a period of national regression, when the literature and language of France were not as dominant in Europe as they had been

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during the eighteenth century, when the aftermath of the crushing military and political defeat of the Franco-Prussian War seemed to coincide with a deterioration in the traditional cultural influence of the French nation on its neighbors. Hence an obsession with the perceived decline or decadence of the country that had once dominated Europe—what Barrès famously called in the title to chapter 9 of *Les Déracinés* “la France dissociée et décérébrée” (3:179)—and the need for a renewed “énergie nationale” to reverse the trend. This moral and spiritual energy would be found in “la vieille âme française, militaire et rurale” (Colette Baudoche, 6:169).

To his regret, Barrès viewed the French nation-state as mainly a historical construct, not a racially homogeneous group having naturally evolved its own social and political system: “Hélas! Il n’y a point de race française, mais un peuple français, une nation française, c’est-à-dire une collectivité de formation politique” (Scènes, 5:86). Viewing this French specificity as a potential weakness, he envied the “organic,” instinctual unity that he perceived in the adversaries of France, England and Germany: “Certaines races enfin arrivent à prendre conscience d’elles-mêmes organiquement. C’est le cas des collectivités anglo-saxonnes et teutoniques qui sont, de plus en plus, en voie de se créer comme races” (5:86).

The Land and the Dead—“la doctrine de la Terre et des Morts”—are for Barrès the inescapable, concrete embodiments of French nationhood. The organic attachment, the individual acquiescence to the immutable legacy bequeathed by history (territory, ancestors and the values they represent) define the relationships between French citizens, their leadership, and their collective societal entity. It is useful to compare this historical but nevertheless essentialist definition of national identity with what has slowly evolved into the European Union since the end of World War Two. The step-by-step approach towards a multinational entity initiated by Jean Monnet in 1950 was predicated on premises of mutual tolerance and commonality of interests—rational premises that are totally incompatible with the mystical form of patriotism espoused by Barrès. To a great extent, the post-war movement toward European unity resulted from the previous excesses of competing nationalisms, from the increasingly urgent need to integrate
existing nation-states into a more peaceful and stable European institutional framework. Barrès often expressed his version of nationalism in terms so extreme as to verge on fascism. Nonetheless, his exaltation of the role of the modern nation-state prefigured much of the current opposition to the progressive formation of supranational institutions within Europe.\(^{19}\)

**North and South**

In some respects, Barrès tended to invert the pre-established theory of climactic determinism—developed by Montesquieu, and later reformulated by Staël—as shaping national character. The more southerly nations of Europe, and in particular France, were in his view more capable of striking a balance between relativistic emotion and absolutist reason. Germany and Great Britain, the dominant, and northerly, economic and military powers of his day, could only achieve a sterile form of mechanical, domineering strength based on a coldly abstract, universalistic pattern of logic. The author of such lyrical works as *Du Sang, de la volupté et de la mort* (1894), *Amori et dolori sacrum* (1903) and *Gréco ou le secret de Tolède* (1912) thus sought personal spiritual and esthetic regeneration in the southerly cities of Spain and Italy. In “Amitié espagnole,” a 1913 article, Barrès makes this north-south dichotomy explicit, designating the cities of southern, Latin Europe as the sources of his literary inspiration: “Il y a vingt ans, tandis que mes camarades s’en allaient chez les Tolstoï, les Nietzsche, les Ibsen et les Walt Whitman et prétendaient recevoir du Nord la lumière, je trouvais mes inspirations à Venise, à Tolède, à Cordoue; et c’est dans le décor du Montserrat que je comprenais Wagner” (7:412).

Since Germany, the representative of modern rationalist values such as organization and efficiency,\(^{20}\) had triumphed militarily, Barrès affirmed the superiority of instinctual, non-logical forces which he found in Latin, Catholic countries that were less economically developed. In valuing instinctive emotion over abstract reason, he applied a *fin de siècle* form of decadent romantic sensibility—“le Culte du Moi”—to his political writings.\(^{21}\) His subsequent conversion from individualism to nationalism can be compared
to the conversion of Joris-Karl Huysmans to Catholicism after *A rebours*. Barrès quickly evolved from the purely ego-driven “Culte du Moi” of his first trilogy to a quest for immutable roots, which led to a veneration for the land and for the dead ancestors buried therein—“le Culte de la Terre et des Morts”—and to a particularly rigid form of intellectual determinism:

Le “Moi” s’anéantit sous nos regards d’une manière plus terrifiante encore si nous distinguons notre automatisme. Quelle chose d’éternel git en nous dont nous n’avons que l’usufruit, mais cette jouissance même est réglée par les morts. Tous les maîtres qui nous ont précédés et que j’ai tant aimés, et non seulement les Hugo, les Michelet, mais ceux qui font transition, les Taine, les Renan, croyaient à une raison indépendante existant en chacun de nous et qui nous permet d’approcher la vérité. L’individu! son intelligence, sa faculté de saisir les lois de l’univers! Il faut en rabattre. Nous ne sommes pas les maîtres des pensées qui naissent en nous. Elles ne viennent pas de notre intelligence; elles sont des façons de réagir où se traduisent de très anciennes dispositions physiologiques. Selon le milieu où nous sommes plongés, nous élaborons des jugements et des raisonnements. Il n’y a pas d’idées personnelles; les idées même les plus rares, les jugements même les plus abstraits, les sophismes de la métaphysique la plus infatüée sont des façons de sentir générales et apparaissent nécessairement chez tous les êtres de même organisme assiégés par les mêmes images. Notre raison, cette reine enchaînée, nous oblige à placer nos pas sur les pas de nos prédécesseurs. *(Amori et dolori sacrum, 7:126-7; also found in Scènes, 5:31)*

The individualistic revolt of *Un Homme libre*, the antisocial connotations of *L’Ennemi des lois* thus faded into an acceptance of nationalistic determinism, into an identification with the sort of pre-totalitarian collective ego that Gustave Le Bon announced in *Psychologie des foules* (1895). “Barbarians,” who in the first trilogy had been the embodiment of cultural mediocrity, of all that stifled the development of the Self, became simply identified with foreigners, with all those who had different roots: “J’ai conscience que mon pays connaîtra d’échapper au flot des barbares qui le recouvrent et le salissent” (“Boulangisme. Notes d’un lettré,” 1:516). In *Scènes et doctrines du nationalisme*, Barrès gave a distinctly nationalistic interpretation of his early work: “l’Homme libre incita bien des jeunes gens à se différencier des Barbares (c’est-à-dire des étrangers), à reconnaître leur véritable nature, à faire de leur ‘âme’ le meilleur emploi” (5:29). In his 1904 preface to a new edition of *Un Homme libre*, he was also
very clear about his personal evolution and its political consequences: “Oui, l’homme libre venait de distinguer et d’accepter son déterminisme” (1:139).

For Barrès, roots were by definition hereditary and exclusive; and southern, Latin nations, united by traditional Catholicism, were in his view more apt to have an intuitive grasp of them. Opposed to what he considered to be the post-Enlightenment model of rational, voluntary adherence to a nation-state based on universalistic values, he stressed a pre-logical, deterministic link between individuals and the ancestral traditions which shaped them, relegating the entire issue of personal freedom to the single, momentous decision of whether to accept the organic solidarity with the Land and the Dead: “Un nationaliste, c’est un Français qui a pris conscience de sa formation. Nationalisme est acceptation d’un déterminisme” (Scènes, 5:25). From this decision came a comprehensive world-view. In a review of Colette Baudoche, Paul Bourget, Barrès’s friend and fellow Academician, presented strict adherence to societal discipline as the logical culmination of the process of self-affirmation, in a seamless, harmonious amalgamation (apparently devoid, that is, of internal conflicts of interest) of individuals with the diverse forms of inherited social institutions that link them:

L’organe local de [notre] race est la nation, plus profondément la région, et plus profondément encore la famille. Ou plutôt, nation, région, famille ne font qu’un. Ce qui enrichit ou appauvrit l’un, appauvrît ou enrichit l’autre. Quand la nation souffre, la ville souffre, et les familles de la ville et les individus qui composent ces familles. La culture du moi, par laquelle avait commencé le sensitif passionné de l’Homme libre, aboutit donc à un acte de foi envers les antiques disciplines qui subordonnaient le développement de la personne au développement de la Cité. (149)

**Rootedness**

Once his nationalism was firmly in place, there could be no Deleuzean rhizome, no multiplicity or horizontal network of roots for Barrès. In a departure from his previous quest for cultural stimuli abroad, he defined his metaphorical rootedness as strictly vertical, limited to one land, one culture—hence his consistently negative use of such words as “cosmopolite” or “apatride.” As Barrès repeats endlessly, his roots are in the Lorraine region: the prefatory phrase “Je suis lorrain,” for instance, keeps
reappearing as a causative determinant in *Scènes et doctrines du nationalisme*. In *Mes Cahiers*, he specifies that his roots condition, indeed govern, his thought: “Ma pensée est lorraine. Ce n’est point par ma préférence, par ma volonté, par mon goût réfléchi ou mon caprice; la Lorraine est au fond de ma pensée” (14:174). Barrès’s Lorraine, however, is as highly personal a construct as the cities of Venice or Toledo.²⁴ Barrès also proclaims himself attached to Alsace, despite the differences between the two regions. The motivation for this last attachment probably has more to do with opposition to German occupation than with cultural roots. Barrès assigns, in book after book, a timeless mission to these twinned “Marches de l’Est”: “La romanisation des Germains est la tendance constante de l’Alsacien-Lorrain” (*Au Service de l’Allemagne*, 6:64). These border regions, instead of encouraging cultural osmosis, should in his view act as barriers or shields: “Ce fut la destinée constante de notre Lorraine de se sacrifier pour que le germanisme, déjà filtré par nos voisins d’Alsace, ne dénaturât point la civilisation latine” (*Amori et dolori sacram*, 7:133). If Barrès felt any meaningful attachment to a wider entity than his native Lorraine and the French nation, it was not to some vague notion of Europe, which he disdained, but to the historical idea—which is at least as vague—of a Latin civilization: “C’est la civilisation classique latine à quoi me prédispose ma destinée lorraine” (*Mes Cahiers*, 14:174).

Barrès’s land-based determinism reflected his literary influences, particularly Taine’s famous triptych of causal factors for artistic production—“la race, le milieu, le moment”—and Renan’s emphasis on the role of common ancestors.²⁵ Starting from the domain of esthetic appreciation, Barrès extended his own determinism to all forms of individual thought and emotion, reifying local (or religious/racial) identities into monolithic, mutually exclusive essences: “Constatez que vous êtes faits pour sentir en Lorrains, en Alsaciens, en Bretons, en Belges, en Juifs” (*Un Homme libre*, 1:270). In *Prétextes*, Gide, sensing the tribalist danger of such a reductive view of individual identity, responded with the humanistic tradition of French diversity and universalism, which he found embodied in Victor Hugo: “Rien de plus particulier que l’esprit de province; de moins particulier que le génie français. Il est bon qu’il naisse des Français
comme Hugo ‘d’un sang breton et lorrain à la fois’” (76).\(^{26}\) Barrès, meanwhile, would cast the figure of Hugo in a totally different light, presenting him as exclusively rooted: “Pour moi, Victor Hugo est l’enfant d’une famille militaire lorraine” (Les Maîtres, 12:142). He also figuratively annexed Hugo’s talent, claiming him as a precursor of what would come to be known as the “cocardier” form of patriotism: “Le génie de Victor Hugo fut préparé dans le plus ardent patriotisme” (12:140).\(^{27}\)

Sternhell has shown the political consequences of Barrès’s conversion to exclusive, immutable rootedness: the author of such dogmatic texts as *Scènes et doctrines du nationalisme* went far beyond traditional religious and political conservatism, providing ample intellectual fodder for twentieth-century fascism and racism. The individualistic cultural rebellion of his early years, which to a great extent flowed from the romantic literary tradition, was transformed into a broader, politically-oriented revolt against the bourgeois values of the Third Republic, against what Sternhell calls the “liberal society” of Barrès’s day:

A l’instar des romantiques, Barrès et la génération de 1890 font partir l’essentiel de leur réflexion, non de l’individu, qui n’a pas de signification en soi, mais de la collectivité sociale et politique, qui ne saurait être considérée comme la somme numérique des individus la constituant. C’est pourquoi ils s’élèvent si violemment contre l’individualisme rationaliste de la société libérale, contre la dissolution des liens sociaux dans la société bourgeoise. (Sternhell 1972, 10-1)

The traditional conservative opposition to a rationalist concept of society posits preexisting social ties that transcend individual choice. As expressed in texts written against the heritage of the French Revolution by authors such as Joseph de Maistre or Hippolyte Taine, established social institutions such as religion or family are not freely chosen; and their willful modification can lead to disastrous consequences. The notion that a society can be reshaped according to new principles—however meritorious those principles might seem when considered abstractly—thus represents nothing less than dangerous hubris. Barrès also opposed the concept that society could be the product of rationality, of logical choices, a concept he attributed to the Enlightenment, particularly to Rousseau. He had praised, and even identified with, the “Romantic” Rousseau in his first trilogy: “O mon cher Rousseau, mon Jean-Jacques, vous l’homme du monde que j’ai
le plus aimé et célèbré sous vingt pseudonymes, vous, un autre moi-même" (Le Jardin de Bérénice, 1:347). However, he rejected the Rousseau of Le Contrat social, and attempted to prevent the transfer of his remains to the Panthéon:

l'homme qui a posé comme principe que l'ordre social est tout artificiel, qu'il est fondé sur des conventions, et qui en déduit le droit pour chacun de nous de reconstituer la société au gré de sa fantaisie? Eh! messieurs, nous savons bien tous que la société n'est pas l'œuvre de la raison pure, que ce n'est pas un contrat qui est à son origine, mais des influences autrement mystérieuses et qui, en dehors de toute raison individuelle, ont fondé et continuent de maintenir la famille, la société, tout l'ordre dans l'humanité. (Les Maîtres, 12:92)

The organic concept of societal organization (as opposed to the "rootless" individualism and rationalism of liberal democracy) that Barrés came to espouse rested on an already long intellectual tradition. This tradition, which he did so much to systematize and popularize, had direct, and highly negative, consequences on the evolution of the conceptions of Europe. The pan-European ideal that Hugo had promoted was an extension of the humanistic, universalistic principles of the Enlightenment and the Revolution as he saw them. Barrés also perceived abstract rationalism and individualism as partly deriving from the Enlightenment, which had led to the destructive illusion of universalistic principles applicable at all times to all peoples. Among these principles were reason, truth, and justice, which for him could have no absolute definitions, only contingent applications within specific historical and national contexts: "La raison mène-t-elle à la vérité? Et qu'est-ce que la vérité? Elle est une vue sur laquelle s'accordent les hommes. Elle n'est rien qu'une entente consentie [...] Une vérité est vraie tant qu'on la croit vraie" (Mes Cahiers, 13:99). He most clearly applied this generalized relativistic ethos during the Dreyfus affair, unswervingly defending his version of "la vérité et la justice française" (Scènes, 5:27).

As a follow-up to his rhetorical question—"Qu'est-ce qu'un intellectuel?"—Barrès supplied this deprecatory definition: "individu qui se persuade que la société doit se fonder sur la logique et qui méconnaît qu'elle repose en fait sur des nécessités antérieures et peut-être étrangères à la raison individuelle" (5:56). He also tended to link abstract rationalism more specifically to Immanuel Kant, a foreign, German thinker.
whose philosophy of universalism had permeated, or infected, French intellectual elites. Any overt form of Europeanism was thus doubly suspect as foreign and based on purely intellectual abstractions. National identity and patriotism remained for Barrès a matter of instinctive emotion, shared by a specific organic societal group, which far outweighed individual logic or intellect: “L’intelligence, quelle petite chose à la surface de nous-mêmes!” (Les Déracinés, 3:239). A supranational organization, based on rationally-examined common interests, constituted a negation of the pre-logical determinism of the Land and the Dead, since foreigners, no matter how close they might be in geographical or cultural terms, were themselves by definition determined by ties to another land and different ancestors.

Jews as the Embodiment of Alterity

From an absolutist form of nationalistic determinism, it was only a short logical and discursive step for Barrès to xenophobia and anti-Semitism, since the most dangerous déracinés would necessarily be foreigners living in France, and in particular, Jews: “Les juifs n’ont pas de patrie au sens où nous l’entendons. Pour nous, la patrie, c’est le sol et les ancêtres, c’est la terre de nos morts. Pour eux, c’est l’endroit où ils trouvent leur plus grand intérêt” (Scènes, 5:72). Through his characterization of Jews as lacking any fixed ancestral and national roots, Barrès designated them as the ultimate outsiders in a Europe built around national identities. As the most well-known of the trans-European minorities, they constituted a living contradiction to Barrès’s organic concept of societal development, thereby evoking the dreaded specter of generalized déracinement and diminution of national unity and strength of purpose. With no natural attachment to any specific country, Jews were inherently prone to play off one national interest against another, according to their needs at any given moment. Barrès was thus predisposed to believe that “ce petit juif,” “le traître Dreyfus” (5:46) was guilty on the basis of his origins: “Que Dreyfus est capable de trahir, je le conclus de sa race” (5:149). Barrès remained one of the most articulate and vituperative anti-Dreyfusards throughout
what came to be known simply as l’Affaire, publishing numerous articles that were later collected in *Scènes et doctrines du nationalisme*.

A modern, racialist anti-Semite, Barrès used physical descriptions of Jews (just as he did for Germans) as a metonymic device to convey their alterity. Drawing on the opposition between Semites and Aryans, which had already become a well-known topos through Arthur de Gobineau’s *Essai sur l’inégalité des races humaines* (1855) and Edouard Drumont’s bestseller, *La France Juive* (1886), Barrès pointed out Dreyfus’s “nez ethnique”, his “figure de race étrangère” (*Scènes*, 5:34) in order to explain why it should hardly be surprising for “cet enfant de Sem,” who lacked “les beaux traits de la race indo-européenne,” to commit treason against France: “Il n’est point perméable à toutes les excitations dont nous affectent notre terre, nos ancêtres, notre drapeau, le mot ‘honner’. Il y a des aphasies optiques où l’on a beau voir des signes graphiques, on n’en a plus l’intelligence. Ici, l’aphasie est congénitale; elle vient de la race” (5:142). Barrès was also capable of stooping to the more traditional form of religious anti-Semitism. Comparing Dreyfus to Judas (5:133), he then describes a prayer in church for “les perfides juifs” (5:139), before returning to Dreyfus: “Seigneur, dissipez les ténèbres de ce perfide juif, pour que je voie clair” (5:141). In order to provide a contrast with his radical distanciation from Dreyfus, Barrès describes his feelings towards a criminal who was about to be guillotined, but who was (presumably) authentically French: “je n’eus dans mon cœur que la plus sincère fraternité pour un malheureux de ma race. Mais qu’ai-je à faire avec le nommé Dreyfus?” (5:134-5).

Combining his interpretation of relativism with an unbending opposition to universalism, Barrès is in the end little concerned with the “abstract” question of Dreyfus’s guilt or innocence. Distinguishing between two types of truth, “absolute” and “judicial” (5:47), he suggests that the former is inherently unattainable, while the latter, in the case against Dreyfus, derives from established French institutions—military courts—and should thus prevail, in the name of the national interest. Those misguided intellectuals who continue to find Dreyfus innocent, in spite of official pronouncements,
are the unwitting pawns of Kantian universalistic theoreticians whose organic link to the
Land and the Dead has been severed:

Il ne faut point se plaindre du mouvement antisémite dans l’instant où l’on
constate la puissance énorme de la nationalité juive qui menace de
“chambardement” l’État français. C’est ce que n’entendront jamais, je le crois
bien, les théoriciens de l’Université ivres d’un kantisme malsain. Ils répètent
comme notre Bouteiller: “Je dois toujours agir de telle sorte que je puisse vouloir
que mon action serve de règle universelle.” Nullement, messieurs, laissez ces
grands mots de toujours et d’universelle et, puisque vous êtes Français,
péoccupez-vous d’agir selon l’intérêt français à cette date. (5:46-7)

Barrès’s work epitomizes what René Girard calls “le mécanisme victimaire.” In
this analysis, societies, like most (if not all) human groups, constitute themselves through
a process that is inseparable from a mechanism of exclusion. It is the establishment of an
us-versus-them perspective that negatively provides at least part of the definition of “us.”
Barrès not only applied this mechanism to his nationalism (Dreyfus, Jews and foreigners
in general), but also to his own being (“le moi” against “les barbares”). Unlike such rabid
Jew-baiters as Maurras or Drumont, Barrès did not systematically describe all Jews as
inherently degenerate and malevolent. He was able to praise individuals and to admit that
some Jews had, by dint of longevity, become part of France. His anti-Semitism derived
quite logically from the exclusionary logic of his brand of nationalism. Most Jews could
simply not experience the emotional links that Barrès valued above pure intellect. Indeed,
when praising Jews for their intelligence, Barrès was merely emphasizing their
rootlessness: “Le juif ne s’attache à aucune façon de voir; il n’est que plus habile à les
classer toutes. C’est l’état d’esprit d’un homme habitué à manier des valeurs. Le juif est
un logicien incomparable. Ses raisonnements sont nets et impersonnels, comme un
compte de banque” (L’Ennemi des lois, 2:256). With the possible exception of Germans,
Jews as a group were clearly the most effective target for differentiation and exclusion:
“vous ne nierez pas que le juif ne soit un être différent” (Scènes, 5:72). This difference is
all the more accentuated in the case of unassimilated Jews who have recently arrived
from the East. In Les Déracinés, Sturel, one of the main characters (whose political
career is in many ways similar to Barrès’s) observes a Jewish family of German origin

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that has just moved in across the street. He feels no enmity toward them; but neither can he conceive of the possibility of having anything in common with them. Their inescapable alterity—or, in Barrès’s terms, their “animalité”—contradicts the Kantian universalism of Sturel’s former teacher, Bouteiller, and thereby negatively reinforces his links with all real Frenchmen:

Et, de voir les quatre juifs recevant ces amabilités, parlant eux-mêmes de leur fils et petit-fils avec amour, c’était un spectacle beau et touchant, oui, un spectacle d’une animalité émouvante... On sentait que ces gens-là eussent été magnifiques dans leur ghetto de Francfort, prolifiques et préparant des humiliés et des vainqueurs du monde; mais ceci restait que, ruisselant d’une certaine intelligence, ils étaient laids tout de même, avec leur mimique étrangère, sous le porche d’une vieille maison de Neufchâteau. Sturel, tout imbu des idées que, petit garçon, il avait prises au collège de Neufchâteau, mais sans nulle animosité, se sentit, à les regarder, envahi de tristesse: “Avec ceux-là, comment avoir un lien? Comment me trouver avec eux en communauté de sentiments?” (3:239)

The same sort of laments at the unbridgeable gulf between rootless Jews and rooted Frenchmen appear in the other volumes of Le Roman de l’énergie nationale. In L’Appel au soldat, a newspaper that had previously supported Boulangism switches its political allegiance, and hence its editorial line. This newspaper is directed by “M. Mayer,” who is, as Barrès diligently points out, a “juif allemand” (3:497). Once again, the journalistic turncoat’s foreign, Jewish origin provides the explanation for his nefarious reaction against the nationalist movement and its leader: “tout étranger installé sur notre territoire, alors même qu’il croit nous chérir, hait naturellement la France Eternelle, notre tradition qu’il ne possède pas, qu’il ne peut comprendre et qui constitue précisément la nationalité” (3:497). In Leurs Figures, Sturel tries to obtain documents on the Panama scandal from one of its major figures, Cornelius Herz, the blackmailer and purveyor of bribes, who is now severely ill. Once again, Sturel can only discern the difference in kind, not degree, that separates him from the likes of Herz—a radical difference that is expressed in starkly biological terms:

Il parlait un jargon anglo-franco-allemand que nous n’essayerons pas de reproduire. Une grosse moustache tombait sur les forts maxillaires de sa figure grasse, ronde et blême. Ni son nez, ni ses yeux au regard dur et perspicace, ne semblaient d’abord juifs. Les cheveux grisonnants étaient coupés ras. Des papiers liassés sur lesquels il étendait son bras couvraient une grande table contre son lit.
Les circonstances préparaient Sturel; sa première impression ne fut ni le malaise, ni la curiosité, ni l’émotion tragique, mais une sorte de haut sentiment d’être né sur le sol de France d’une honnête lignée. Il ne regarda point ce malade, entouré de sa femme et de ses enfants, avec humanité, mais avec cette froide indifférence, facile à transformer en haine, qui sépare les représentants de deux espèces naturelles. (4:369-70)

Herz and Jacques de Reinach were two of the major culprits in the Panama scandal, which shook public confidence in the parliamentary Third Republic, and which preceded the Dreyfus affair by only a few years. Both of these figures were not only Jewish but also recently established in France, details that Barrès highlights, implicitly attributing a causal connection between their cosmopolitanism and their graft. Describing the first meeting between de Reinach and Sturel’s former teacher, Bouteiller, who would go on to a parliamentary career, Barrès portrays a natural continuum of crooked financiers of foreign extraction and power-hungry French parliamentarians: “En 1885, quand Bouteiller, professeur obscur, fut présenté au monde parlementaire, dans le salon de Jacques de Reinach, juif allemand, baron italien, naturalisé français, oncle et beau-père de Joseph Reinach, il subit une fascination que son ton cassant ne trahit guère” (4:255).

The lack of national roots of Cornelius Herz is similarly described: “c’est encore un juif, né à Besançon, en 1845, d’un petit relieur qui venait de Bavière. En 1848, la famille Herz partit pour l’Amérique, d’où Cornelius, naturalisé Américain, nous revint à l’âge de vingt-et-un ans” (4:258). This description is followed by a list of the petty swindles and major bribes committed by Herz. The Panama scandal allowed Barrès to sharpen his anti-Semitic discourse, deriving the thievery of individual Jews from their collective origin. Treachery would follow with Dreyfus.

During World War One, however, due to the pressing need for a nationwide union sacrée in order to defeat Germany, Barrès shelved his anti-Semitism and accepted French Jews (along with Protestants and socialists) as full participants in the war effort. In 1917, one of his contributions to maintaining national morale, when the war was already in its fourth year, was Les Diverses Familles spirituelles de la France, in which he celebrated the suspension of internal divisions: “Nos diversités disparaisseront au 4 août 1914” (8:325). At a personal level, he purposefully set aside past disputes, reconciling
for instance with Joseph Reinach, whom he had attacked during the Panama scandal, but who wholeheartedly supported the goal of French victory (Barrès's reconciliation with Georges Clémenceau, another of his targets during the scandal, was also due to the wartime leadership of "le Tigre").

Despite his praise of Jews who fought and died under the French flag, Barrès continued to exhibit more discreet remnants of his formerly flamboyant anti-Semitism. In Une Enquête aux pays du Levant, a text published after the First World War—though it was based on notes that had been taken during a pre-war trip to the Middle East—Barrès returns to his old demons. During his visit in Alexandria, he shows more condescension than direct animosity, praising the efforts by two priests from Alsace to convert Jews to Catholicism: "Tirer Israël du ghetto, de son isolement désolé, le rattacher à la nation, le rattacher au Christ, ce sont des besognes nuancées, mais les effets d'un même désir de libération" (11:118). In a reference to the notorious Damascus Affair of 1840, however, repeating a vicious blood libel of the sort often seen during the Middle Ages, Barrès uncritically recounts the "ritual murder" of a Capuchin monk and his Muslim servant, purportedly committed by a group of Syrian Jews: "ces neuf juifs qui saignent ces deux hommes, c'est pour expédier leur sang à Bagdad, où il servira à fabriquer un pain azyme de choix" (11:211). He proceeds to link this scurrilous accusation—which led to the torture and execution of several Jews—to a similar affair in France, while scrupulously specifying that in the second instance, the murder victim's drained blood was not used for religious purposes: "s'ils saignent leur victime, dont le sang mélié à du son va repaître un cochon, (sic) c'est une simple précaution, pour qu'il n'en reste aucune trace." This episode is related with the same condescending, almost precious tone that Barrès uses for colorful descriptions of local legends and folk tales. As if to convey a sense of distanced objectivity, he twice punctuates his account with the same sentence as a disingenuous caveat: "Du moins, ainsi l'attestent certaines dépositions" (11:211).
Economic Nationalism

As Marie-Claire Laval-Reviglio points out (94), the electoral platform of economic protectionism that Barrès developed, during and after his Boulangist phase, was initially presented as a form of socialism, designed to shield French workers, farmers, and shopkeepers against unfair competition from immigrant labor and imported products. Barrès’s “Programme de Nancy,” written for his unsuccessful 1898 legislative campaign, begins with nationalism, then proceeds to protectionism by way of anti-Semitism. Reminding voters that the “opportunistic” economic system of the Third Republic was unfairly tilted in favor of “le juif, l’étranger, le cosmopolite,” Barrès identifies the socio-economic purpose of his nationalist program:

On voit comment nationalisme engendre nécessairement socialisme. Nous définissons le socialisme “l’amélioration matérielle et morale de la classe la plus nombreuse et la plus pauvre”. Après des siècles, la nation française est parvenue à donner à ses membres la sécurité politique. Il faudrait maintenant qu’elle les protégeât contre l’insécurité économique dont ils souffrent à tous les degrés. (Scènes, 5:387)

He then defines these insecurities as they apply to “l’ouvrier,” “le petit commerçant,” and “l’agriculteur”, before proposing a list of measures designed to counteract the role of “le produit étranger,” “l’ouvrier étranger,” “la féodalité financière internationale,” and “le naturalisé” (5:387-90). The causal link between the two lists is only tenuously established, Barrès being more concerned with directing attention toward the malignant consequences of an often fantastical foreign influence. Predictably, Barrès’s version of socialism has little to do with Marxist concepts, such as the collectivization of the means of production. It is instead a smokescreen for such populist and paternalistic notions as the protection of French workers, farmers, and shopkeepers from the effects of industrial dislocation, the source of which is generally linked to foreign interests.

Barrès’s forays into economics, especially for the purpose of electioneering, provide examples of some of his weakest writing, as well as of his most simplistic logic. Having brought up the highly controversial and ambiguous question of socialism, he then proceeds to skirt the issue of economic inequality, attributing it to what has become an
increasingly obvious straw man, pervasive foreign influence. The solution thus lies in preferential treatment for French workers, which would involve greater regulation of the economy by the state: “L’idée de patrie implique une inégalité, mais au détriment des étrangers, et non, comme aujourd’hui, au détriment des nationaux” (5:412). Eclectic in its sources, Barrès’s right-wing anti-capitalism allows for xenophobia, anti-Semitism, and an early version of what would become a widely shared political myth, from the communists to the extreme right, of the “deux cents familles” who surreptitiously run the French economy:38

For Barrès, the penetration of high finance and industry by foreign elements produced pernicious consequences at all levels of the French economy, in turn leading to deleterious social outcomes. During a visit in Lorraine, Sturel and Saint-Phlin ask a local innkeeper about the social and economic effects of new industrial plants in the region. The factories are depicted as the economic equivalent of the German military invasion, with foreign (i.e.: Jewish) capitalists replacing local farmers, thereby destroying the traditional cultural structures of a rural society: “ce nom évocateur de la riche famille juive qui a peut-être le mieux symbolisé l’installation au pouvoir de l’aristocratie de Bourse succédant au patronat terrien, grandissait encore cette lumineuse démonstration de la nécessité qui jette le paysan de la forme agricole, où il ne peut plus vivre, dans la forme industrielle, où il se détruit” (L’Appel au soldat, 4:40). Jews were not only pulling the strings within large financial and industrial corporations; they had also insinuated themselves into the higher echelons of the civil service, thereby acquiring direct influence in French political matters:
La question juive est liée à la question nationale. Assimilés aux Français d’origine par la Révolution, les juifs ont conservé leurs caractères distinctifs, et, de persécutés qu’ils étaient autrefois, ils sont devenus dominateurs. [...] On les a nommés préfets, juges, trésoriers, officiers parce qu’ils ont l’argent qui corrompt. (Scènes, 5:386)

Barrés’s vision of the French economy was built on the predominance of small, locally-owned farms and businesses, and on a policy of outright protectionism. Internal decentralization was thus allied with external economic barriers, designed to achieve a degree of national economic autarchy. In an attempt to reconcile socialist equality with local free enterprise, the Barrésian economic vision reflected a nostalgic yearning for supposedly simpler times, when the jobs and livelihoods of French workers were not dependent on decisions made by foreign capitalists, when a larger proportion of the active population was self-employed, when working the land was still a noble calling. As Robert Paxton has detailed, the enduring notion of “France as a peasant nation” (174–86) has reappeared in various guises during different phases of French political history. In particular, the Vichy regime would later draw on similar Barrésian fantasies of a largely self-sufficient national economy dominated by agricultural production—and by sturdy peasant values. For Barrès, economic decentralization called for more local political control, including the possibility of federalism. Ever mindful of his literary sources, he invoked Taine’s work in support of the need to loosen centralized state control: “Nous avons d’abord à dire comment les livres de Taine sur les origines de la France contemporaine ont été un point d’appui de notre réflexion” (5:434). Another source of inspiration was Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, who had the distinct advantage of offering a French alternative to foreign socialist theory:

Comme Marx et Bakounine, Proudhon relève de la dialectique hégélienne. [...] En tout cas, ce qui fait le principal du proudhonisme, c’est le fonds français, l’héritage des Rousseau, des Saint-Simon, des Fourier. Le socialisme de Proudhon, parce qu’il combine notre sensibilité nationale et l’hégélianisme, satisfait ou intéresse profondément des Français qui ne parviendront jamais à se plier sur le collectivisme allemand ou le terrorisme russe, car ces deux dernières conceptions sont significatives des races étrangères. (5:460)
After World War One, Barrès renewed his interest in economic issues. As the increasingly mechanized conflict (which included the first systematic uses of tanks, aerial bombardment, and poison gas) had highlighted the importance of industrial development, he campaigned for a greater national effort in favor of scientific research. As always, he was motivated by nationalist concerns, seeking to emulate and go beyond the German model of scientific research linked to industrial development, particularly in terms of military applications. By rhetorical association with the French soldiers who had fought and won the war, science and technology were enlisted into the continuing struggle against foreign foes:

L’avenir de la France est directement lié à la mise en valeur du cerveau français, puissant entre tous et jusqu’ici insuffisamment exploité au service de la haute culture. La suprématie scientifique et spirituelle d’une nation dépend de ses hommes supérieurs. Favorisons la haute intelligence, nous aurons rendu à notre pays un des plus grand services qu’il puisse attendre, après la victoire des poilus. (Pour la haute intelligence française, 9:330)

**Masculine and Feminine**

Jean Foyard has inventoried the (mostly condescending) images of women in Barrès’s texts—“objet précieux, petit animal, oiseau, insecte, papillon, tigre, jeune jument, rose, plante grimpante, liane...” (89)—and considered the influence of the poet Anna de Noailles on his work. In this context, it is interesting to note that the masculine-feminine dichotomy constitutes another tropological organizing principle, in addition to the previously outlined north-south partition, of the Europe of Barrès. Some cities and countries are thus masculinized (Germany being the most obvious example), while others, such as Spain and Italy, are generally feminized: “les hommes recevant de l’Italie, depuis des siècles, toutes les ivresses du bonheur, l’appellent justement leur maîtresse” (Du Sang, de la Volupté et de la Mort, 2:167).

Italian cities provide the best examples of feminization. These are the locales that Barrès most clearly eroticizes, presenting them as objects for his sensual conquest. Describing “Les Beaux Contrastes de Sienne” (2:148-52), he associates the entire region with the image of a sexual encounter: “C’est le caractère de la Toscane entière. On ne
saurait être jeune avec plus de gentillesse que ces territoires florentins; oui, nulle part la jeunesse n'a été davantage une jolie chose à mettre dans son lit" (2:149). Venice is similarly endowed with an inescapable erotic charge: “tout ce faste qu’est Venise et ces eaux chargées de souvenirs les lassèrent d’une fièvre continue. Cette ville est une dormeuse parée dont l’enivrant contact nous maintient un désir inassouvi et pourtant épuisant” (L’Ennemi des lois, 2:243). The process of feminization and eroticization also applies to the “Oriental” cities visited by Barrès: “Toutes ces villes de l’Orient, je les vois comme un cercle de jeunes femmes, entre lesquelles je fus invité à choisir” (Une Enquête aux pays du Levant, 11:364).

Alongside obvious sexual connotations, the Barrésian pattern of feminization of cities or countries is highly correlated with images of decadence, defeat, decay, stasis, and death. The visibly aging city of Venice, in particular, is endowed with a mortiferous aura, which is reminiscent of the deadly contagion silently plaguing the city in Thomas Mann’s Death in Venice. In the section of Amori et dolori sacrum aptly titled “La Mort de Venise” (7:11-59), Barrès dwells on the city’s “atmosphère d’irremédiable échec. Ville vaincue, convenable aux vaincus” (7:54). He compares its languid allure to “le chant d’une beauté qui s’en va vers la mort” (7:55). Its picturesque, decaying architecture—“les églises délitées, les vastes palais ruineux” (7:57)—is the perfect environment for his “feverish” imagination: “Cette ville m’a toujours donné la fièvre” (7:12); “pensées fiévreuses du soir” (7:56); “la misère et la fièvre se courtisent” (7:57); “la fièvre était dans Venise” (7:59). The dilapidated city seems to be largely uninhabited, serving only as a vast mausoleum of strangely fascinating sensations: “j’ai cherché à déchiffrer ce souvenir suspendu, cette tristesse voluptueuse dont Venise éternellement se pâme. Mon objet n’est point ici de peindre directement des pierres, de l’eau, des nuages, mais de rendre intelligibles les dispositions indéfinissables où nous met le paludisme de cette ruine romantique” (7:14). With its “palais d’Orient” (7:55), Venice is also Orientalized, associated with an evocation of women dancing in the Indian city of Bénarès, each dancer personifying a Barrésian motto: “l’une murmure: ‘Tout désirer’; l’autre réplique: ‘Tout mépriser’” (7:58). Venice’s tarnished beauty provides Barrès
with the darkly romantic motif of “la mort par excès d’amour de la vie” (7:59). As is consistent with his sexual esthetic, the city is all the more precious to him precisely because of its ruinous state, which prefigures the intensity that inevitable aging and death bring to the possession of the object of his love: “Etre périssable, c’est la qualité exquise. Voir dans nos bras notre maîtresse chaque jour se détruire, cela parfait d’une incomparable mélancolie le plaisir qu’elle nous procure. Il n’est point d’intensité véritable où ne se mêle l’idée de la mort” (Du Sang, 2:101).

In Le Voyage de Sparte, Barrès contrasts Venice with the strength and “virility” of Sparta: “Sparte n’est point comme Venise une note de tendresse qui sonne au milieu du plaisir” (7:275). He at last finds cause for identification and personal “enthusiasm” in the course of his visit of the archæological site of Sparta, as opposed to the distanced “désarroi” (7:187) he felt during most of his travels within Greece. Admiring the famous self-discipline of the ancient Spartans, he is inspired by their sense of purpose: “Voici l’un des points du globe où l’on essaya de construire une humanité supérieure” (7:273). Instead of languid charm or feverish eroticism, he finds in the masculinity of Sparta a forthright call to glory: “Un cœur noyé de poésie [...] veut mourir pour un idéal. Sa volonté d’être un héros jaillit, claire et joyeuse” (7:275).

It is not necessary to indulge in Derridean deconstruction to see a degree of contextualized overlapping between the two forms of hierarchical binary oppositions that Barrès uses in his writings. With some exceptions, it is northern countries or cities that tend to be masculinized. They are characterized by efficiency, strength and aggression. They are to be respected or feared. Southern countries, meanwhile, are generally feminized. They are economically backward, but have romantic ruins and a rich artistic heritage. They are endowed with a highly estheticized, somewhat morbid allure, procuring violent, contrasting sensations that often invite attempts at symbolic sexual conquest. The gendered geographical divisions elaborated by Barrès roughly correlate with the traditional “théorie des climats.”
Dissociating Germany

Mme de Staël s’enthousiasme dans l’atmosphère sentimentale de la Germanie, sans se préoccuper de l’œuvre bienfaisante qu’y réalisent les armées révolutionnaires et l’administration napoléonienne. En face d’une vie morale française ramenée à un civisme étroit, à un enrégimentement de l’esprit et du corps, c’est à l’enthousiasme et aux puissances vivifiantes de l’intuition que Mme de Staël voudrait que le Rhin pût donner passage. Le fleuve sera pour elle, et pour les romantiques qui procéderont d’elle, la porte d’entrée des mystères et des musiques, l’introduction à l’idéalisme et à la rêverie. L’idéalisme par opposition à la statistique, à la loi des grands nombres. Le Rhin, c’est le seuil d’un immense pays qu’elle embellit à souhait et où les notions insaisissables, les impondérables de l’âme ont une puissance qu’elle voudrait voir se développer chez nous. (Le Génie du Rhin, 10:48-9)

Barrès’s version of nationalism required both internal and external enemies. Positioning his work against the multicultural or cosmopolite outlook that Germaine de Staël incarnated, he posited the French view of German culture and society as having been clouded by the delusions of the Romantics, whose perceptions in turn derived in large part from the idealized images in Staël’s De l’Allemagne (1810). Endeavoring to correct this view, Barrès wrote at length about the German national character as he saw it, both before and after World War One, when French troops occupied much of the Rhineland. Sensing a possibility of durably shifting the balance of power between France and its longtime adversary, he sought to separate the Rhineland, in which he saw the fruits of a long period of French cultural influence, from Prussia, the despised embodiment of “le teutonisme.” In his zeal to see most of Germany purged of its Eastern European background, Barrès had grandiose dreams of redirecting its culture under French tutelage:


Early in his career, Barrès had been able to acknowledge that he was influenced by German writers, and even to criticize the “chauvinism” of those who would reject all
aspects of German culture: “Nous avons des pères intellectuels dans tous les pays. Kant, Goethe, Hegel, ont des droits sur les premiers d’entre nous” (“Un Mauvais Français: M. Victor Tissot,” 1:405). While he already advocated war to recover Alsace-Lorraine, he did not yet show the unyielding hostility that would soon come to dominate his writing on Germany. He instead stated his admiration for the country and its role in the world: “Nous dirons la France grande et l’Allemagne aussi. Quels que soient d’ailleurs les instants de la politique, trois peuples guident la civilisation dans ce siècle: La France, l’Angleterre, l’Allemagne aussi” (1:404). Barrés would not long cling to such views, soon identifying his native Lorraine as the most exposed bulwark of French resistance against the invaders from the East: “reconnaissez le rêve d’une race qui, depuis des siècles, se bat aux extrêmes avant-postes contre les puissances de la Germanie pour l’idéal latin” (Amori et dolori sacrum, 7:11-2). As Jacques Portes emphasizes, the clear designation of Germany as an irreconcilable enemy constituted the catalyst of the Barrésian version of nationalism: “A partir de 1896-1897, un tournant s’amorce, définitif; le nationalisme de Barrès devient plus exigeant et se définit par rapport l’ennemi irréductible et absolu: l’Allemagne” (194). Barrès’s Germany became less a country than an aggressive force, a relentless mindset based on brute strength and its glorification, which he referred to by the essentializing terms of “le germanisme” or “le teutonisme” (as opposed to “la latinité”). Barrès usually characterized this force in esthetic terms, rendering it as the negation of the grace and harmony exemplified by France. “Germanicity” is thus unfailingly heavy, awkward, and domineering. In L’Appel au soldat, Sturel and Saint-Phlin meet a “typical” German in a restaurant during a tour of occupied Lorraine:

Grossièrement bâti encolosse, il bedonnait en s’élargissant toujours vers le bas, ce qui lui donnait un ensemble piriforme. Ses bottes à tige droite, qui montaient jusqu’à mi-mollet sous le pantalon déformé par le genou, rendaient encore la jambe plus laide et le pied plus vaste. Tous les détails le complétaient. De son binocle partait une chaînette en or, élégamment passée derrière son oreille droite, et, sous les verres, son regard dardait inquisiteur et intelligent. Ses cheveux plats, fort rares, collaient et luisaient d’une pommade qui sentait la graisse. Sa redingote gris foncé, à deux rangs de boutons, croisait sur sa poitrine, avec de nombreux plis lourds, à cause de l’étoffe trop raide, tandis que, d’encolure manquée, elle bâillait dans le dos. Le faux col, mal maintenu par une
de ces chemises en laine tissée et d’un jaune sale qui portent le nom de leur inventeur, le professeur Doeger, remontait dans le cou. Par-devant s’étalait une chemisette en caoutchouc, blanche, mais qui devait à d’innombrables lavages matinaux des reflets verdâtres; un énorme bouton, pointu comme un casque fermaît le col et empêchait de monter une cravate constituée par deux parallélogrammes plats et croisés avec une partie intermédiaire supérieure où brillait un gros corail rouge. Les manchettes, indépendantes de la chemise, s’agitaient librement autour du poignet et glissaient jusqu’au bout des doigts d’où le personnage les repoussait incessamment avec un geste élégant. Son chapeau de velours brun, à bords larges, s’avachissait. Sturel et Saint-Phlin considérèrent d’abord, comme une magnifique curiosité, ce type classique de l’Allemand apporté par le flot historique sur les douces rives mosellanes. (4:91)

Another set of descriptions of such “typical” Germans is found in *Au service de l’Allemagne*, where the same sort of terms, connoting mechanical and aggressive propensities, are used: “raides et arrogants,” “on les dresse à la discipline,” “une âme brute,” “cette barbarie germano-slave,” “puissant guerrier,” etc. What these Germans lack in “politesse innée,” in “culture héréditaire”—in short, what characterizes the French—they make up for in cold, unwavering determination: “leur volonté demeure constantment tendue” (6:100). The individuals described by Barrès reflect the eternal essence, in the Herderian tradition, of their collective cultural and national entity. Instead of a specific militarized regime with expansionist tendencies, France was in his view facing what had always been, and always would be, its hereditary enemy. He would thus see little difference between the domineering German Empire and the weakened post-war Weimar Republic:

> En effet, nul moyen de se fier à l’Allemagne. L’espoir du monde moderne repose sur des notions d’accord, d’entente, de contrat, qui demeurent absolument opposées à la tendance générale de l’esprit allemand. On pouvait croire que la défaite convertirait le Boche, mais le Boche demeure semblable à lui-même. La bonne volonté entre les hommes n’a pas d’adversaire plus déclaré qu’une certaine conception nettement germanique de la lutte pour la vie, de la survie du mieux adapté, de la force suffisant à créer le droit. (Les Grands Problèmes du Rhin, 10:261)

In *Au service de l’Allemagne*, published in 1905, Barrès considers the plight of the inhabitants of occupied Alsace-Lorraine, particularly the young men who are faced with a choice between being drafted into the German army or crossing into France, never
to return to their hometowns. The hero of this book is Paul Ehrmann, a medical student from Strasbourg, whom Barrès praises for remaining in Alsace and enduring the rigors of German military service while maintaining pride in his French identity. By not fleeing to France, Ehrmann is keeping faith with his roots, and fulfilling a timeless mission of resistance against the invaders from the East: "La besogne, modestement accomplie par M. Ehrmann à la vieille caserne d’artillerie de la place d’Austerlitz, c’est celle des légionnaires de Rome sur le Rhin et d’Odile à la Hohenburg. Il est une garde avancée, on disait autrefois une garde folle, de la latinité, un défenseur de nos bastions de l’Est" (6:122). This view of the French-German antagonism had also been elaborated in Barrès’s second trilogy. During their trip through Lorraine, Sturel and Saint-Phlin go by military fortifications, in which Barrès sees the concrete embodiments of a seemingly endless struggle between eternal enemies:

Le long de la Moselle, Sturel et Saint-Phlin ont déjà rencontré environ quatorze forts. Toul en a douze, et Metz, onze. C’est, pour relier ceux-ci, un enchevêtrement de lignes stratégiques et de travaux d’art sur un sol bosselé par les tombes de 1870. En méditant ces espaces dénaturés, on donne enfin leur sens plein aux codes et aux rêveries philosophiques où s’affirme l’antagonisme germano-latin. Un tel paysage, véritable état d’âme social, étale devant nous la conscience de l’Europe. Voilà le lieu où se font le plus intelligibles la précaire sécurité des peuples et leur surcharge financière. On y voit entre l’état-major français et l’allemand un état de guerre constant, entretenu par des millions sans cesse engloutis dans ce sol de frontière. Secrète ou déclarée, cette bataille, si haut qu’on remonte dans les siècles, ne fait point trève. Elles ne sont pas près de désarmer, les deux forces ethniques qui s’affrontent ici, à perte de vue historique, sur une ligne d’intersection que tous leurs efforts n’ont jamais déplacée plus sensiblement que la corde d’un arc où tire un sagittaire. Dans la série des transformations qui va de l’idée au fait, un canon pointé marque l’instant où le rêve obscur d’une race devient une volonté. (L’Appel au soldat, 4:45-6)

Germans are usually referred to as “Prussians,” a way to emphasize their Eastern European origin, or more benevolently as “Rhinelanders.” The two are not simply used as geographically neutral terms. In the writings of Maurice Barrès, the degree of civilization improves among Germans in relation to their geographical proximity to France. Barrès thus adds an internal east-west dichotomy to his established opposition between northern and southern countries. True to form, he uses physical descriptions to
distinguish the two groups, to the point of using putative racial characteristics to link Rhinelanders to France and separate them from Prussia: “[les Rhénans] sont des paysans lorrains, des Celtes, des brachycéphales bruns [...] il y avait des fonctionnaires prussiens. Ce n’est pas la même race, ceux-ci, ce sont des dolichocéphales blonds, grands, forts” (Les Grands Problèmes du Rhin, 10:509).

In Colette Baudoche, published in 1909, Hermann Asmus, a somewhat naïve—and therefore relatively uncorrupted—professor from the eastern part of the Empire, is sent to spread Germanic culture in occupied Lorraine. The uneasy contact that ensues between the German occupier and the occupied French can be compared to Vercors’s Le Silence de la mer (1942), despite obvious differences in style and historical context. As the unlikely suitor of a young French woman whose family remained in the city of Metz after it was annexed by Germany, Asmus, initially a typically uncouth Prussian, progressively discovers through Colette the innate richness of French culture: “il se hausse à un degré supérieur de civilisation” (6:218). Despite the entreaties of his conveniently distant Prussian fiancee, who pointedly reminds him in a letter that the French remain “les ennemis héréditaires de notre race” (6:218), Asmus is increasingly drawn to Colette and to the civilization she steadfastly represents. Now that he is living in the westernmost part of the Empire, he finds his own national background lacking the balanced, serene self-assurance of his French landladies. During a discussion with a dubious German colleague (“le Pangermaniste”), Asmus contends that “Goethe, Schiller et beaucoup de grands hommes ont déclaré qu’il fallait à la pâte allemande un peu de levain français” (6:222). His Prussian friends warn him that in seeking to absorb presumed French virtues he is only losing his Germanic soul, thereby using arguments that, ironically, harmonize well with the Barrésian ethic of rootedness:

In spite of his apparently sincere love for Colette, and his efforts to respect and learn her French heritage, Asmus cannot bridge the gap between them. Colette, although initially drawn to him, ultimately heeds the voice of the Land and the Dead, which she hears—in a scene quietly reminiscent of Joan of Arc's revelation—during a ceremony in Church honoring French soldiers who had died defending Metz. In a perfect blending of the religious and national traditions exalted by Barrès, Colette is decisively moved to turn down Asmus's marriage proposal after a reading of:

l’histoire des Macchabées [...] où s’affirme la doctrine de l’Eglise sur les morts. Une grande idée la commande, c’est qu’ils ressusciteront un jour... Honorons leurs reliques, puisqu’elles revivront: conduisons-nous de manière à leur plaire, puisqu’ils nous surveillent, et sachons qu’il dépend de nous d’abréger leurs peines. (6:245-6)

The weight of determinism obviates any other possible outcome. Colette does not formulate any arguments against the ancestral forces that are making the decision for her: “Elle ne leur oppose aucun raisonnement” (6:247). She is not alone in her decision, nor, as the inheritor of an eternal tradition, is she a free agent: “Colette reconnaît l’impossibilité de transiger avec ces morts qui sont là présents” (6:247). Barrès has thus created a heroine who illustrates by her actions the doctrine of rootedness which he had previously elaborated: “Il n’y a pas même de liberté de penser. Je ne puis vivre que selon mes morts. Eux et ma terre me commandent une certaine activité” (Scènes, 5:26). Of course, the impossibility of Asmus ever winning the love of Colette, the living symbol of the enduring French presence in Lorraine, had already been foretold. The Prussian, in spite of all his intellectual efforts to understand her spiritual and national heritage, lacked the organic link with the Land and the Dead that the less-educated French woman intuitively felt. When viewing a landscape in Lorraine, Asmus's ineradicable alterity is emphasized when the narrator switches to the first person: “Mais un jeune Prussien tout neuf, que peut-il glaner derrière nos pères et sur des champs qu’ils ont aménagés? Il nie et désire détruire, ce fils de vainqueur, tout ce qui ennoblit cette terre et peut y produire une fermentation. Où je trouve mon équilibre et ma plénitude, il ne s’accommode pas” (6:182).
Barrès was of course not the only writer to give literary expression to the Franco-Prussian War and its consequences. The traumatic French defeat, the forcible annexation of Alsace-Lorraine, and the brutalities of the invaders are vividly captured in such texts as Alphonse Daudet's *Contes du lundi* (particularly the famous "La Dernière Classe"), Émile Zola's novel *La Débâcle*, and several of Guy de Maupassant's short stories (for instance, "Boule de suif," "Deux Amis," and "Mademoiselle Fifi"). In an influential polemical text written in 1870 ("L’Alsace est-elle allemande ou française? Réponse à M. Mommsen"), the French historian Fustel de Coulanges assailed a German historian’s attempt, through rationalizations based on pre-existing racial and linguistic ties, to justify the conquest and annexation of Alsace: "La patrie, c’est ce qu’on aime. Il se peut que l’Alsace soit allemande par la race et par le langage; mais par la nationalité et le sentiment de la patrie elle est française" (509). As François Hartog points out (51), Renan would later provide, in his 1882 conference ("Qu’est-ce qu’une nation?"), a definition of "la nationalité comme volonté," which was similar to Fustel de Coulanges’s formulation of national formation through voluntary association.

However, no writer did more than Barrès, through his journalistic and political activities as well as through his novels, to keep the issue of the eventual liberation of the occupied eastern regions alive. In what would later become a monumental understatement as to the cost in human lives, he called for war in order to recover them: "Il n’y faudra qu’un peu de sang et quelque grandeur dans l’âme" ("Un Mauvais Français: M. Victor Tissot," 1:404). Typically, Barrès did not cast the issue of Alsace and Lorraine in terms of self-determination for their inhabitants (as had Fustel de Coulanges and Renan): his nationalistic determinism had settled the question of their identity. What he was concerned with was the danger of permanent encroachment within the occupied regions by foreign, Germanic elements: "La race germaine se substitue à l’autochtone dans tout l’est de la France. Vaut-elle moins? — Oui, car elle est étrangère. Par ces immigrés, le type se modifie et se gâte" (*Les Déracinés*, 3:238). No less dangerous was the possibility of intellectual conquest: "la résistance faiblit sur les frontières de l’Est, d’où l’esprit allemand fuse dans tous les sens sur notre territoire et
The balance of power between France and Germany having been inverted by the Franco-Prussian War, Barrès became one of the most consistent French counterparts to the German philosopher Johann Fichte, who had elaborated an early form of ultranationalism, directed against Napoleonic imperialism, in Addresses to the German Nation (1807-08). Each author developed his xenophobic theory in the historical context of his country’s perceived weakness. Each called for a revival—indeed, an exacerbation—of the national spirit as a means of expelling the foreign occupier and restoring his country’s tarnished glory. For all his saber-rattling, Barrès had an ambiguous relationship with the German model he decried. He praised its economic organization, its methodical pursuit of scientific research, and its social welfare system. He professed admiration for the tireless efficiency and discipline of Germans in general, and for German civil servants in particular. Perversely, the sort of changes he wanted to see occur in France mirrored to a great extent the situation of the German adversary as he described it. If there was a living prototype for the sort of strong, decisive leader Barrès wanted for France, it was none other than the German Chancellor, Otto von Bismarck. To achieve revanchist aims, France would have to submit, paradoxically, to the sort of regimentation and mechanization Barrès condemned in Germany. The mechanistic model he perceived in Germany (which was consistent with his north-south continuum), recalls Martin Heidegger’s “The Question Concerning Technology” in its pervasiveness, conditioning all facets of German thought and activity: “Chez l’Allemand, le point faible est la débilité
Before the war, in *L'Appel au soldat*, a similar analysis of the German way of thinking had been offered by Rœmerspacher, one of the main characters of the second trilogy, in a letter written to Sturel from Germany where he was studying: "Tous les problèmes de justice sont réduits à un problème de mécanique: la société est un système de forces où le vaincu au demeurant a toujours tort. Le fait accompli constitue le droit" (3:395). In an analysis that seems more suited to the Second World War, Barrès contrasted the German will to power with stalwart French resistance to brute force. In *Chronique de la Grande Guerre*, he interpreted the French victory in the First World War as a triumph of the spirit over unbridled mechanization: "Cette victoire marque la prépondérance des puissances spirituelles sur la puissance matérielle la plus colossale que l'on ait jamais vue" (14:200).

After World War One, Barrès continued writing about Germany and its future relations with France. In an echo of “la querelle du Rhin” of the early 1840s (which was discussed in the previous chapter), Barrès provided his variant of the recurring issue of the Rhine as the “natural border” between France and Germany. Concerned with national boundaries as a way of preserving limits between cultures, he dreamed of resurrecting a semi-autonomous Rhineland which, under continued French influence, could become a buffer against the threat of a resurgent Germany. His fairly detailed economic proposal would have linked the region to France “par le commerce, par les voies de communication, par la coordination des tarifs de chemins de fer et de voies d’eau, par un programme de travaux publics, principalement par la canalisation de la Moselle et de la Sarre, par des institutions bancaires et coopératives, par l’assimilation des lois ouvrières et sociales” (*Les Grands Problèmes du Rhin*, 10:190-1). Interestingly enough, this Barrésian program of transnational cooperation seems quite compatible with more recent attempts to establish common European institutions, with one crucial distinction: it was designed to isolate, not integrate, most of Germany.
The degree of economic and political interdependence that Barrès sought to establish between France and the Rhineland derived from his perception of their cultural contiguity. In *Le Génie du Rhin* (1921), he inventoried the historical and cultural links, real or imagined, between “les Rhénans” and France. Pointing out that the Rhine is closer to the French border than to Eastern Prussia, he decried “Pangermanist” attempts to reclaim control of the Rhineland: “Ce germaniste [...] dont la convoitise rêve précisément de faire, non la frontière, mais le centre spirituel, le lieu sacré de la Germanie” (10:68). Ironically, Barrès himself waged a long literary and political campaign to make of Lorraine—which is after all a border region with long-standing cultural links to Germany as well as France—the spiritual heart of the French nation. In the preface of this curious book, that includes rapturous accounts of folk legends of the Rhine, Barrès gives his interpretation of the cultural meshing between France and the Rhineland that occurred before the rise of Pangermanism, citing no less a figure than Goethe as an example:

Ce Rhénan représente, selon moi, le meilleur effet que la civilisation française peut se flatter d’exercer sur les régions en éternel suspens qui avoisinent le grand fleuve historique. Il demeure un de nos titres de gloire dans Strasbourg, un signe éclatant de notre généreuse influence, lui qui a passé sa vie dans la nostalgie de la meilleure France, et qui était venu chercher ici même sa première initiation aux choses de chez nous, que par la suite il apprit mieux à trier et à goûter. (10:40)

Meanwhile, on the French side, Barrès also invoked a major literary figure as an example in favor of his perceived Franco-Rhinelander cultural continuum, linking Victor Hugo—“homme de la vallée du Rhin”—to an increasingly imaginary Rhineland: “Ses origines paternelles plongent dans une Lorraine qui ne partageait pas encore les destinées du royaume de France. Lui-même a perpétuellement tourné les yeux vers ces marches de l’Est” (10:78). In *Les Maîtres*, Barrès would also highlight what he saw as Hugo’s Rhenish affinities, this time drawing on his books: “Dans le Rhin, nulle philosophie brumeuse, triste ou compliquée. Les Burgraves sont peints avec la netteté et la force latines [...] Victor Hugo, profondément, sent comme le Rhénan” (12:145). Of course, Hugo was only following the determinism of his origins: “Victor Hugo fut toute sa vie l’homme d’une marche, le défenseur de la France de l’Est contre l’invasion germanique.
C'était son rôle naturel, puisqu'il est né, comme nous l'avons montré, d'une famille lorraine et des profondes campagnes vosgiennes" (12:143).

While Barrès's hopes for a lasting political and cultural French guardianship over the Rhineland never materialized, they constitute a revealing example of his particular European outlook, which puts France at the center of a fairly stable system of partners and adversaries, a system based on shared, long-standing cultural affinities, instead of temporary political alliances. As previously mentioned, the natural partners of France were for Barrès to the South: Spain and Italy.

**Campaign For Hispanicity**


For Barrès, culture precedes and conditions politics. His inventory of French writers that owed a debt to Spanish culture (with which he felt a particular, oft-stated affinity) is thus followed by a proposal of a political association with Spain, in order to balance the influence of France's more northerly neighbors. While his repeated travels to Spain led him directly to write two books, his vision of France's southern neighbor, like that of the Rhineland, remained an intensely personal construct, based on highly selective literary and artistic images. In this Catholic country steeped in traditions, Barrès perceived a legacy of violent, instinctual passion, of sensual beauty and of an estheticized form of worship for the Dead (which in turn fed into his own "Culte de la Terre et des Morts"). Barrès's Spain, like Germany, was less an actual country than the embodiment of an idea, that of a passionate, perhaps overdeveloped version of the Bergsonian *élan vital*: "l'Espagne qui est le pays le plus effréné du monde" (*Du Sang, de la Volupté et de la Mort*, 2:33).

In Spain as in Italy, Barrès enjoyed visiting cities rich in history: Cordoba and Toledo, Venice and Sienna. As befits a novelist with a romantic sensitivity, he made use
of the views of these cities, and of the descriptions of their history, in order to trigger subjective, fiercely emotional sensations: "une impression d'énergie et de passion" (2:23). The intensity of Barrès’s emotions was heightened by the form of religiosity he found in their churches, "le néo-catholicisme: une façon de mêler la sensualité à la religion" (2:90). Seeking starkly contrasted images that would stir the soul and not the mind, Barrès found in these cities the "atmosphère de mort et de voluptés éphémères" (2:96) which stimulated his ongoing "Culte du Moi." His passionate descriptions of these cities tends to assimilate their contact with sexual encounters, with Barrès casting himself as a seduced lover, obsessed with what he once “possessed:” “Venise et Séville, Sienne et Tolède et Cordoue! Faiseuses d’illusions qu’un jour j’ai possédées avec nonchalance et fatigue et qui, par un prestige diabolique, dominez, depuis, toute ma songerie” (2:108). As previously noted, Spain is generally feminized—that is, reduced to a principle of boundless sensuality—in Barrès’s work: "La femme espagnole... Cette race est usée par le plaisir. A toutes les heures qu’on les voit, ils sortent du lit" (Mes Cahiers, 13:290).

In the initial stages of the exaltation of these sentiments, he was not looking for any logical direction or finality: "Peu m’importe le fond des doctrines! C’est l’élan que je goûte!” (2:34). Eventually, however, his pilgrimages to the southern sources of instinctive vitality also provided inspiration for his more political writings: “tant d’intérêts supérieurs commandent l’union [entre la France et l’Espagne], une union qui ferait des deux pays, avec l’empire d’Afrique dès lors inattaquable, un bloc capable de vivre sans redouter la menace de ses ennemis ni la pression de ses amis” (Mes Cahiers, 20:56). In praising Spain and in advocating close ties with it, Barrès was conflating his esthetics and his politics.32 The inherent vigor he detected in Spanish culture would provide a much-needed counterweight to the excessively intellectual tradition of Kantian German philosophy: “Un contrepoids [à l’Allemagne] est fourni par la pratique des civilisations de langue anglaise, et aussi par ce monde de langue espagnole auquel je voudrais voir l’université consacrer davantage de son attention” (20:54). Meanwhile, an alliance between Latin, southern countries would strengthen France in its struggles.
against its adversaries to the north: “C’est le bénéfice des deux pays. En Espagne, nous
coupons trouver des trésors spirituels, des puissances rénovatrices de nos sentiments
fondamentaux. J’insiste sur les parentés éternelles de l’Espagne et de la France et sur
l’intérêt actuel d’une reprise des relations fraternelles” (20:57).

It should be noted, however, that the professed admiration Barrès felt for Spain
and its culture was not without its limitations, and certainly not without a note of
condescension. The effusive literary impressions he recorded during his travels were
colored by his obviously limited perceptions of what he felt to be the Spanish national
character, or “l’hispanisme,” a term as essentializing, if not as negative, as “le
germanisme.” Not above resorting to traditional climate-based stereotypes about
excessive Spanish passion or indolence—such as are found, for instance, in Prosper
Mérimée’s Carmen (1845)—he tended to project a concomitant lack of intellectual
depth onto the Spaniards he observed: “Dans leurs mœurs, les Espagnols ne vont pas
chercher midi à quatorze heures; sous un ciel de couleur violente, ils se conforment à
leurs sensations. C’est un pays pour sauvage qui ne sait rien ou pour philosophe qui de
tout est blasé, sauf d’énergie (Du Sang, 2:44). As if to confirm the connection with
Mérimée, Barrès visited “la manufacture des tabacs de Séville,” admiring the beauty of
its female workers and declaring it a microcosm of the region as a whole: “Ainsi la
cigarerie est bien un résumé de cette Andalousie qui vaut par ses fruits, ses fleurs, ses
mules et ses femmes” (2:102).

Pointing out Spain’s geographic position at the southern edge of Europe, Barrès
tended to assimilate it to Africa or to the Orient (as had Hugo): “L’Afrique renaît dans
les décombres des palais castillans. Une chanson orientale [...] s’élève du milieu de cette
côte brûlée pour affirmer la race indélébile” (Gréco ou le secret de Tolède, 7:361). He
described an ongoing cultural struggle within the country, casting it as an unstable fault
line between two large civilizations, not unlike the Rhine: “Et dans Tolède, si je n’ai
jamais le cœur froid, ni les yeux ennuyés, c’est que j’y vois à chaque pas la plus belle
lutte du romanisme et du sémitisme, un élément arabe ou juif qui persiste sous l’épais
vernis catholique” (7:361). In the section of Du Sang, de la Volupté et de la Mort
entitled “A la pointe extrême de l’Europe,” the comparison with Africa is used to intensify the Barrésian image of Spain as an endless resource of strong, contrasting sensations:

Pour rompre l’atonie, l’Espagne est une grande ressource. Je ne sais pas de pays où la vie ait autant de saveur. Elle réveille l’homme le mieux maté par l’administration moderne. Là, enfin, on entrevoit que la sensibilité humaine n’est pas limitée à ces deux ou trois sensations fortes (l’amour, le duel, la cour d’assises) qui, seules, subsistent dans notre civilisation parisienne. C’est une Afrique: elle met dans l’âme une sorte de fureur aussi prompte qu’un piment dans la bouche. (2:112)

**Consecrated to Love and Pain**

Most of what has been said about how Barrès viewed Spain applies to Italy, the other southern, Catholic country where he found the contrasting sensations that stimulated his esthetic outlook: “La mort et la volupté, la douleur et l’amour s’appellent les unes les autres dans notre imagination” (*Amori et dolori sacrum*, 7:8). By spiritualizing extreme emotional states and estheticizing religious faith, Barrès found in the multifaceted architecture and art of Italian cities—such as in “cette Rome confuse et trop vivante” (*Du Sang*, 2:82)—the supplementary inspiration he sought in order to devote his writing “à l’analyse des nuances du sentiment, aux rêveries sur le Moi” (2:13). These were not minor issues for him. As Yves-Alain Favre puts it, for Barrès, “le voyage n’a rien du divertissement pascahien” (241). Barrès often referred to the influence of Italian cities and art in his work: “C’est à Venise que j’ai décidé toute ma vie, c’est de Venise également que je pourrais dater ces ouvrages” (“Examens des trois romans idéologiques,” 1:40). This influence appears in his more political texts as well. In this excerpt from Barrès’s second trilogy, the violence of the terms used to describe the regions of Italy reflects the emotional state of “l’homme du Nord:”

Sturel parcourut durant les hivers de 85-86 et 86-87 la Lombardie, la Toscane, la Vénétie, que l’homme du Nord ne devrait jamais visiter que vêtu d’un cilice, car s’il néglige de contrarier leurs délices par quelque souffrance volontaire comment plus tard s’accommodera-t-il de son aigre patrie? Il ne voyageait pas pour goûter du vin et des filles. Sous un ciel si puissant, des paysages qui font contraste lui dirent chacun leur mot. Parmi ces climats
Physiques et moraux qui le saisissaient, ce touriste solitaire évolua. La nature, l'art et l'histoire lui violentèrent l'âme. (*L'Appel au soldat*, 3:381-2)

Seldom straying from his political aims, Barrès also kept abreast of Italian influence in European affairs, bemoaning France's weak postwar ties with its erstwhile World War One ally: "Les faits sont là et nous pressent. Nous ne pouvons compter ni sur l'Italie, ni sur l'Angleterre" (*Mes Cahiers*, 20:43). During one of his visits, ever conscious of national as well as literary symbolism, he had made a pilgrimage to Garibaldi's home (just as he had visited Goethe's in Weimar). Barrès did not tend to assimilate Italy to Africa or the Orient, as he did in the case of Spain. He seemed to perceive it as more firmly grounded within the limits of Europe: "Rome, en effet, malgré son caractère éminent, est moins un lieu particulier que le plus complet abrégé de la culture européenne" (*Trois Stations de psychothérapie*, 2:362). His last visit to Italy took place in 1916, in the middle of the war, when he was invited by its government to tour the front lines, something he was already in the habit of doing in France (and which furnished the basis for many of his thunderous pro-war articles in *l'Echo de Paris*). As always, he linked the alliance with Italy to its cultural and racial underpinnings: "Aujourd'hui, nous voulons tous une extension de l'amitié franco-italienne sur tous les terrains: intellectuel, économique, financier, militaire. Les artistes ont toujours travaillé à une diffusion plus grande de la pensée latine sur les deux peuples" (*Dix jours en Italie*, 9:61-2). However, in an indication that Italy was for him more a source of esthetic inspiration than an important European state, he seems to have paid little attention to the significance of Mussolini's rise to power in 1922.

In spite of his obvious affinity for Italian culture, Barrès was just as capable of rejecting Italian influence, of relegating it to an radically alien, foreign status similar to that of Germany's, political alliances or cultural interconnections notwithstanding: "On croit expliquer quelque chose en disant que, chez deux jeunes gens [Sturel et Roemerspacher] placés dans des milieux italiens et allemands, la nationalité devait particulièrement réagir; mais à cette date c'est toute la France, dans toutes ses cellules, qui désire repousser des éléments venus de ses dehors" (*L'Appel au soldat*, 3:400).
More pointedly, in an echo of the Dreyfus Affair, Barrès campaigned against the triumphant re-interment in the Panthéon of the remains of a novelist who had been one of his most effective adversaries, Emile Zola. In an 1908 article, Barrès sought to explain Zola’s pro-Dreyfus activism by the Italian ancestry of the author of *J’accuse*: “Les Zola, si loin qu’on remonte, sont des Vénitiens [...] François Zola, père du romancier, abandonna Venise et l’Italie [...] Nous ne tenons pas nos idées et nos raisonnements de la nationalité que nous adoptons [...] Zola est violemment heurté, étonné, souvent choqué par nos spectacles et par nos mœurs, comme le serait un étranger en voyage” (4:607). Barrès had already attacked Zola during *l’Affaire*, using similar tautological arguments based on geographic determinism: “Qu’est-ce que M. Emile Zola? Je le regarde à ses racines: cet homme n’est pas un Français [...] il y a une frontière entre vous et moi. Quelle frontière? Les Alpes [...] Emile Zola pense tout naturellement en Vénitien déraciné” (*Scènes*, 5:52). The parallel between the infiltrated Italian and the Jewish traitor he was defending was obviously too tempting to pass up. The rigidly deterministic Barrésian logic inevitably led to a familiar and consistent conclusion: as a rootless foreigner, Zola could not immediately sense the instinctive rejection of Dreyfus by the French nation; he could only abstractly speculate about universalistic illusions such as truth and justice.

**Orientalizing Greece**

Barrès describes his trip to Greece as generally disappointing. He had been unenthusiastic about traveling there in the first place: “La curiosité qui m’oriente vers Athènes m’est venue du dehors plutôt que de mon cœur profond” (*Le Voyage de Sparte*, 7:177). He contrasts the somewhat tedious voyage, undertaken out of a sense of belles-lettres duty, with the excitement he felt during his visits in Spain and Italy: “Sur le paquebot du Pirée, je songe qu’en peu d’heures, j’aurais pu gagner Barcelone et gravir le Montserrat, ou bien franchir une fois encore le ravin de Tolède et regarder les Gréco qui savent toujours, ainsi que les Zurbaran de Séville, me dire des paroles excitantes. C’est
avec une sorte de maussaderie et pour remplir un devoir de lettré que je vais me soumettre à la discipline d'Athènes" (7:177).

Greece remained associated with Barrès's former teacher, Auguste Burdeau, whom he mercilessly depicted as the increasingly corrupt parliamentarian Bouteiller in his second trilogy. Barrès reproached Burdeau for his repeated attempts to instill a love for the “haute poésie essentielle” of classic Greek literature in his students: “Il eût mieux valu qu’un maître nous fournît une discipline lorraine et nous expliquât le destin particulier de ceux qui naissent entre la France et l’Allemagne” (7:162). With the code words “lorraine” and “particulier,” Barrès immediately signals that Greece, and especially Athens, is yet another incarnation of the abstract universalism he finds so pernicious.

Although an elitist French scholar such as Burdeau, under the influence of Kant, Nietzsche or other German philosophers, might claim an intimate link with Hellenistic thought, Barrès finds no prefigurement of any commonality among European cultures amid the ruins of Athens. While he admires the literature and architecture produced by the ancients Greeks, he feels no common bond with their civilization: “Tout est trop clair, hélas! nous sommes de deux races. Ce que les meilleurs d’entre nous appellent leur hellénisme est un ensemble d’idées conçues dans Alexandrie, dans Séleucie, dans Antioche, et que nos professeurs débitent” (7:190). In his rejection of Greece as the starting point of a continuous series of connective links between European cultures, in his characterization of Hellenism as the spurious, relatively recent grouping of a dispersed and heterogeneous set of discursive formations, Barrès seems to prefigure Martin Bernal’s critique of the notion of ancient Greece as the autonomous fountainhead for an interconnected framework of European cultural entities.

For Barrès, Hellenism is not just largely foreign to Greece and permeated with Oriental influences, it is mainly alien to his roots in Lorraine, and therefore incompatible with his sensibility. He declares himself incapable of appreciating or understanding Greek thought, using the lack of blood ties as a rationale: “N’étant pas de sang hellénique, je ne secrète aucune pensée athénienne” (7:197). Such statements may seem merely ridiculous, in their implication that presumed racial differences preclude the comprehension of
philosophical texts: “Faute de sang grec dans mes veines, je ne comprends guère Socrate ni Platon” (7:300). They are, however, consistent with the exclusionary logic of Barrès’s theory of rootedness. He cannot establish a link, intellectual or otherwise, with the land he visits, since he experiences no instinctive emotional attachment to it:

Il faudrait qu’en me repliant sur moi-même je trouvasse dans mon âme des réalités morales, des besoins et des émotions, analogues à celles qui s’expriment par ces statues, par ces architectures et par ces paysages grecs. Il faudrait... parlons net, il faudrait que j’eusse le sang de ces Hellènes. Le sang des vallées rhénanes ne me permet pas de participer à la vie profonde des œuvres qui m’entourent. (7:189)

Having criticized Renan for suggesting that Athens “a fondé la raison universelle” (7:187), Barrès, in front of the Acropolis, finds only yet another narrowly-based “raison municipale” (7:188). The intellectual universalism posited by Renan is for his rebellious disciple an inaccessible myth, no more plausible in Athens than it would be in Alexandria. At an esthetic level, Barrès is similarly unsatisfied by his trip to Greece, still unable to abolish the cultural distance that separates him from “les citoyens de l’Athènes du sixième siècle” (7:190). He finally finds the instinctive emotional connection he seeks—"Je ne puis faire emploi d’aucune beauté, si je n’ai pas su établir une circulation de mon cœur à son cœur" (7:189)—in a transplanted remnant of French history.

In the chapter of Le Voyage de Sparte entitled “Le Palais des ducs d’Athènes” (7:192-6), Barrès bemoans the 1875 destruction by archeologists of a small fort built on the Acropolis by French crusaders in the thirteenth century (that these crusaders had fought against Christian Byzantines is here of little consequence). The removal of this trace of a former French presence complicates, but does not prevent, the forging of the natural bond that Barrès was searching for in the land of Greece. It was inevitable that he would feel a more intense sensation when contemplating a vanished minor military French edifice than when standing in front of the remnants of the purportedly timeless and universal Parthenon: “avec quoi sentirais-je et jugerais-je, sinon avec ma sensibilité et ma raison française?” (7:195). In an interesting version of cultural relativism, Barrès does not seek to transcend his origins, feeling obligated to interpret Greek history and literature in strict accordance with his own national roots: “Notre sang nous force à
sentir dans le mot de Grèce autre chose que ce que l’Hellade était pour Périclès” (7:195).

Concerning the French thirteenth-century crusaders, Barrès returns to his day, establishing a laudatory parallel with colonial expansion in the nineteenth:

Ils apportaient une religion française, une langue française, des lois et des habitudes françaises et venaient disputer la Grèce aux Byzantins. Deux brillantes fantaisies se heurtent sur un sol, d’où perpétuellement émane une divine influence. Il serait beau d’écrire cette chevauchée pour qu’elle soit un livre national, un exemple significatif de toute notre histoire, car l’énergie qui fit déborder, au treizième siècle, la France sur l’Orient réapparaît, exactement pareille, au début du dix-neuvième. (7:287)

Once Barrès has found a small piece of France within Greece, he can appreciate the rugged beauty of the land and its ruins. As previously mentioned, he in particular finds “les motifs de mon enthousiasme” (7:274) in the masculine atmosphere of the site where once stood the city of Sparta. Overall, however, his trip to Greece lacked the “feverish” dimension of his visits to Spain and Italy, remaining a merely intellectual “voyage d’étude” (7:300) which had in retrospect reinforced his sense of rootedness: “Je me suis aperçu qu’entre tous les romans que la vie me propose, la Lorraine est le plus raisonnable, celui où peuvent le mieux jouer mes sentiments de vénération” (7:301).

Even when he devoted time and energy to the discovery of the sites of Greek mythology, he imposed his specific analytical matrix of destructive uprootedness on them:

Depuis ce burg de Mycènes, où régnerent Agamemnon et ses vassaux, je distingue le château franc qui couronne la montagne d’Argos; et j’imagine que ces deux féodalités doivent peu de choses aux lieux qu’elles étonnèrent en s’y épuisant. Ce sont deux colonies que leurs mères patries cessent un jour de ravitailler. Les flots ont jeté dans cette Argolide, ouverte largement à la mer, les vieilles civilisations de l’Egypte, de la Chaldée, de l’Assyrie, et, vingt siècles plus tard, de France, d’Espagne et de Venise. Mycènes est une Orientale abandonnée sur la plage de Grèce. Les Atrides, comme les Brienne, sont une forte famille de chefs déracinés. (7:241)

As was the case for Italy, Barrès never allowed for any easy interpenetration of national identities. In a direct reference to what he saw as the fundamentally alien nature of Greece, Barrès pointedly reminded Renan’s son-in-law, in the context of the Dreyfus affair, of his foreign origin, warning the brilliant philologist to avoid the temptation of
political activism: “Jean Psichari ou le Métèque: Psichari, jeune étudiant, nous vint de Grèce. Il fit sa fortune en France” (Scènes et doctrines du nationalisme, 5:64). For Barrès, it took the political and military upheavals of the First World War to transcend strict barriers between national origins, thereby transmuting former “métèques” into Frenchmen. Psichari’s sons would later die in battle as French soldiers; and Barrès would praise Renan’s grandsons of Greek extraction as patriotic heroes: “Ernest et Michel Psichari, deux enfants qui furent deux hérôs de la Patrie” (Les Maîtres, 12:168). In Chronique de la Grande Guerre, Barrès, stressing that the war had canceled all internal divisions, recalled Jean Psichari as a former political adversary, “que ce glorieux malheur rend pour nous un ami sacré” (2:122).

Where does Europe End and the Orient Start?

Barrès sometimes indulged in the picturesque type of Orientalist descriptions that depend on a luxuriant, dreamy exoticism. Un Jardin sur l’Oronte, with its harem scenes, is typical of the sort of lush, languid atmosphere popularized by Pierre Loti. Another example is provided by the character of Astiné Aravian in Les Déracinés: “Elle vient d’Asie et de régions mystérieuses et parfumées comme de belles esclaves voilées […] [Sturel] s’inclinant comme un barbare sur le seuil des immenses beautés asiatiques […] parmi les trésors de l’Orient […] aussi ingénieuse que Schéhérazade auprès de son sultan” (3:82-3). Sturel, who considers himself “responsable de l’Europe en face de l’Asie,” manfully tries to resist the hypnotic allure of Astiné’s feminized Orient: “je n’aïmerais pas sommeiller tout le jour comme des femmes du sérail” (3:91-2). It is not just that prolonged contact with Astiné would weaken his virility. Sturel’s roots in Lorraine, “une province militaire et disciplinée,” render him constitutionally unsuited for the languorous pleasures Astiné embodies: “le rêve de l’Orient, la cendre des siècles asiatiques, n’est pas pour lui respirable” (3:94).

In the way Astiné Aravian describes her family to Sturel, her immutable status as a foreigner derives as much from her uprootedness as from her cultural and geographical origins: “Tu vois bien la famille que nous sommes, turque et russe, en réalité arménienne,
c’est-à-dire pas du tout d’Europe” (3:84).\textsuperscript{55} As the embodiment of the prestigious but decadent civilizations of Asia, she also represents through her rootlessness the \textit{apatride} cosmopolitanism that would be so dangerous for the child of Lorraine transplanted to Paris. She is a newer version of Barrès’s \textit{Barbares}, threatening Sturel’s Self by weakening his emotional ties to his homeland:

Cependant, les paroles d’Astiné laissaient diffuser leurs dangereux éléments étrangers dans cet organisme en désordre. Sturel, qui subit l’invasion énervante de l’Asie, en croit d’abord sa clairvoyance plus étendue. Quelle erreur! Ce n’est pas une plus-value que lui laisseront ces grands mouvements: les vagues sentiments qui l’envahissent ou qui, déjà présents en lui, s’y développent, ne valent que pour le détourner de toutes réalités ou du moins des intérêts de la vie française. (3:93)

In a particularly brutal and sordid episode (3:298-305), her dangerous influence on Sturel is physically eliminated by two of his former friends from Lorraine, Racadot and Mouchefrin, both of whom are of lower-class origins. As is mentioned in the previous chapter, Sturel will eventually decide, due to the land-based solidarity he more acutely feels during the ceremonies linked to Victor Hugo’s funeral (3:325-45),\textsuperscript{56} to refrain from informing the police as to the identities of the murderers of his onetime lover. The assassination scene of the character of Astiné Aravian provides one of the clearest examples of Barrès’s misogyny: “Ainsi sanglante eut-elle le temps de penser dans la nuit: ‘Comme ça m’ennuie de mourir!...’ Mais eût-elle aimé vieillir? Les Orientales s’alourdissent si fort!” (3:301). Her death represents the evacuation of a presence at once foreign and feminine:

Cette fille d’Orient, originaire des pays où la moyenne de la vie humaine est bien plus courte qu’à Paris, semble vraiment s’être toujours appliquée à multiplier autour d’elle les mauvaises occasions et à se créer autant de risques qu’en présente la vallée de l’Euphrate où campa sa famille. Son gémissement dans les terrains de Billancourt vaut sa mère expirant sur la rive d’Asie. Il est naturel qu’une Astiné Aravian meure assassinée. (3:304)

As a disciple of Ernest Renan, Barrès, whom Jacques Huré calls “le dernier des écrivains orientalistes” (223), produced several characters and texts which would fit into Edward Said’s definitions of “Orientalism:” Marina in \textit{L’Ennemi des lois}, Astiné Aravian...
The broad scope Barrès attributes to the Orient is one way to trace the limits he assigns to Europe. As previously mentioned, Barrès tended to Orientalize countries, such as Spain and Greece, that are well within the traditional geographical and cultural confines of Europe as a continent. He also came to deny any “European” status to most of Germany. His treatment of the associated European and Oriental topoi provides an illustrative counter-example to what constitutes one of the major flaws of Said’s book: the representation of “the West” as a monolithic presence. Far from contrasting a culturally homogeneous Europe with the image of a similarly uniform Orient as a menacing or subaltern other, Barrès systematically positioned his own national culture at a remote, unbridgeable distance from such traditionally important European cultural forces as Greece and Germany. In effect, he “Orientalized” much of Europe, thus blurring the east-west opposition so thoroughly examined by Said. By symbolically relegating a country such as Germany to Asia, Barrès tended to make the borders of Europe coincide with those of France:

En tout cas, à cette heure, le débat est éclairé et tranché par la guerre. De ces deux variétés de discipline, l’une de force, l’autre de sympathie, la victoire a démontré que l’Allemagne ne peut concevoir que la première; cependant que l’effondrement de la prépondérance économique, qui jusqu’à cette heure n’a été remplacée par nulle autre, laisse le champ libre à notre action plus spirituelle.

Et c’est fini, n’est-ce pas, que personne puisse nous parler d’une Allemagne rempart de la civilisation contre la barbarie asiatique!

Hier, sous son apparence de modernité et d’activité pratique, ce n’était pas la vraie doctrine de l’Occident que l’Allemagne réalisait; son européanisme était entaché d’une foi néfaste dans le pouvoir de deux notions, le nombre et la force, qui n’appartiennent pas à la meilleure définition de l’Europe; mais aujourd’hui, tandis qu’elle laisse jouer avec prédilection ses affinités asiatiques et qu’elle reporte ainsi plus à l’ouest la vraie frontière de l’Europe, tandis que son communisme prend figure de soviétisme et ses aspirations monarchiques de tsarisme, qui donc pourrait s’entêter dans l’erreur de croire qu’elle incarne l’esprit européen? (Une Enquête aux pays du Levant, 11:463)

Although he generally approved of France’s efforts at extending its colonial empire—as long as they did not distract the country from its main objective along the Rhine—Barrès did not posit an unchanging subject-object relationship between Europe
and the Orient, neither of which is represented as a unified entity in most of his texts. His support of the French presence in the Ottoman Empire before the First World War, for instance, was to a great extent motivated by his desire to counter long-standing German influence. The superiority he ascribed to French culture, and the condescension or outright racism he often showed in his “Oriental” texts, did not derive from an underlying sense of belonging to a common, homogeneous European cultural field. The civilizational fault line Barrès perceived within the European continent was for him far more fundamental than what separated Europe from Asia. The same can be said for his version of the Orient, where he saw natural allies as well as enemies of France. In an aside on the forced Islamization of Persia, for instance, Barrès decries the loss of what he sees as its true nature: “Quel désastre pour cette race persane, qui appartient, comme les Indiens, les Grecs, les Latins et nous-mêmes, à la grande famille aryenne, d’avoir à s’accommoder de la pensée sémitique et d’une pensée contre sa nature!” (Une Enquête aux pays du Levant, 11:234). Given his constant railing against “le germanisme,” one wonders why he dissociated “nous-mêmes” from “les Latins.” What is clear is that Barrès did not merely fabricate an immutable and unitary Oriental essence as a means of antithetically establishing a similarly reified European identity.

Conclusion

Maurice Barrès is not as easy to classify as such obvious proto-fascists as Georges Sorel and Charles Maurras, or such systematic racist ideologues as Edouard Drumont and Arthur de Gobineau. The settled parliamentary career of his later years belied the revolutionary rhetoric and activities of his youth. Like many a young firebrand, he gradually evolved into a staid conservative, becoming in many ways a pillar of the very regime he had seemed bent on destroying. In his intellectual eclecticism, Barrès was capable of praising Michelet, Hugo, and even Rousseau, who incarnated the rationalist, universalistic tradition of the Enlightenment that he otherwise rejected. He could also show grudging respect for a contemporary political adversary such as Jean Jaurès. His reconciliation with his former enemies within France during the First World War seems
genuine, and stands in contrast with the frequently violent tone of his previous texts. The fact that critics remain bitterly divided over such a basic question as whether he was a pre-fascist or a pre-Gaullist is an indication of the lingering ambiguities of his literary and political heritage.61

There is little doubt, however, that Barrès was a major participant in the rise of a reductive, tribalist version of French patriotism at the turn of the century. The jingoistic patriotic fervor he exalted bore little resemblance to Victor Hugo’s version of French nationalism, which allowed for a vision of eventual European reconciliation and cooperation. Unlike Hugo, Barrès precluded any possibility of transcending nationalism or limiting its magnitude, perceiving only an uninterrupted series of conflicts—or at best an uneasy balance of power—between France and most of its neighbors. While he tended to relativize and particularize “abstract” concepts such as reason, truth, and justice, Barrès expressed his ethnocentric ethic of the Land and the Dead in absolute, all-encompassing terms, thus obviating any possible coexistence of national identity with a wider sense of European citizenship.

A nuanced and complex writer who initially showed signs of a genuine European sensitivity, Barrès evolved into a systematic nationalist with a comprehensive theory that made many of his political attitudes predictable, and that seems to have limited his literary outlook. By assigning somewhat simplistic, essentialized national characters to the countries he wrote about, and exalting or denigrating aspects of their culture according to his own estheticized nationalistic framework, he tended to reduce other European cultures to the status of alluringly (or threateningly) exoticized postcard images. His Europe soon became a blank screen onto which he could project mental pictures of contiguous foreign cultures that were either radically inimical to his native land, or in a situation of reciprocal influence with it. Just as he dreamed of a Europe shaped according to the needs of France, his literary forays into other cultures always brought him back to his own: “C’est ainsi que, dans ma jeunesse, j’ai cru la beauté dispersée à travers le monde et principalement sur les régions les plus mystérieuses, mais
aujourd'hui j'en trouve l'essentiel sur le visage sans éclat de ma terre natale" (Amori et dolori sacrum, 7:10).

Many of the themes so thoroughly developed by Barrès (national cohesion, Latin affinities, the ongoing adversarial relationship with Germany) will reappear, albeit in far different form, in the next chapter. Jean Renoir produced his best films during the 1930s, in a European context largely shaped by World War One and its aftermath. As is reflected in some of those films, the Entre-Deux-Guerres was marked by a resurgence of pro-European sentiment and activism. However, it would take another world war for some countries to actually take the first tentative steps towards transcending the nationalistic divisions and hatreds that Barrès had sought to exacerbate.
Jean Renoir (1894-1979) is widely regarded as one of the world’s greatest film directors. Born the year of Dreyfus’s trial, he had a privileged upbringing—materially, artistically, and by all accounts, emotionally—within the uncommonly stimulating environment of the studios in Paris and southern France of his father, the painter Auguste Renoir.¹ After his Baccalauréat, Jean Renoir enlisted in the French cavalry corps, seeking a military career. During World War One, he was seriously wounded, and would always suffer from a persistent limp. Nevertheless, after his convalescence (during which he spent a great deal of his time watching films), he returned to active duty, serving in another elite unit, the air corps. Much of his wartime experience would later be depicted in his films—and it would be represented in a far different way from the Barrésian panegyric of enthusiastic martyrdom.

Renoir left France for the United States in 1940. In choosing exile as a means of escape from the German Occupation, he was hardly alone: a prestigious roster of French artists, including filmmakers, fled France during the war years. Unlike many of them, however, Renoir did not return after the Liberation.² Instead, he made a new home in Hollywood, became an American citizen,³ and did not visit France again for ten years, a course of events that fundamentally changed both the direction of his career and the way his films were received after the war in his former homeland (most of them were banned, it should be noted, during the Occupation). Critics generally distinguish his pre-World War Two films, among which are arguably his best, from the rest of his cinematic
production. Renoir’s American films were a mixed lot, that included wartime propaganda efforts and a 1946 adaptation of Octave Mirbeau’s novel, *Le Journal d’une femme de chambre*. After the war, his career became international, with films shot in India (*Le Fleuve*, 1951), Italy (*Le Carrosse d’or*, 1953), and Austria (*Le Caporal épinglé*, 1962), as well as in France (from *French Cancan*, 1955, to *Le Petit Théâtre de Jean Renoir*, 1970). While Renoir was never a theoretician or even an obvious proponent of a unified Europe, several of his films are marked by an awareness of what Germaine de Staël had called the “European spirit.” They reflect the promise and the contradictions of what would become a trend towards integration among several countries of Western Europe. Renoir was also one of the first major filmmakers to lead a successful multinational career.

As a quintessentially French director who nevertheless chose to settle in the United States, who often depicted in his films encounters that spanned linguistic and national boundaries, and who would eventually come to describe himself in universalistic (and apolitical) terms as “un citoyen du cinématographe” (1974a, 259), Jean Renoir provides an early example of cross-cultural cinematic production and representations. I will not argue that Renoir was a forerunner of what might someday be a transcultural European cinema, but will try to show that some of his films embody a European sensibility, or an awareness of common patterns of thought and behavior, in a historical period when transnational interactions between the inhabitants of Europe had begun to multiply, no longer simply among the established economic and cultural elites, but across broader societal segments. As was the case for the authors covered in the previous chapters, this chapter is by no means intended as a comprehensive study of Renoir’s work: I will consider only those films that are particularly relevant to the evolving conceptions of Europe. Ironically, most of these were produced during the 1930s, when the idea of a Europe potentially at peace and united was at a low ebb. Renoir’s film work is especially significant, not only in terms of its own obvious merits and influence, but also because it spanned and partly reflected a particularly tumultuous historical period,
from the eve of the worst war on the continent to the first concrete steps toward European integration.

**Style and Technique**

Few directors have been as wide-ranging in their filmmaking—in terms of the subject matter, technique, locales and conditions of production—as Jean Renoir. His career spanned the transition from the silent to the sound era, as well as the subsequent transition from black-and-white to color films. For the greater part of his career, he had to contend with the traditional financial pressures of the filmmaking industry. Although Renoir was able to provide the initial investment for his early silent films by selling some of his father's paintings, most of these, especially his 1926 adaptation of Emile Zola's novel *Nana*, were financially unsuccessful. He soon turned to making films for a living, including some, such as the theatrical farce *On Purge Bébé* (1931), that were shaped more by commercial considerations than by artistic inspiration. As Dudley Andrew points out, Renoir was capable of acclimatizing himself to widely varying conditions and methods of production within the cinema industry: "Renoir was forever adapting to whatever was around him" (1995, 276). Hence a certain qualitative unevenness among his films. Aside from his multi-faceted filmmaking, Renoir was also a prolific essayist and novelist.⁵

Like most filmmakers of his generation, Renoir had no formal training in the field, and learned the technical aspects of his craft through practical experience. During the apprenticeship period of his early silent films, he gradually developed a visual esthetic or style that came to define, following the auteurist tradition, "un film de Renoir," much as his father's paintings had come to be seen in terms of a generally recognizable style. Although he continued throughout his career to experiment with all the technical possibilities of the film medium, including the use of television, it is Renoir's increasingly consistent mastery of cinematic technique that imparts a certain sense of continuity to his widespread body of work (the degree of this continuity, as I will endeavor to show, has often been overstated). Renoir's films have generally been characterized by fairly long
plans-séquences, with depth of field shooting that allows for a clear view of both the foreground and background (and sometimes even three levels of depth, as in the first meeting between Pepel and the Baron in Les Bas-Fonds). The view of the characters in the background can thus provide an illustrative or contrapuntal complement to the action seen in the foreground, as in La Règle du jeu, when Octave and Robert appear ill at ease, standing behind Christine while she is speaking to her guests at la Colinière of her "amitié" for André.

The style that Renoir gradually adopted is very different from the découpage classique inspired by American cinema, which stresses narrative continuity through, paradoxically, a highly fragmented succession of takes, usually involving a series of shots/reverse shots. As André Bazin has noted (1971, 77-84), by contrast with the meticulous montage, or editing, required by Hollywood standards, Renoir generally favored fixed or panning shots that privileged the time and space of each dramatic moment. Describing the evolution of Renoir’s technique as he moved from silent to sound films, Bazin derives the signature camera movements of Renoir’s films of the 1930s from his preference for the visual and dramatic effects of depth of field: "La préoccupation fondamentale de Renoir sera en effet plus tard d’élargir par le recadrage latéral le champ de l’écran approfondi par ses objectifs. A cette fin, le panoramique et le travelling latéral seront les deux mouvements principaux de sa caméra" (1971, 21). In 1938, Renoir provided a similar description of his technique, stressing his growing reliance on depth of field, as opposed to a flat, two-dimensional presentation inspired by certain established theatrical or photographic traditions: "plus j’avance dans mon métier, plus je suis amené à faire de la mise en scène en profondeur par rapport à l’écran. Plus ça va, plus je renonce aux confrontations entre deux acteurs placés sagement devant l’appareil comme chez le photographe. Cela m’est commode de placer plus librement mes personnages à des distances différentes de la caméra, de les faire bouger" (1974b, 42).
In spite of the thematic and qualitative disparities among his films, many critics have emphasized Jean Renoir’s status as a film “auteur,” who attempted to control all the important aspects of his films, so as to produce an individual—and relatively constant—vision, to the extent possible in such a collective medium. André Bazin and Alexander Sesonske have amply documented the recurrence in Renoir’s work of certain thematic motifs (such as poaching, class distinctions, theatricalization, or murders accompanied by diegetic songs) as well as techniques (long takes, panoramic shots, and especially depth of field). In particular, Bazin describes Renoir as consistently a realist, in the nineteenth-century novelistic sense: “Renoir est l’un des maîtres du réalisme cinématographique, héritier de la tradition romanesque naturaliste et de son contemporain l’impressionnisme pictural” (1971, 29). *La Règle du jeu,* one of Renoir’s masterpieces—and a commercial disaster when it was first released in 1939—represents for Bazin “l’expression la plus achevée de l’école réaliste française d’avant-guerre, dont Renoir est le plus grand représentant” (1971, 67). Even in the oneiric sequences of one of Renoir’s early silent films, *La Petite Marchande d’allumettes,* Bazin sees “une incursion du réalisme de Renoir dans les thèmes et techniques de l’avant-garde” (1971, 19). The issue of realism in cinema, and the techniques with which it is associated, were particularly important for Bazin, who sought to establish for the film director a level of authorship similar to that of the novelist: “Le cinéaste est, non plus seulement le concurrent du peintre et du dramaturge, mais enfin l’égal du romancier” (1958, 148). Several other critics of the influential review *Les Cahiers du cinéma,* many of whom would go on to filmmaking careers—and who would be somewhat simplistically lumped together under the appellation of “la nouvelle vague”—championed Renoir’s directorial style after the war, opposing it to the “tradition de qualité” of the French screen in the 1950s. The *Cahiers* issue of January 1952 (as well as subsequent articles and interviews in 1954 and 1957), which was largely devoted to Renoir’s work, did much to revive popular interest in a French director who had been living abroad for over a decade, and whose films were not initially well received in his home country after the war.
By stressing technical and thematic continuity within a highly differentiated body of work, by isolating the filmmaker from his social and cultural environment, auteurism, despite the often brilliant insights of its practitioners, tended to elevate Renoir to the lofty but somewhat inaccessible status of Genius or Great Artist, thereby minimizing the social and historical determinants of his cinematic production. Overemphasis on such technical aspects as depth of field and panoramic shots led to assimilating Renoir to Alfred Hitchcock’s technique-driven style of filmmaking. As Susan Hayward characterized the limitations of the auteurist approach: “Whereas the emphasis on auteurs and movements is often justified in terms of the excellence of the works concerned, what is lacking is their proper historical contextualization within wider cultural considerations” (7). The studies by Elizabeth Grotte Strebel, Jonathan Buchsbaum, and Christopher Faulkner have provided a much-needed corrective to auteurism’s gradual elimination of the social and political background of Renoir’s films. The 1996 issue of *Persistence of Vision* on “Politics and the Cinema of Jean Renoir,” mainly devoted to the films of what might be called the Popular Front period of Renoir’s career, also highlighted the need to consider the broad societal context of Renoir’s filmmaking.

In *The Social Cinema of Jean Renoir*, Faulkner attempted to break with the “author-centered” analysis of the Renoir corpus, foregrounding instead the historical context of some of Renoir’s films, especially those shot during the period of the Popular Front. Where auteurism had privileged common themes and techniques, Faulkner’s interpretation usefully establishes discontinuities between Renoir’s films, distinguishing, in particular, between the films of the 1930s (what he calls “an ideology of politics”) and the postwar films (“an ideology of aesthetics”). Faulkner’s detailed study provides a convincing case that several of the films directed by Renoir in the late 1930s reflect his “specific political commitment” (8), a commitment which must be situated within the context of the hopes and turmoil of the Popular Front in France, and of the threat of fascism throughout Europe. However, Faulkner also creates a new form of cohesive unity in that notable segment of Renoir’s career, a unity largely determined by political
involvement—and undermined by his own argument concerning the spurious “wholeness” of Renoir’s work. By stretching such films as *Boudu sauvé des eaux* (1932) and even *Une Partie de campagne* (1936) across the Procrustean bed of his “social analysis,” Faulkner ascribes to perhaps the most important part of Renoir’s film corpus an excessive degree of continuity. This continuity is, ironically, similar in its single-minded focus to the technical and thematic uniformity that some of the practitioners of auteurism had superimposed upon Renoir’s output as a whole.

To a certain extent, *The Social Cinema of Jean Renoir* constitutes a reaction against Alexander Sesonske’s classic book on Renoir’s pre-war films, a comprehensive study that builds on the auteurist tradition and provides some of the most insightful scholarship on Renoir’s art and technique. This long-standing critical divide between auteurism, which tends to privilege Renoir as a unique artist, and what might be called social analysis, which situates his work as a reflection of the socio-political forces at a given historical juncture, has to some extent been bridged, or transcended, by more recent books by Dudley Andrew, Susan Hayward, and Alan Williams. These broader studies of French cinematic practice inscribe Renoir as an important cultural actor within a complex set of social determinants, which include such factors as audience expectations, the availability and influence of other forms of popular entertainment, the economic constraints of filmmaking, the evolving notions of class, sexual and national identities, as well as overtly political activity and conflict. In *Mists of Regret*, Andrew devotes a separate chapter (275-317) to Renoir, acknowledging both his status as an “institution” within French cinema and the social and political movements he came to be identified with:

As much as modern scholarship might like to gauge Renoir’s films and activities from 1935 to the war with reference to the prevailing social conditions and political ideology, the eight magnificent and varied films he fashioned, one after another, in these short years have compelled most critics on the contrary to gauge the period with reference to him. His staggering output spreads far beyond the contours of the dominant social and aesthetic movements of the day: the Popular Front and poetic realism. (299)
A Popular Front Auteur?

Renoir was never an active politician seeking elective office. Unlike Hugo and Barrès, his political activity, which was considerable until 1939, remained that of an artist, one who clearly identified with the major left-wing political movement of his time. Renoir’s active support for the Popular Front is well-known. Aside from *La Vie est à nous* (1936) and *La Marseillaise* (1938), he worked with Jacques Prévert and the *Groupe Octobre* on *Le Crime de M. Lange* (1935), participated in the creation of an independent association of filmmakers, *Ciné-Liberté*, and contributed several articles to the Communist newspaper *Ce Soir*, which were collected in his *Ecrits 1926-1971*. Renoir was of course far from the only major French filmmaker of the 1930s to give cinematic representation—with varying degrees of political involvement and stylistic innovation—to the social issues of his day. He had been preceded by, for instance, René Clair (*A nous la liberté*, 1931) and Jean Vigo (*Zéro de conduite*, 1933). Also, the films of several other directors of the pre-war period—such as Julien Duvivier’s *La Belle Equipe* (1936) and Marcel Carné’s *Le Quai des brumes* (1938)—similarly reflected the social concerns of the urban working class as well as the political turmoil linked to the rise of fascism and the threat of war in Europe.

During this period of his career—from *Toni* (1934) to *La Règle du jeu* (1939)—Renoir alternated between a humanist, internationalist world-view and more specific signs of support, as a fellow traveler, for the French Communist Party (PCF) platform of nationalism and alliance between workers and the middle classes. This period, during which Renoir produced some of his most—and least—commercially successful films, roughly coincided with the rise and fall of the Popular Front. After the infamous riot of Feb. 6, 1934 (and subsequent demonstrations and riots on Feb. 9 and 12), the PCF, following the lead of the Komintern, called for an alliance of the Left in order to counter the rising tide of fascism in Europe. No longer emphasizing class struggle or denouncing the socialists, the PCF, in one of its ideological U-turns, called for cooperation between the French working and middle classes, which were both being hard hit by the global economic crisis of the 1930s.
For the Communist Party, expounding the necessity of national unity, rather than traditional class-based internationalism, meant resurrecting and promoting previously disparaged nationalistic symbols, such as the tricolor flag and the anthem of the French Revolution, projects in which Jean Renoir participated through his filmmaking. He directed one of his best films, *La Grande Illusion*, in between *La Vie est à nous*, which was used for the PCF’s electoral campaign in 1936, and *La Marseillaise*, which was financed in part by the CGT labor union (the two other films of this particularly productive period were *Partie de campagne* and *Les Bas-Fonds*). While he never became a member of the PCF, Renoir was a highly visible compagnon de route, clearly engaged as an artist in the struggle for better living standards for French workers, and against the rising tide of fascism in Europe. Along with the socially-oriented themes of Renoir’s films during this troubled historical period, the process of his cinematic production was characterized by a rare degree of cooperation with a semi-regular team of actors, scriptwriters and technicians. In his later years, Renoir tended to diminish the scope of his political engagement during the 1930s, devoting only a three-page chapter of his autobiography, *Ma Vie et mes films*, to the period of the Popular Front (112-14). His new, relatively apolitical stance was in part due to anti-communist hysteria in his new home, the United States, after the war.

A Persistent Theme

Unlike Victor Hugo, Renoir was never a prophet or theoretician of a united Europe; nor did he show great interest in, or openly advocate the gradual process of European integration after the war. In fact, as a film director, he was insistent, before the Second World War, on the necessity of independent national cinemas—if not exclusively national filmmakers. However, several of his pre- and post-war films show an obvious affinity, in terms of content as well as conditions of production, for the sort of transnational cooperation that the building of Europe continues to require. Similarly, some of Renoir’s films, while they can include instances of negative stereotyping, also depict what I have called transnational minorities with a significant degree of both
empathy and complexity, a rare achievement for their time. A discussion of the European thematics found in some of his films is inseparable from the dialectic of nationalism and internationalism which characterizes a great deal of his visual and textual output. Just as Renoir tended to disengage himself from left-wing political involvement after the Second World War, he also distanced himself from the form of French nationalism he had previously advocated in his writings and his filmmaking—a form, it should be noted, that bore little resemblance to that of Barrès.

Renoir’s own intellectual evolution is visible in his writings. In particular, his generally negative attitude towards transnational coproductions seems to have changed after the Second World War. Initially, while he in no way disparaged foreign films, he privileged the specificity of cinema as the reflection of an individual national culture. In an article written in 1938, he saw film as first and foremost a national medium: “Je sais que je suis français, et que je dois travailler dans un sens absolument national. Je sais aussi que, en faisant, et seulement somme cela, je puis toucher les gens des autres nations, et faire œuvre d’internationalisme” (1974b, 45). To his credit, Renoir showed no signs of chauvinism in his championing the necessity for authenticity in French cinema. Nor did he advocate protectionism in terms of film production, although at that time he pronounced himself unwilling to direct anything but French films. In 1936, he opposed attempts to limit the number of foreign workers in the French cinema industry, many of whom were at that time refugees from nazi Germany: “Nous ne devons pas empêcher les producteurs qui le désirent d’employer des metteurs en scène, des opérateurs, des techniciens étrangers” (1974b, 85).

However, in the same article, Renoir also called for levying special taxes on foreign films distributed in France, partly as a means of raising capital for the national film industry, which had remained financially weak since the First World War: “j’insiste sur le fait que le film français manque d’argent et que ce serait, peut-être, une façon d’en trouver” (1974b, 83). Many of Renoir’s writings before the war revolve around the need to defend the artistically resourceful, but financially beleaguered, French film industry—a perceived need that does not seem to have greatly diminished in our own day. This
notion of a “French national cinema” (which Hayward has studied at length), of which directors such as Renoir and Marcel Carné constitute prime examples, was to a large extent formulated against the dominant American model of filmmaking. It is all the more ironic that Renoir, the French film director who apparently never became fully fluent in English, would in 1940 find not just a safe haven, but a permanent home in Hollywood. Due to both the war and personal concerns, he would not return to France for ten years, and would not shoot a film there for fifteen. This enforced absence obviously affected him and his work. In 1952, having by then become an American citizen, he was already distancing himself from “l'idée de nation sur laquelle nous nous appuyons depuis Jeanne d'Arc” (1974b, 60). By 1957, Renoir was also far less insistent on the specificity of a national cinema:

Nous en arrivons donc à ceci, c’est que notre collaborateur le public, qui fait des films avec nous, nous demande maintenant à ce que ce film soit international. Or, je dois l'avouer, il y a vingt ans, je n'y croyais pas. Il y a vingt ans, j'étais absolument convaincu que l'idéal était de faire un film à un certain endroit, pour le public de cet endroit et que l'idéal eût été presque de montrer ce film dans un théâtre appartenant à une organisation dont on ferait partie soi-même, et à ne pas en sortir. (1974b, 68)

It is true that by then Renoir’s brief American film career was already over, and he had begun a new phase as an international filmmaker with *The River* (1951), shot on location in India. Although an atypical film within the Renoir corpus, it constitutes an important point of transition in his career, in terms of both theme and technique. As Faulkner points out: “*The River* completes a gradual shift [begun in 1945 with *The Southerner*] away from subject matter that deals with specific historical realities. With the films of Renoir’s second maturity, it is the world of art that offers us the individual and collective dream of social harmony fulfilled” (1986, 164). Renoir later presented his encounter with India as a transformative experience, even though he never returned to that country or represented it in his films. In 1972, the former Popular Front director seemed to be verging on a form of quietism: “La puissance destructive des idées venues de l'Inde tient à ce qu'elles révèlent à des millions d'Occidentaux la vanité de l'action.
Pour les gens de ma génération, le Dieu était l'action. La forme la plus populaire de cette action était le travail” (1974b, 271).

_The River_ was not just Renoir's first film clearly set abroad—that is, outside of France or the United States—it also involved several personal and technical innovations: for the first time in cinema, _The River_ made use of direct sound recorded on magnetic tape. It was also Renoir's first color film, as well as the first Technicolor film made in India. So concerned was Renoir with the appropriate use of color that he resorted to such devices as having the grass painted greener. The Indian filmmaker Satyajit Ray met Renoir in Calcutta during the filming of _The River_. He describes Renoir as seeking not just fresh artistic inspiration in India, but also a means of escape from the technical and administrative constraints of the commercialized Hollywood studio system: “Renoir feels that the best intentions are apt to be thwarted in Hollywood owing to certain immutable factors. He mentioned the star system, the endless codes of censorship and the general tendency to regard films as a mass-produced commodity as being the three most obvious” (114). Although Renoir remained an American citizen and continued to reside in California until his death in 1979, he would not make another film in the United States. After India, he went to Italy to shoot his next film, _Le Carrosse d’or_ (1953). In 1958, he celebrated the multinational nature of its production process, while still referring to himself as a French director: “Voilà l’histoire de _La Carroza d’Oro_, tourné en langue anglaise en Italie, par un metteur en scène français” (1974b, 275). Nearly all his subsequent films would be shot in France (the 1962 exception, _Le Caporal épinglé_, was mostly shot in Austria).

_The River_ made explicit the universalism that had been one the underlying themes of Renoir’s films of the 1930s. As I will argue later, this theme is in practice mostly applicable to European countries. In his autobiography, Renoir described himself as being more concerned with “horizontal” than with “vertical” divisions (i.e.: class vs. national boundaries): “ma théorie de la division du monde en frontières horizontales et non plus en chambres fermées par des frontières verticales” (1974a, 146). He came to believe that people from different countries who shared a similar educational and cultural
background—what Pierre Bourdieu would call *l'habitus*—would more easily find common ground. Class distinctions, meanwhile, would more surely divide people living within the borders of a country. This form of internationalism, which was diametrically opposed to Barrès's wartime call for national unity, irrespective of class or religion, discounted ethnic conflicts and assumed the stability of class distinctions around the world. Renoir gave another version of his view in 1952, apparently discounting class distinctions as well: "Au lieu de grouper les hommes par races, nations, religions, langues, je les groupe par affinités spirituelles. Mon monde à moi se divise en avares et généreux, en négligents et précautionneux, en maîtres et en esclaves, en habiles et en sincères, en créateurs ou en copistes" (1974b, 196-7).

Renoir after the war was no doubt less of a militant, but not necessarily more of a dreamer (as he has often been portrayed). One of his lighter post-World War Two films, *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe*, pointedly satirized the technocratic orientation of the European Economic Community, which had been created in 1957 by the Treaty of Rome. In this 1959 production, a brilliant scientist played by Paul Meurisse is a candidate for the much-discussed, but still inexistent, office of President of the United States of Europe. An aloof, grimly purposeful, and somewhat pompous bureaucrat, he advocates a brave new world of societal betterment through generalized artificial insemination. He will be lured away from his somewhat sinister projects of methodical eugenics, and from his intended bride (an equally rigid, uniformed German scout leader with whom he seems to enjoy communicating by television), by a French peasant girl played by Catherine Rouvel. This comic fable of science vs. nature, or abstract rationalism vs. sensual materialism, ends with a reconciliation, as Rouvel's very pregnant character eventually humanizes what Durgnat calls "an amiably glaciated biologist," leading him toward "a new, scientifically less fanatical policy" (349). The hypostatized representatives of the technocratic and pastoral domains, without abandoning either of their specificities, have thus managed to find what Renoir had called "affinités spirituelles." The new or artificial European entity, with its quest for standardization and efficiency, can coexist with the less structured *mores* of the traditional French
countryside; and the two can learn from each other. The thrust of this dionysian morality
tale is similar to La Grande Illusion's pre-war appeal for common understanding
between ordinary Frenchmen and Germans; one difference being the far more favorable
post-war historical context.

Renoir's gradual acceptance of "international" cinema has yet to find much
concrete expression within Europe. The notion of "European cinema," which is briefly
explored by Dyer and Vincendeau in their introduction to Popular European Cinema (1-
14), is at least as problematic as that of "European literature." Although cinema is often
considered a more easily accessible—or "popular"—medium, most European films are
still rarely screened outside of their home markets. Indeed, while the economic and even
political integration of a large part of the continent has reached an advanced stage,
cultural production remains highly fragmented, with perversely negative consequences
for films produced and distributed within Europe. Despite an established tradition of
coproductions, the film industries of each country of Europe are to a great extent
provincial, producing films principally aimed at their individual home audience.25 The
most common, trans-European films are thus, paradoxically, largely American—of
course, the film industry of the United States is dominant in the greater part of the world.
This asymmetrical situation of American global dominance and relative European
fragmentation can be seen in a positive light, as the productive resistance of local
cultures against the homogenizing influence of entertainment conglomerates that tend to
reduce cinematic cultural production to the lowest common denominator ("le degré zéro
du cinéma," to paraphrase Roland Barthes). However, relatively limited distribution
within each country not only entails the competitive disadvantage of smaller markets and
budgets, it also carries the potential of perpetuating chauvinistic or provincial
representations, encouraging the continued reification of national and local cultural
patterns into mutually exclusive essences.26 Within the European context of largely
separate national film industries and audiences, what makes some of Renoir's films of the
1930s especially interesting is precisely the degree and complexity of the cross-cultural
interactions they depict.

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Latin Connections: *Toni* (1935)

A team of workers is in the middle of a maintenance job on the railroad tracks, as a train carrying new immigrants arrives at a small town in southern France. While the train is slowly passing by, one of the railroad workers laments that these new arrivals will probably compete for scarce jobs in the area: "des étrangers qui viennent nous enlever le pain de la bouche." His colleague concurs. Curiously, both of these presumably French xenophobes speak heavily accented French. Their short conversation soon reveals that one of them is from Turin, and the other from Barcelona... This opening scene from *Toni* appears strikingly contemporary, reminiscent of more recent popular jokes by Fernand Raynaud or Coluche about French attitudes towards foreign immigrants. In the next scene, as the title character gets off the train and heads for the town in search of lodging, a pair of gendarmes stop him for a random "contrôle d'identité"—another routine occurrence in contemporary France.

However, once the point is made that many of the characters are of foreign origins, *Toni* shows few instances of us-against-them adversarial relationships between French nationals and the diverse groups of immigrant workers. Few ethnic or racial epithets are heard; and the interactions between the different national and regional groups seem relatively frictionless. The multicultural, multilingual setting is introduced by the film's epigram: "L'action se passe dans le midi de la France, en pays latin, là où la nature, détruisant l'esprit de Babel, sait si bien opérer la fusion des races." The opening scene situates the practical motivation of the immigrants, and the relative irrelevance of nationalistic sentiments within the narrative, as one of the workers opines, in spite of having complained about the new arrivals: "Mon pays, c'est l'endroit qui me fait bouffer." *Toni* represents one extreme of Renoir's work in terms of the extent of multinationaism it depicts, with national institutions almost absent (the only representatives of the French Republic are a few gendarmes, who are briefly seen at the opening and closing of the narrative). He would move towards a clearer affirmation of
French nationalism in subsequent films, particularly in *La Vie est à nous* and *La Marseillaise*. François de La Bretèque points out (69) that *Toni* is one of the few films situated in the south of France that matter-of-factly presents the languages of national and regional minorities (in this case, Italian, Spanish, and Corsican). Renoir thus initiated the use of multiple languages and accents as an integral component of one of his films, a technique he would use so brilliantly in *La Grande Illusion*. The character of Toni is an Italian immigrant, while Josépha, the object of his unrequited love, is Spanish. Nearly all the characters speak French with an accent, including most of the French citizens in the area (some of whom are Corsican). The only major character who speaks standard, or “Parisian,” French—Toni’s rival, Albert, who will become Josépha’s husband—is also the only unredeemably negative individual in the film. Albert, who rapes Josépha and marries her for her uncle’s money (which he proceeds to squander), announces the character of Batala in *Le Crime de M. Lange*. He illustrates Renoir’s theory of horizontal, or class-based, divisions: as the generally-disliked manager of the quarry where many of the immigrants work, Albert is the only real outsider within the area’s transnational community.

In a decaying upper-class milieu, *La Règle du jeu* combines tragedy and farce in the events that lead up to the death of the aviator André Jurieu. The romantic entanglements among immigrant workers that lead to the death of the title character in *Toni*, meanwhile, have all the ingredients of a lurid melodrama (as several critics have pointed out), and could have been treated as such. Similarly, Renoir could have played up the accents, mannerisms, and attitudes of his provincial and foreign characters, thereby presenting them as cute and picturesque, in the tradition established by Marcel Pagnol (who participated in the financing and distribution of *Toni*). Instead, Renoir recounted real events that had occurred ten years earlier, filmed on location, hired several local inhabitants as part-time actors, and avoided exoticizing the characters, or excessively dramatizing the plot. Renoir’s refusal to idealize or sentimentalize his “Latin” community is visible in such scenes as the negotiations between Josépha’s uncle and
Albert, prior to the latter’s wedding to Josépha, which situate the bride as one of the economic assets to be haggled over, along with the house, the land, and the farm animals. This scene is not presented as some sort of exotic ritual, far removed from French societal practices. A parallel could be drawn with the financial negotiations between Robert and André over Christine in *La Règle du jeu*. As Andrew writes, concerning the family structures found in *Toni*: “in the drama of patriarchal control over virginity, and in the economy of sex this founds, one can sense that Renoir feels he has latched onto a structure that covertly rules more refined cultures” (208). In his analysis of *Toni*, Sesonske emphasizes (164–5) the historical context of the 1920s, which saw a huge influx of immigrants (nearly three million) into France, many from Spain and Italy, after the First World War. These immigrants replaced, within the French economy, the generation that had been decimated during the war. During the period between the two world wars, *Toni* is one of the few films that not only acknowledged the presence of large numbers of immigrants, but also generally portrayed them in much the same way as their French counterparts, with neither excessive sentimentality nor demonization.

Some of the immigrants depicted in *Toni* have been settled in France long enough to acquire property; some have just arrived in search of employment. During the narrative, there is a constant weaving in and out of French, Spanish, and Italian, with diegetic songs accompanying the dialogue or providing transitions. Characters sometimes switch languages as they move from one conversational context to another. The south of France is thus presented as a somewhat unstable, but functional, Latin melting-pot, or, as the film’s epigrammatic introduction calls it: “pays latin.” This fantasy of a specifically southern European, or Latin, commonwealth was already present in Barrès’s work, albeit not at the level of peasants and proletarians. The spatial or geographic division suggested in *Toni* does not follow national borders. When speaking with his friend Fernand, Toni dreams of fleeing Europe altogether, of escaping to South America with Josépha: “quand nous serons en Amérique du sud, c’est un autre ciel que nous aurons sur nos têtes [...] et ce sera une nouvelle vie, sous d’autres étoiles.”

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European countries thus appear undifferentiated, with the notion of foreignness or alterity transposed to another continent.

Other ethnic and national groups are represented or mentioned in Toni, but not always seen. As will be the case in La Grande Illusion, a lone black man, whose origin is never elucidated, has a minor role. Josépha’s uncle, who is a fairly prosperous farmer, warns her against all the recently arrived foreigners in the area, especially the “Sidis” [Arabs]: “Attention! Avec tous ces travaux, on ne voit que des étrangers qui rôdent dans le pays. Surtout les Sidis. Ah, je ne les aime pas, ceux-là! On ne peut pas savoir ce qu’ils pensent.” Josépha tells him not to worry, the irony being that she answers this xenophobic tirade in Spanish. The film’s depiction of a harmonious “fusion des races” is obviously less than perfect, remaining limited in practice to southern European countries.

In this sense, Toni is again contemporary (by present-day standards), presenting a relatively smooth process of integration within France for most Europeans, and reflecting instances of xenophobic or racist reactions against immigrants from France’s former colonial empire.

Renoir and Italian Cinema

Toni is in several ways an exception among Renoir’s films of the 1930s. The narrative is situated in a rural working-class milieu, as opposed to the generally urban settings of other Renoir films during this period. Even such films as Partie de campagne and La Règle du jeu are centered on city-dwellers, who are only temporarily transplanted to the countryside. The theatrical references found in several other Renoir films are conspicuously absent in Toni. As Alan Williams points out (228), the editing in this film is also relatively plain. By basing the plot on events that had actually occurred in a similar setting, Renoir was reacting, as Bazin has noted, against “les conventions théâtrales littéraires du cinéma d’alors” (1971, 35). He used several non-professional actors, and filmed on location in the town of Martigues, near Marseille (Marcel Pagnol participated in the financing and distribution of this film), producing what Bazin and other critics see as a precursor to post-war Italian neo-realism: “Le rôle de Renoir dans la genèse de
l'école italienne actuelle ne pouvait guère être contesté, puisque la première œuvre majeure du néo-réalisme fut *Ossessione* de Luchino Visconti (1942), lequel était ancien assistant et fervent admirateur de Renoir. Mais huit ans plus tôt, *Toni* prophétise véritablement le néo-réalisme contemporain” (Bazin 1971, 34).

The Italian filmmaker Luchino Visconti was Renoir’s assistant director on *Partie de campagne*, and later worked on the script of *Tosca*. *Ossessione*, the first film Visconti directed, was based on a script that he had received from Renoir, an adaptation of James M. Cain’s novel, *The Postman Always Rings Twice*. Visconti’s film is generally considered, along with Roberto Rossellini’s *Rome: Open City* (*Roma città aperta*, 1945), the starting point of Italian neo-realism, which became one of the most influential postwar cinematic movements in Europe. In his autobiography, Renoir drew distinctions between the unadorned esthetic of his 1935 film and the neo-realist masterpieces that were produced in Italy after the war: “Les films italiens constituent de magnifiques réalisations dramatiques. Dans *Toni* je me suis efforcé de ne pas être dramatique” (1974a, 140). *Toni* is indeed notable for its consistently understated tone and style of acting. As Faulkner puts it, “What Renoir wished to avoid was the artifices of representation which the French cinema traditionally borrowed from the theater of the boulevards—the exaggerated gestures, the facial contortions, the over-elaborate decors, and the sentimentalities—despite the fact that his subject had all the ingredients of a melodrama” (1979, 89).

Aside from the issue of the origin of neo-realism, the generally high degree of reciprocal influence between French and Italian cinema, which is visible in such qualitative extremes as the *Don Camillo* series (1951-55) and Ettore Scola’s *La Nuit de Varennes* (1982), remains to be comprehensively studied. As Bazin points out, Renoir is one of the most important links between the two national cinematic traditions: “L’influence de Jean Renoir sur le cinéma italien est capitale et décisive. Elle n’a d’égale que celle de René Clair” (1962, 11n). Some of Renoir’s actual contact with the Italian film industry was tragicomic. In 1937, *La Grande Illusion* received a special prize at the Venice film festival, which was the most important in Europe until the war. This was a
way to avoid giving Renoir’s film, with its pacifist overtones, the Mussolini Cup for best foreign film, a situation which would have embarrassed all concerned. Renoir attempted to film an adaptation of Giacomo Puccini’s *Tosca* in Italy at the beginning of the war, when the French government was hoping to persuade Mussolini to at least remain neutral. The shooting of the film was interrupted, at the end of *la drôle de guerre*, by the German invasion of France, Italy’s entry into the war, and the collapse of the Third Republic. Renoir hastily returned to France and later found his way to the United States. *Tosca* was finished by his friend and scriptwriter Carl Koch. Renoir would not return to Italy to shoot a film until 1953 for *Le Carrosse d’or*.

**Somewhere between Paris and Moscow: *Les Bas-Fonds* (1936)**

Renoir transposed the plot of Maxim Gorky’s play from Czarist Russia to an unnamed location, apparently set in the present at the time of the film’s release. Renoir completely recreated *Les Bas-Fonds*, adding scenes, transforming characters, and changing the ending, producing a film that is much less somber in tone than Gorky’s 1902 play. While the characters keep their Russian names and make frequent references to Rubles (usually their lack thereof), nothing else situates them in national terms. By contrast, Akira Kurosawa’s 1957 film adaptation also transposed Gorky’s play, this time to Japan, but remained much closer to the original in terms of plot and characterization. In 1968, Renoir sought to portray the lack of spatial and temporal specificity in *Les Bas-Fonds* in universalistic terms: “Je ne me suis pas appliqué à faire un film ‘russe’, j’ai voulu faire un drame humain” (1974b, 239).

In Renoir’s version of *Les Bas-Fonds*, most of the narrative seems to occur in a sort of generic Europe in the throes of the Great Depression, rather than in the squalor of pre-revolutionary Russia. However, the scene in which Pepel drags a sullen, inebriated Natacha away from her would-be suitor, a pompous *fonctionnaire*, takes place in the middle of a fashionable, and mostly open-air, café-restaurant. The luxurious decor of the spacious locale and the ridiculously genteel mannerisms of the clients and staff (which Pepel disrupts and deflates) are evocative of the Belle Epoque, thereby adding to the
general impression of unreality. With the music and the elegant costumes of most of the
clients, that scene could just as easily be set in Vienna as in Paris. Renoir said about this
film, shot at the studios of Epinay-sur-Seine: “Il m’avait semblé qu’essayer de faire de la
Russie authentique à Paris était une entreprise vouée au ridicule, au carnaval” (1972,
47). Practical considerations, such as the difficulty of trying to pass off famous actors
such as Jean Gabin and Louis Jouvet as Russians, thus apparently led to situating
Renoir’s version of *Les Bas-Fonds* somewhere between Paris and Moscow, but
obviously closer to the former.

By displacing away from Russia a famous realistic play by an iconic figure of
Soviet communism, Renoir was challenging the expectations of his audience, something
he often seemed to enjoy doing. As René Clair had done in *A nous la liberté* (1931),
Renoir made a direct reference to the last scene of a famous American film, thereby
adding another level of variance, of displacement, relative to audience expectations. The
ending of *Les Bas-Fonds*, showing Pepel and Natacha walking down the road, harkens
back to Charles Chaplin’s *Modern Times*, a film Renoir had reviewed: “Charlot est un
grand bonhomme, et il faudra toujours à un public se piquant d’intellectualité, en
admettant même que ce public soit de bonne foi, un peu de temps et quelques efforts
pour se mettre dans l’état d’apprécier un travail basé sur l’expression d’une forte
individualité” (1974b, 80). Given the reception to some of Renoir’s films, especially *La
Règle du jeu* in 1939, it is a statement that could well have been applied to him. The
relatively optimistic ending of *Les Bas-Fonds* is more consonant with the initially heady
atmosphere of the Popular Front—exemplified by the communal solidarity of *Le Crime
de M. Lange*—than with the despair of Gorky’s play.

There are several parallels between these two films. Both portray a initially fragile
community’s symbolic exclusion, by murder, of an oppressive figure. Both end with the
departure of the couple that was central to the community’s development. However, *Les
Bas-Fonds* ends with the couple, formerly a thief and a victimized household servant,
escaping a static, hopeless community, and thereby losing nothing. Meanwhile, *Le
Crime*’s Valentine and Lange, respectively a small business owner and a popular artist,31

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are forced to abandon a now-thriving community and to flee across the border. As had been the case in *Le Crime* (which was released about ten months before *Les Bas-Fonds*), Renoir makes considerable use of the open space of a collective courtyard, which tends to portray the murder committed by Pepel as less of an individual act of revenge and more of a micro-society’s application of rough justice against a parasite who incarnates a ruthless system of economic exploitation. In both films, the courtyard serves as a theatricalized agora, where public issues are debated and decided, and where the rare malefactors are punished. The somewhat idealized communal space, together with Renoir’s use of depth of field and panoramic shots, impart a sense of inclusiveness or sociability to these two films, which problematizes the situation of those who are forced to leave. By contrast, another 1936 film that centered around a collective enterprise, Julien Duvivier’s *La Belle Equipe*, had a deeply pessimistic conclusion, with the cooperative project of a small group of French workers destroyed by greed and jealousy. Interestingly, a more upbeat ending had to be shot for Duvivier’s film when it was first released. French audiences were not yet ready for the fatalism of a film such as Marcel Carné’s *Le Jour se lève* (1939).

The departure from the sordid communal environment is a voluntary and comparatively hopeful event for Pepel and Natacha in *Les Bas-Fonds*. In *Le Crime*, however, the context in which the two main characters leave their flourishing community is one of fear and possible capture. Having killed the corrupt Batala, Lange, aided and accompanied by Valentine, must seek refuge abroad, after being symbolically “judged” during an impromptu meeting in a café, by a de facto jury of his working-class peers. As in *Les Bas-Fonds*, the conclusion of *Le Crime* is indecisive, with the fugitive couple heading across the Belgian border, and the future of the collective they leave behind uncertain. There is no particular significance to the choice of Belgium as the direction in which to flee: it is simply the closest border, and one that is fairly easy to cross clandestinely. Similarly, Pepel and Natacha do not seem to have any specific destination in mind. The couples in both films are fleeing in the hope of finding sanctuary or a new beginning. In 1936, areas of relative safe haven were already shrinking in Europe, and
the idea of a better *ailleurs* was becoming increasingly phantasmic. *Toni* projected it toward South America, *Le Crime* featured Lange's imaginative re-creation of an open Wild West in the United States, while *Les Bas-Fonds* presented a utopia (i.e.: no-place) in the literal sense.

**From Class to Nation: *La Vie est à nous* (1936) and *La Marseillaise* (1938)**

The contradictions and discontinuities within the Renoir film corpus are often glaring. His early body of work includes a (silent) musical comedy set in a futuristic, barbaric Europe (*Sur un air de Charleston*, 1926), and an embarrassing paean to French colonialism in Algeria (*Le Bled*, 1929). Among his postwar credits can be found an adaptation of Robert Louis Stevenson's 1886 novel, *The Strange case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, that makes use of the techniques of television (*Le Testament du Docteur Cordelier*, 1959). Within the overall "humanism" or "universalism" of his work that several critics have commented on, the two overtly political films he made in support of the Communist Party and/or the Popular Front stand out as celebrations of French nationalism, even more than as calls for class struggle. Made respectively for the PCF and the CGT labor union, *La Vie est à nous* and *La Marseillaise*, which were intended as propaganda films, correspond roughly to the beginning and the end of the Popular Front as a governmental alliance.

The extent of Renoir's participation in *La Vie est à nous*, a film with several directors, remains unclear. Sadoul emphasizes Renoir's role, calling the film "une étape importante chez un réalisateur parvenant à son apogée" (75). Alan Williams insists on the collective nature of the making of this film: "*La Vie est à nous* is the very antithesis of an author's film" (225). Sesonske sees Renoir's work on this atypical film as an illustration of his lack of aesthetic or conceptual rigidity: "Viewed within the context of Renoir's work, the film confirms, above all, his openness and flexibility, his unwillingness to be wedded to a single style, not even to his own." (232). The most thorough analysis of *La Vie* is found in chapter 2 of Jonathan Buchsbaum's *Cinéma engagé*. Buchsbaum has highlighted the links between the film's structure and the electoral objectives of the
PCF: "In fact, the film adopts quite literally the rhetorical strategy used by [PCF leader] Maurice Thorez in his speech to the PCF Congress at Villeurbanne at the end of January 1936, just before the production of the film. The commentary spoken by the teacher takes passages verbatim from the opening section of this speech, "L'Union de la nation française"" (1988, 93). Within France, the use of the cinema as an instrument of what would today be called the communications strategy of a political party constituted an innovation. However, while political propaganda films were fairly new in France, they were a staple of Soviet film production. In Germany, Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will* (1935) had celebrated the rise of nazism.

As a part of the PCF's campaign for the 1936 legislative elections, *La Vie* positions the party as the main line of defense against the enemies of France, both external (Hitler, Mussolini) and internal (the infamous myth of "les deux cents familles"). It begins, didactically enough, with a teacher lecturing schoolchildren, and ends with a series of speeches by PCF leaders. In between, three sequences illustrate the PCF's role in defending the rights of workers, farmers, and the middle class. *La Vie* often accurately depicts the effects of the Great Depression—high unemployment, harsh working conditions, bankruptcies and repossessions—on individuals, something not often seen in commercial cinema. In customary propagandistic fashion, it interweaves accounts of real poverty and suffering with messages about the PCF's platform and activities. Amalgamating fictional and documentary techniques, *La Vie* provides, as Buchsbaum points out, an ideologically critical antidote to the generally reactionary messages of the newsreels that were commonly seen in film theaters:

The conception of *La Vie est à nous* went beyond the more modest efforts of the other films to document the vitality of the Left. *La Vie est à nous* systematically questions the authority normally invested in newsreel images and sounds; it proposes a critique of the mode of newsreels themselves. The film openly tampers with the newsreel segments on multiple levels: editing, sound/image relations, and the images themselves. These deformations of newsreel documents overtly propose new meanings for the documents, interpretations that coincide with the position of the Left. (1988, 142)
La Vie also includes its own version of newsreels, or counter-documents, that Buchsbaum fails to critique. One of the sequences that show the activities of party members depicts a group of factory workers meeting in opposition to the relentless pressure of the Taylorized techniques of mass production that have come to be known as "les cadences infernales." Although he finds "several reasons for considering this sequence in some detail" (1988, 122), Buchsbaum seems to accept at face value this translated quote from the film, despite the disastrously deleterious effects of Stakhanovism on Soviet workers: "Look at Russia. They have succeeded in shortening the work day and raising wages, thanks to the machines" (1988, 120-21). Not surprisingly, the Soviet Union is held up in La Vie as the alternative model to class-based exploitation in capitalist Europe, a point reinforced by Thorez's laudatory references to Stalin in his speech. It is also presented by association as a natural ally against the increasingly menacing fascist countries that bordered France.

Renoir also participated, this time as the only director, in the other major film that sought to embody and project the ideology of the Popular Front. A filmic commemoration of the French Revolution, shot not too long before its 150th anniversary, La Marseillaise was initially sponsored by the CGT, France's largest labor union, which organized a novel method of financing through mass subscriptions. Although the film later reverted to more traditional means of production and distribution, it remained a project structured around the already-fading hopes and promises of the Popular Front.37 In addition to the broader historical context, Norman King sees La Marseillaise as a reply to the authoritarian subtext of Abel Gance's film, Napoléon (a new sound version had been released in 1935): "Il ne s'agit pas ici de déterminer dans quelle mesure Renoir a voulu répondre à Gance. Il suffit de constater qu'il l'a fait" (70). Two interpretations of French history, each with its political aftereffects, were thus presented to French audiences, during a period of increasing polarization along class and party lines. In typically Barrésian fashion, Gance's film portrayed Napoleon as a Promethean conqueror, spreading the spirit of the French Revolution across Europe. Renoir's film, meanwhile, centered on the early part of the Revolution leading up to the
battle of Valmy, stressing the isolation of France against external, particularly Prussian, enemies. Aside from their obvious differences, both films assert the primacy of French nationalism, and therefore national unity, rather than any universalistic ideals associated with the Revolution.

La Marseillaise includes a curious mixture of meticulous historical reconstruction (which Renoir insisted on) and obvious references to the Popular Front period of its planning and shooting. For instance, when during a town meeting, a participant yells out, "les riches doivent payer l'impôt," the political context is easy to identify. Similarly, during the trial of an impoverished peasant who had killed, without his aristocratic landlord's permission, a bird that was damaging his crops, the argument between the aristocrat and the bourgeois over their respective class positions and loyalties should be understood in the context of the 1930s, not the 1780s. La Marseillaise freely juxtaposes quotes from classical French literature with the sort of overblown PCF rhetoric that has come to be known as "la langue de bois." In an early scene, one of the patriots hiding in the hills near Marseille sardonically tells a priest who complains that a 22-year-old aristocrat has been named Bishop, despite his ignorance and lack of faith: "Le rejeton [noble] se trouve tout savoir sans jamais avoir rien appris." He thus echoes a line from Molière's Les Précieuses Ridicules (scene 9): "Les gens de qualité savent tout sans avoir jamais rien appris." During the meeting at the port of Marseille, when a group of patriots decide to capture the nearby forts, a speaker insists on the need for disciplined action, sounding as much like a union representative as a revolutionary (even though much of the film's dialogue is based on historical documents): "Nous les portefaix du port de Marseille, travailleurs disciplinés et ennemis de la violence, nous qui avons arrêté la révolte quand la populace voulait saccager la maison du fermier [général] Rebuffet, nous flétrissons les lâches attentats commis contre la tranquillité publique, par lesquels les réactionnaires marquent leur dépit de la victoire du peuple!" These disparities in tone, along with authentic period details, such as a detailed demonstration of the proper way to load a rifle, impart a certain choppiness to
the film's narrative structure, as opposed to the flawless timing and transitions Renoir would exhibit in *La Règle du jeu*.

*La Marseillaise* presents no contradiction between class solidarity and national unity. During the scene on the fishing boat before they leave for Paris, the volunteers from Marseille attempt to learn the origin of what would become the national anthem. It had been transmitted by: "une chorale d'ouvriers à Montpellier; eux-mêmes la tenaient d'un colporteur juif qui l'avait entendue à Strasbourg. On appelle ça le Chant de Guerre de l'Armée du Rhin." Geographical, class and religious distinctions are thus abolished—in the interest of national defense. Aside from the aristocrats, especially those in exile, virtually the whole country is presented as united around the goals of the Revolution. In keeping with the PCF General Secretary Maurice Thorez's famous offer of "la main tendue," *La Marseillaise* condemns attacks against Catholics, pointing out that many priests supported the Revolution: "Pourquoi veux-tu que parce qu'un homme porte la soutane, il soit forcément un réactionnaire?"^39

There is little trans-European camaraderie portrayed in this film. Goethe's famous quote on Valmy is shown in the final frame ("En ce lieu et en ce jour a commencé une nouvelle époque pour l'histoire du Monde"),^40 some music by Mozart and Bach is used in the score: this is the extent of non-French representation in *La Marseillaise*. To a far greater extent than in *La Grande Illusion*, the emphasis is on national unity and on the necessary military efforts to repel foreign aggression. The French aristocrats exiled in Coblenz are depicted mostly as either ridiculous fops or cynical opportunists all too eager to ally themselves with the reactionary Prussians and their bellicose king (the parallel with the nazis and Hitler is obvious). During the storming of the palace, most French troops of the National Guard join in with the assailants,^41 but most Swiss guards are shown choosing to die rather than switch allegiance to the Revolution.

As is typical in Renoir's films, few of the characters are truly represented negatively. Significantly, aside from a small group of exiled French aristocrats, two foreigners are singled out. The first, Brunswick, the Prussian general whose threatening
Manifesto has the unintended effect of galvanizing French revolutionary forces, is never seen. The second, Marie-Antoinette, is linked to the reactionary danger directly through her foreign origin. At the second popular meeting in Marseille, where the decision to send a group of soldiers to Paris is announced, the female speaker denounces the Queen as a lingering menace to the Revolution and the country: "Madame Veto trahit parce qu’elle est autrichienne, parce qu’elle est orgueilleuse, parce qu’elle déteste la France!" 42

By contrast, even the much-maligned Louis XVI (played by Renoir’s brother Pierre) is depicted as a somewhat sympathetic figure, whose lack of resolve is balanced by a relative lack of bloodthirstiness.

The French Revolution, especially in its initial stages, included a strong ideational element of internationalism that was expressed, for instance, by electing foreigners such as Thomas Paine to the National Assembly. The ideology of universalism that was an early component of the revolutionary process is not reflected in Renoir’s film. The representation of the Revolution is clearly overdetermined by the political struggles of the period in which the film was shot, hence the emphasis on the menace coming from the German border, a danger enhanced by the complicity of some sections of the French upper classes. Against the backdrop of the disintegration of the Popular Front at home, and of the continuing spread of fascism abroad (the Anschluss, the Spanish Civil War), La Marseillaise stressed the need to counter the threats from foreign aggressors and their French supporters. Overall, La Vie est à nous and La Marseillaise, the films that most closely followed the PCF line, or that reflected the dangerous international context of the short-lived Popular Front, are the most overtly nationalistic of Renoir’s films, and the least European.

Europe in a Camp: La Grande Illusion (1937)

Just as Renoir attempted to represent the French Revolution from the point of view of its average participants in La Marseillaise—as Lebovics puts it, "Renoir wished to take back the Revolution from the great figures and give it back to the little people who made it" (18)—he sought in La Grande Illusion to represent the First World War
as it had been experienced by its ordinary combatants. And just as La Marseillaise reflected the struggles linked to the Popular Front within France, La Grande Illusion reflects the rising tensions linked to the spread of fascism across much of the European continent, one year after the beginning of the Spanish Civil War and one year before Munich. The filmic representation of the Great War, nearly twenty years after the Armistice, was not an isolated instance. Films set during the First World War were fairly common at the time, in France as elsewhere in Europe.* Pierre Sorlin has estimated that “in the 1930s, Europe made more films on the years 1914-18 than Hollywood” (24). What distinguished La Grande Illusion from other war films of the period was not any “realistic” reconstruction of scenes from famous battles, but the complexity and richness of its depiction of the (enforced) interactions among different European national groups. In this sense, Renoir’s film adumbrates the post-war situation in Europe (or rather western Europe), with an initially uneasy truce and the belated recognition of the need for dialogue and accommodation across national borders.

The ambiguity of the film’s famous title is never fully resolved, and has been diversely interpreted by critics. Faulkner, for example, privileges Renoir’s openly pacifist aims, and speaks of “the pacific and conciliatory La Grande Illusion, which attacks the great illusion that war can be for the good of man” (1986, 84). Other critical interpretations, which are often contradictory, mention the presumed illusions of class-based solidarity and of possible reconciliation across national or religious divides, as well as the illusion that another generalized armed conflict in Europe could have been avoided. A commercial success, La Grande Illusion was diversely received within France and abroad. Predictably, it was banned in fascist Italy and nazi Germany, whose censors perceived mainly the call for universal brotherhood, that included, of course, the Jews. It was, however, warmly received in the United States, even receiving praise from Franklin Roosevelt.44

Renoir’s 1937 film was, among other things, a retrospective look at the state of Europe during the First World War—just as the clouds of World War Two were gathering. With two German prisoner-of-war camps serving as microcosms and
metaphors, Renoir managed to fit an almost representative sample of European nationalities into his film, along with gender, class and religious rivalries. Although the narrative of *La Grande Illusion* takes place during what was still called “la Grande Guerre” when the film was released, the war itself constitutes a mostly invisible presence. There is no infantry assault, pitched battle, or artillery barrage anywhere in the film. Indeed, there are few examples of any form of physical struggle between uniformed soldiers; few shots are fired; few corpses are shown. Even the aerial battle that turns the characters of Maréchal and de Boeldieu into prisoners of war remains unseen. The news from the front, which seems quite distant, arrives at the camp late, filtered through posters or newspapers. Despite the well-known brutality of the Great War, an aura of antiquated gentility envelops the camps, in which German soldiers guard French, British and Russian prisoners.

True to Renoir’s theatrical tradition, the war itself is represented indirectly, on the makeshift stage of the Hallbach camp, with the British and French actors/prisoners defiantly singing *La Marseillaise*, thereby provoking a walkout by the German guards/spectators. Such a theatrical representation was at the time less unlikely than it would appear. As Charles Rearick has pointed out in *The French in Love and War*, shows staged by soldiers were fairly common during the war (13-4). However, the battlefield victory that leads to the singing of the French national anthem turns out to be only temporary. The recapture by the French army of the fort of Douaumont was simply one of the back-and-forth swings in the battle of Verdun, the longest and bloodiest of the war. A poster later informs the prisoners and the viewers that the German army had in turn retaken the disputed fort. The impression that results is not one of military enthusiasm or disappointment, but of the absurdity of war itself. In a 1938 speech, Renoir was quite clear about his intentions when making this film: “Parce que je suis pacifiste, j’ai réalisé *La Grande Illusion*” (1974b, 240). The bitter irony is that the pacifist subtext of a film such as *La Grande Illusion* was doomed from the start to be misunderstood or ignored, due to the rise of fascism and nazism. The *de facto* capitulation of France and Great Britain to Hitler’s demands at Munich would soon rid
Renoir of any illusions he might have had about the power of cinema to promote his brand of pacifism; and he would write about being "moins fier d'être français" (1974b, 178) upon Prime Minister Daladier's return to France.

The failure of pacifism as a practical possibility, in the European context of the late 1930s, did not transform Renoir into a xenophobic nationalist. In 1957, he seemed to have abandoned none of his hopes for reconciliation across national borders. He bemoaned the aggressiveness promoted by modern nationalism and longed for a new flowering of internationalism, which he felt could be facilitated by the film medium: "On a inventé le nationalisme. Je crois que le nationalisme, nous allons en voir la fin. Du moins de tout mon cœur je le souhaite. Et c'est parce que mon grand espoir est d'imaginer que ce retour à l'internationalisme qui nous guette heureusement peut être facilité par le cinématographe" (1974b, 65-6). Ironically, La Grande Illusion records, in a retrospective way, the Europe-wide triumph of modern nationalism, of the sort of nationalism that seeks to transcend class antagonisms. The First World War had represented for Maurice Barrès the apotheosis of his patriotic movement, the triumphant culmination of his revanchist dreams. With very few exceptions, the French nation temporarily set aside all forms of internal class and religious divisions, forming the sort of union sacrée he had long been calling for. United against a common, foreign foe, the French were able to recover the regions of Alsace and Lorraine which had been forcibly annexed by Germany in 1870. Despite the war's horrendous cost in human lives, France had recovered, through its defeat of the German military machine, both its former military glory and its sense of common purpose, if only for a brief period. In La Grande Illusion, there is a similar sense of national unity, but it is far from unequivocal; nor is it imbued with the sort of religious fervor in battle that Barrès celebrated. Class and religious divisions are openly examined in Renoir's film, not swept under the rug. What is also missing is a clearly defined eternal enemy, at least in the way that Barrès had designated Germans as a monolithic horde of aggressive invaders.

It might be excessive to consider La Grande Illusion as a prefiguration of the sort of transnational exchanges and interactions that have become institutionalized in the
European Union, with its perennial rivalries and endless negotiations. However, the film is full of references to diverse European countries, cultures, languages and food. For instance, a Russian officer gives a language lesson to a French counterpart at the Hallbach camp, patiently pointing out morphological similarities and differences: "En russe, les noms se déclinent, comme en latin." In the Wintersborn camp, the French character Demolder is busy translating Pindar, declaring, to everyone else's bewilderment: "C'est le plus grand poète grec." In Hallbach, the French prisoners are digging a tunnel, seeking to escape to Holland, which was neutral during the First World War. The engineer, played by Gaston Modot, tells his fellow prisoners: "Alors, rendez-vous à Amsterdam." In Wintersborn, the goal of Maréchal and Rosenthal, played by Jean Gabin and Marcel Dalio, is to escape to Switzerland. Also in Wintersborn, the excited Russian prisoners invite their French counterparts to witness the opening of a highly anticipated crate they have just received, a "gift from the Empress"—which turns out to contain only surplus books instead of the hoped-for vodka and canned food. In an echo of pre-revolutionary tensions, they angrily set fire to the crate and its contents, preventing the horrified Demolder from saving any of the books.

All the characters use their native language, one of the major innovations of the film, as Sesonske has noted (319-22). The simultaneous use of different languages plays both a technical and thematic function, alternately separating or uniting characters of different national origins. Language is one of the major factors, along with class, religion, and gender, that determine relationships and alliances among the characters. Some of them seem to break the language barriers with relative ease: the de Boeldieu/von Rauffenstein couple, Rosenthal, some of the German guards, some of the Russian prisoners, and the Maréchal/Elsa couple. Others remain confined to their own national group, even if there are characters from other countries who speak their language: aside from the theatrical representation, the British prisoners are never seen amicably interacting with representatives of other countries. In a 1938 speech in London, Renoir, introducing his film, pointed out the importance of hearing all of the different languages in the films, without the filter of dubbing:
Et je profite de la circonstance pour protester contre une menace de doublage de *La Grande Illusion*, à l’usage du public anglais. Comment peut-on avoir l’idée de doubler dans une même langue un film dont l’une des caractéristiques essentielles est que tous les personnages de nationalités différentes s’expriment dans leur langue maternelle? Dans ce film, l’authenticité des accents, des expressions, du langage, joue un rôle primordial. (1974b, 48)

One of the other distinguishing attributes of European nationalities in this film is food, which is always a major concern in times of war—and which is consistent with Renoir’s aim of presenting *la Grande Guerre* from the point of view of its average participants. As early as the first scene, when the character of Maréchal is introduced, other French soldiers are eating, with one of them heard saying, “passe-moi le camembert.” According to the level of its abundance or quality, food also serves to divide the characters, or bring them together, across class or national lines. Shared meals can provide the setting for pacific encounters, where all forms of societal divisions are momentarily set aside: de Boeldieu and Maréchal politely have lunch with the German air corps unit responsible for shooting down their plane; all social classes at Hallbach, from the aristocrat to the proletarian, commune at what can only be called Rosenthal’s table; and Elsa, unafraid despite the wretched appearance of the escaped prisoners whom she finds in her barn, instantly shares her food with them. Alternately, in a scene that tests and ultimately cements their friendship, Maréchal and Rosenthal, before they reach the warmth and safety of Elsa’s house, are reduced to blaming each other when they run out of provisions. Within the camps, access to food, as well as its quality, depends on one’s nationality. The relative position of each group is neatly summarized in the mess hall of the Hallbach camp, with a portrait of the Kaiser on the wall, when three German soldiers sardonically complain about their rations:

This is dishwater.
What do the French get?
Cabbage, but they’ve got their canned stuff.
And the Russians?
Cabbage roots, without canned stuff.
And the English?
Plum pudding! [laughter]
Representing Germany

This film's universalism, much discussed by critics, is in practice circumscribed to Europe: the narrative of *La Grande Illusion* takes place in 1916, before the United States entered the war, and there is almost no trace of the soldiers drawn from the British and French colonial empires who were sent to the front. The European theme of Renoir’s film was not an isolated one, whether in the artistic or political domains. During the *Entre-Deux-Guerres*, there were several organizations and projects that called for European unity, such as Count Coudenhove-Kalergi’s *Paneuropa* and Aristide Briand’s 1930 memorandum on an “union fédérale européenne” (written by his assistant, Alexis Léger, better known as Saint-John Perse). In the literary field, Romain Rolland was instrumental in creating the review *Europe*, which attempted to extend his wartime calls for peaceful coexistence within the European continent. Of course, these projects or movements, which were designed to bring peace and prosperity to Europe, all remained dead letters. A central feature of most of them was a call for reconciliation between France and Germany. The Schuman Declaration of 1950 would also stress the Franco-German relationship as the building block of a united Europe, with somewhat more success, since it led to the first of the postwar institutions which later developed into the European Union. The main focus of *La Grande Illusion*’s European theme is also the interactions between the French and German characters. While these interactions are not devoid of conflict—the context is, after all, a prisoner-of-war camp where German soldiers are guarding French prisoners—they are characterized by a degree of common understanding and the possibility of a reconciliation. As Andrew points out, the depiction of coexistence, effective if not frictionless, across religious, class or national divides, provides one of the common threads of many of Renoir’s films: “Even before the politically inspired *La Marseillaise*, the coordinated understandings among rich and poor, Jew and Catholic, even Frenchman and German had been the subjects of *Les Bas-Fonds* and *La Grande Illusion*” (1995, 298).

The generally positive representation of Germans—especially Germans in uniform—accounts for much of the negative reaction in France to *La Grande Illusion*
when it was re-released in 1946. In the two camps, the German guards are depicted as fundamentally decent individuals who carry out their military duties with no sign of sadism or bloodthirstiness. As he clearly stated in 1938, Renoir sought to portray Germans as individuals the French could empathize with and see as similar to them. There is none of the systematic demonizing of “les Prussiens” in the Barrésian vein. The timeless message is one of common humanity, with constant reminders that soldiers of other countries would behave in a similar fashion. Thus, after being shot during the diversion he organizes to assist the escape of Maréchal and Rosenthal, de Boeldieu responds to von Rauffenstein’s obviously sincere apology with a laconic: “J’en aurais fait autant.” During the first part of the escape attempt, a passing German soldier knocks at Elsa’s window, inquiring about the distance to the next town. He seems happy and surprised as he looks inside Elsa’s warm, cozy house. In a way, it is as much a haven for him as for the escaped prisoners Maréchal and Rosenthal, who remain safely hidden within. At the film’s end, a German border patrol spots the two Frenchmen trudging through the snow towards the sanctuary of Swiss territory. As some of them start firing, one of the soldiers yells: “Don’t shoot! They’re in Switzerland.” Another responds, perhaps ruefully, perhaps with envy: “All the better for them.”

The most favorable portrayal of a German soldier occurs when Maréchal, desperate after languishing in solitary confinement at Hallbach, is comforted by an older guard who, out of concern over the French prisoner’s distress, offers him a cigarette and a harmonica. Almost absent-mindedly, Maréchal starts playing “Frou-frou,” the recorded song he was singing along with at the film’s opening scene. Although he is reassured by Maréchal’s reaction to his kindness, the weary German guard observes: “the war is lasting too long”—an understated comment that could have been echoed by soldiers and civilians of any other nation. The question often asked by critics is whether such a generous depiction was naive or worse in the historical context of the film’s release. Of course, as an artist, Renoir cannot be held accountable for, or somehow represented as complicit with, the new form of inhumanity developed by the Nazi regime. In 1946, obviously aware of the criticisms directed against the positive representation of Germans
in uniform in *La Grande Illusion*, Renoir stressed that his film depicted Germany before the rise of Hitler:

Dans ce film, je me suis efforcé, avec Spaak, de ne montrer personne d'anormal. Nos personnages appartiennent à des catégories sociales très différentes. Nous avons un aristocrate, un homme du peuple, un Juif, un instituteur, un acteur. En face d'eux, il y a des Allemands. Et les Français de ce film sont de bons Français, les Allemands de bons Allemands. Des Allemands d'avant la guerre de 39... Des Allemands d'avant une guerre où l'on a violé les règles les plus élémentaires de l'humanité. Mais *La Grande Illusion* n'est qu'une évocation de la guerre 14-18. (Renoir 1974b, 243)

Renoir had a long and productive association with Germany and German filmmakers during the first part of his career. In particular, Carl Koch, who had served in a German antiaircraft unit during the First World War, became a close friend of Renoir and worked with him as a screenwriter on several films. Renoir devoted several passages of his autobiography to Koch: “Nous devînmes d’excellents amis et participâmes ensemble à plusieurs aventures cinématographiques” (146). Another indication of the warmth of their friendship can be found in Renoir’s post-World War Two letters to Koch in *Lettres d’Amérique*. *Nana*, Renoir’s first important film, was also the first French film shot in Berlin after the First World War. The practice of producing French films abroad, particularly in Germany, rapidly became widespread. The French cinematographic industry having lost its pre-war supremacy, many French films had German producers and were shot in German studios during the inter-war years, sometimes in separate bilingual versions. Hitler’s rise to power slowed, but did not stop, German participation at all levels of French filmmaking. As Rémy Pithon points out, many French actors, screenwriters, and directors continued to travel to Germany for coproductions until 1939. During the Occupation, meanwhile, German authorities tended to encourage the production of French films, albeit heavily censored.

Georges Sadoul characterized Renoir’s film as a last-ditch appeal to ordinary Germans, a desperate plea to avert another generalized conflagration: “Dans un certain sens, *La Grande Illusion* fut un dernier appel, sincère mais sans espoir déjà, à l’Allemagne, pour que, retrouvant l’esprit de fraternisation qui avait marqué la fin de la
première guerre, elle ne laisse pas les maîtres, qu’elle acceptait ou subissait, déchaîner un nouveau conflit mondial” (74). This call for transnational fraternization is sometimes expressed comically. Within the temporary sanctuary of Elsa’s farm, Maréchal jovially speaks French to the cow he is feeding: “T’es née dans le Wurtemberg, et puis moi dans le XX° à Paris. Ben, ça nous empêche pas d’être copains, tu vois...” Renoir’s openness to German culture and his generally positive characterization of Germans in La Grande Illusion illustrates the difficulty inherent in any pro-European position in the context of German nazism. In 1937, he insisted on the need to resist conflating Germans and nazis: “Non, tous les Allemands ne sont pas des nazis et, à cause de cela, nous devons les recevoir, chez nous, à bras ouverts” (1974b, 125). However, in a 1938 article written after the already-infamous Munich accords, Renoir showed that he was also conscious of nazi brutalities:


Britain vs. Europe

At his arrival in Hallbach, a British soldier stubbornly resists being searched, apparently believing he will only be robbed: “Keep your hands away! Don’t touch me! What do you want, my watch?” Incensed at the insistence of the German guard standing in front of him, the Briton ends up throwing down his watch and crushing it under his boot, contemptuously telling the unfazed guard: “Pick it up now!” As if to present a contrasting attitude, a French soldier also exhibits resistance as he is being searched, but with far less aggressiveness directed at the German guard: “Laisse ça tranquille, mon vieux! C’est mes affaires!” These parallel presentations of anonymous soldiers are typical of the generally negative depictions of Britons in La Grande Illusion, all the more negative by comparison with the film’s more generous representations of Germans. This
scene shows British characters for the first time, and it situates them as marginalized, relative to representatives of other countries. If Renoir's film consigns a national group to a position of alterity, it is not France's enemy during the war but, paradoxically, its main ally.

There are two other unflattering portraits of British prisoners in the Hallbach camp (significantly, none are seen helping in the escape attempt at Wintersborn). The first features the dancing line of British officers when they are rehearsing for the show. Their comically (and stereotypically) light-hearted song, "Tipperary," complete with a ridiculous chorus line, stands in contrast to the rousing French anthem of war and victory which will symbolically unite all the prisoners. The participants in the chorus line will later be seen fully costumed in drag on stage, thus connoting the stereotypes of British effeminacy and homosexuality: while the French prisoners might fondle the recently arrived women's garments with fetishistic longing, it is mostly the British who actually wear them. The group of Britons will only attain dignity, virility, and solidarity with the other prisoners when one of them removes his wig and asks the musicians to play La Marseillaise, in celebration of the French victory at Douaumont. Gender distinctions are thus straightforwardly established along national lines.

Another, more ridiculous scene, this time centering on frivolity, occurs when a new group of British prisoners arrives in the Hallbach camp, just as its current occupants are being transferred. The British officers are seen carrying tennis racquets—as they arrive in a prisoner-of-war camp! The lack of comprehension with their French counterparts is highlighted when Maréchal vainly attempts to inform one of the incoming British officers about the tunnel originating in the barracks that the French officers are vacating. The Briton, as annoyed as any nonchalant tourist would be at having to repack the contents of his suitcase, makes no effort to understand Maréchal's obvious sense of urgency, politely but dismissively answering that he does not speak French. Most of the French officers themselves do not seem to be sure if they should inform the newly arrived British—who are, after all, their allies in the war—about the tunnel, implying a
relative lack of trust. By contrast, the departing French prisoners are fairly warm when saying good-bye to the German guard they call “Arthur.”

The French Jew

As a rich Jew whose family has not long been settled in France, the character of Rosenthal represents the ultimate outsider (or the untrustworthy cosmopolite) in the Europe of the 1930s. In La Grande Illusion, that perceived apatride status does not prevent his forming a close friendship with the working-class Maréchal—who has the sort of fixed national roots that Maurice Barrès would have approved of. By making his Jewish character the scion of a rich and powerful banking family, Renoir links him to the popular image of the Rothschilds, thus directly confronting the issue of anti-Semitism, which was all the more virulent since the Popular Front was led by the first Jewish Prime Minister of France, Léon Blum. While highlighting Rosenthal’s status as a wealthy landowner, Renoir also portrays him as brave, generous—and eager to fit in with his fellow French prisoners, as opposed to the aloof, aristocratic de Boeldieu. Not surprisingly, Renoir was attacked in some right-wing circles for this generally positive representation of an important Jewish character. In 1938, he angrily responded to Céline’s Bagatelles pour un massacre, which accused La Grande Illusion of being “une entreprise de propagande juive” (1974b, 147-8).

This depiction of a Jewish character as a regular, albeit rich, fellow, as patriotic as any other Frenchman, did not have any German counterpart in the film, even though German Jews had fought and died for the Reich during the First World War. Perhaps current events at the time of the film’s making—German eliminationist policies directed against Jews—were inescapable. Responding to the actor’s barbed comment (“Lui, il est né à Jérusalem”), Rosenthal provocatively highlights his cosmopolitisme: “Pardon! à Vienne, capitale de l’Autriche, d’une mère danoise et d’un père polonais, naturalisés français.” In an ambiguous statement that reflects the complex, unresolved dialectics between class, religion, and nation in the film, Maréchal jokingly responds: “Vieille noblesse bretonne, quoi...” Rosenthal is always in an intermediary position: between de
Boeldieu and Maréchal in terms of class; and between Elsa and Maréchal in terms of national origin and language. On Christmas eve, it is Rosenthal who carves for Elsa’s daughter Lotte the characters of the nativity scene (including Jesus, “mon frère de race”) out of potatoes. He is thus the only character who always transcends borders, saying at the end of the film: “Les frontières, ça se voit pas. C’est une invention des hommes. La nature s’en fout.”

During the disastrous first part of their escape, before they stumble onto Elsa’s secluded house, Maréchal’s anti-Semitic outburst against the limping Rosenthal—“J’ai jamais pu blairer les juifs”—has a cathartic function, bringing into the open hatreds that were shared by workers as well as aristocrats. The fact that Maréchal can overcome his latent prejudice illustrates La Grande Illusion’s constant portrayal of all characters (with the exception of the aristocrats) as ordinary people, with whom it is possible to reach an understanding. By the end of their escape to Switzerland, Maréchal turns a vicious insult into an apparently affectionate joke—“Au revoir, sale juif”—which Rosenthal accepts as such. During the Occupation, the hope expressed by the film’s representation of solidarity across religious divides would prove to be just as illusory as that of the decency of German soldiers. Renoir’s film came too early or too late.

No Woman’s Land

Like many films of this period, several of which Jean Gabin starred in, La Grande Illusion eliminates any feminine presence during much of its narrative. Aside from the nurse by de Boeldieu’s deathbed, a farmer walking down a road, and two elderly women briefly glimpsed near the German barracks (expressing their distress at the sight of very young recruits going through their military drills), Elsa and her daughter Lotte are the only female characters in this film. However, since women are almost totally absent from the male world of prisoners and guards, they have to be replaced, invented or evoked indirectly, by posters, songs, and clothes. In Hallbach, as in Wintersborn, there are, unsurprisingly, pictures of women on the walls of the prisoners’ barracks, including a detail from Boticelli’s “Birth of Venus,” clearly seen in both camps. The film’s opening
scene shows Maréchal singing along to a recording of a typically escapist popular song, "Frou-frou," which contrasts with the martial music, evoking the sound of booted soldiers marching, heard during the credits. He will later reproduce the song’s tune on the harmonica given to him by a German guard, while in solitary confinement in Hallbach. The song which provides solace for the distraught Maréchal is associated with the meeting he never had with the unseen “Joséphine” at the beginning of the narrative, as well as with the frilly clothes so reverently examined by the French prisoners as they prepare for their stage show.

In the homosocial environment of *La Grande Illusion*, several of the male characters at times take on “feminine” characteristics. Some become quite literally the object of a collective “male gaze,” as in the scene in which the room falls silent when one of the French prisoners emerges in full drag, repeatedly murmuring “c’est drôle,” during the preparations for the show at Hallbach. Similarly, during the first phase of their escape, Maréchal and Rosenthal form a strong/weak, masculine/feminine dichotomy, as Rosenthal is increasingly debilitated by his injury. Away from the camp and the presence of de Boeldieu, the last remnants of a class-based hierarchy between the two dissolves, leaving the physically stronger Maréchal in charge. After having escaped from the Wintersborn camp, Maréchal and Rosenthal are rescued from cold, hunger, and injury by Elsa (played by Dita Parlo), a German woman whose isolated house in the peaceful countryside seems far removed from the war that was ravaging Europe. As Rearick has pointed out, the ensuing love affair between Maréchal and Elsa corresponded to a common wartime fantasy among French soldiers, embodied in such popular songs as “Quand Madelon”—with the important difference that it involved a German war widow. This transnational relationship was one of the reasons, along with the generally positive portrayal of the Jewish character Rosenthal, for the film being banned in Germany in 1937, a ban Renoir deeply regretted.
An Aristocratic Couple

The twilight of one idea of Europe is embodied by the doomed friendship—or courtship—between the French and German aristocrats (de Boeldieu and von Rauffenstein, played by Pierre Fresnay and Erich von Stroheim), whose narrow class-based solidarity cannot withstand the generalized assault of modern nationalism. By contrast, the central figure, the working-class Maréchal, does manage, in spite of initial misgivings and prejudices, to establish relationships based on friendship (with Rosenthal) and love (with Elsa). While Rosenthal uses his multilingualism to bring characters together, de Boeldieu and von Rauffenstein use theirs as a means of exclusion. As career officers and representatives of a fading aristocratic class, they have common tastes and activities, which they nostalgically reminisce about (often in English, another “snobbish” trait they share): social contacts, horse racing, restaurants, and women... After Maréchal jokes about Maxim’s in the context of camp food, von Rauffenstein addresses de Boeldieu in English, thus excluding the French commoner: “Maxim’s... That reminds me: I used to know a girl there in 1913. Her name was Fifi.” De Boeldieu responds laconically: “So did I.” Interestingly, de Boeldieu, a fluent English speaker, never attempts to communicate with the British prisoners, while Maréchal does, to no avail. While Maréchal can manage to communicate with a German guard and with Elsa, despite his monolingualism, he is unable to tell a British officer about the tunnel in one of the barracks. This is in keeping with the rather negative portrayal of the British in most of La Grande Illusion.

The civility, indeed the chivalry, that von Rauffenstein shows to his French counterparts in the mess hall early in the film, is strictly based on their status as officers. Von Rauffenstein is following a rigorous code of conduct that today seems particularly outdated: “If they are officers, invite them over for lunch.” He immediately finds a common bond with his French counterpart de Boeldieu, having met his cousin, a military attaché, in Berlin before the war. Despite the fact that it is von Rauffenstein who has shot down his plane, de Boeldieu is instantly more comfortable with him than with the working-class Maréchal, who in turn is happy to meet a French-speaking German
mechanic. At Wintersborn, the sole flower serves as the symbol of the singular friendship between the two aristocrats. Von Rauffenstein reacts very much like a jilted lover when de Boeldieu risks his life, not in a bid for his own freedom, but to ensure the escape of his lower-class compatriots. There is also something of a lovers’ triangle in the relationship between Maréchal, Rosenthal and de Boeldieu. Maréchal is the center of attention throughout, with de Boeldieu apparently having renounced any attempt at forming a bond with Rosenthal, despite their common upper-class backgrounds. The tension will ultimately be resolved by the self-sacrifice of de Boeldieu, which will allow Maréchal and Rosenthal to escape.

Europe on the Brink: *La Règle du jeu* (1939)

*La Règle du jeu* is one of the most famous examples of a commercially unsuccessful “film maudit” that belatedly received vindication from critics and audiences. It was very badly received at its opening, in the volatile European context of 1939. In a frantic effort to improve its popular reception and to forestall a commercial disaster, it was significantly cut, to no avail. Renoir’s last pre-war French film was banned as demoralizing by the French government at the beginning of the war, and then during the German Occupation. Its shortened version did not fare any better after the Liberation. After a painstaking restoration in 1959, it finally became accessible in its near-original form to audiences and critics. It took decades for *La Règle du jeu* to be widely recognized as a masterpiece.\(^{59}\) In 1954, Renoir commented on the often virulently negative reactions: “Il faut croire que je me suis trompé puisque les gens ont accueilli le film comme lorsqu’on reçoit vraiment des coups de fouet” (1974b, 227). Based on classical eighteenth- and nineteenth-century French comedy,\(^{60}\) the film’s funereal mixture of unheroic tragedy and black comedy was apparently too unsettling immediately before and after the war.

*La Règle* inserts several disruptive characters into an otherwise smugly closed upper-class milieu: the ne’er-do-well Octave, the hero/misfit André Jurieu, the poacher Marceau, the Alsatian gamekeeper Schumacher, and the foreigner Christine de la
Chesnaye. Although it is less obvious than in *La Grande Illusion*, Renoir also mixes representatives of several European nations. While the national conflicts suggested in the narrative are mostly limited to France and Germany, class and sexual distinctions are more consistently highlighted. As in many of Renoir’s films, a diverse community is assembled in a collective, albeit luxurious, environment. One of the guests at the rural mansion called la Colinière has a very noticeable Spanish accent, while one of the servants is identified as British. Lisette nonchalantly tells him: “if you please.” In answer to another servant’s disapproving comment about Christine and André being seen together in public, the Briton says, with mock understanding: “Où il y a de la gêne, il n’y a pas de pleasure.” In a scene that recalls *Toni*, and suggests a none-too-flattering parallel—across perceived differences between social classes, in terms of character, education, and behavior—Robert dejectedly comments to his rival André, after their ungentlemanly fistfight over Christine: “De temps en temps, je lis dans les journaux que dans une lointaine banlieue, un terrassier italien a voulu enlever la femme de quelque manœuvre polonais, et que ça s’est terminé par des coups de couteau! Je ne croyais pas ces choses possibles. Mais elles le sont, mon cher, elles le sont!”

Although Renoir does not make full use of multiple languages, as he had in *La Grande Illusion*, the national identities or origins of several characters are clearly designated, along with conflicts and alliances that follow national lines. André Jurieu is thus identified as “le héros national,” or as the embodiment of France, while Christine is repeatedly situated as a foreigner. The upper-class Robert/Christine/André triangle has its corollary among the servants with the Schumacher/Lisette/Marceau triangle, one of whose members has a German-sounding name—which is reinforced when Christine pronounces Schumacher’s name in German. As played by Nora Gregor (who, with her husband, was forced into exile after *Anschluss*), Christine de la Chesnaye’s status as an expatriate, specifically a German-speaking Austrian, is mentioned several times, by Octave, Geneviève, André, Robert, and Saint-Aubin. She also alludes to it herself, dressing for the costume party as “une Tyrolienne,” and mockingly replying to Octave that if she refuses to invite André to la Colinière, “on parlera de la main de l’étranger.”

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Geneviève, Robert’s mistress, pointedly plays up her rival’s foreignness and lack of Parisian sophistication when he ineffectually tries to end their long-standing affair: “Christine est restée très de son pays. Une Parisienne comprendrait, elle pas.” As an ironic visual counterpoint to this declaration of Frenchness, Geneviève is wearing a Chinese robe, and she and Robert are standing next to impassive, almost smirking Chinese statues. Octave, the character in an intermediate social position, is alone in giving a positive account of Christine’s foreign background, stressing his emotional and artistic links to her father: “Son père, le vieux Stiller, c’était non seulement le plus grand chef d’orchestre du monde, mais c’était aussi le meilleur homme qui soit. Quand j’ai voulu apprendre la musique et que je suis allé le trouver, en Autriche, à Salzbourg, il m’a reçu comme son fils.”

Christine is somewhat indifferently married to Robert de la Chesnaye, a rich, idle French aristocrat who is identified as the descendant of “un métèque” (i.e.: a Jew, preferably of foreign origin). As in La Grande Illusion, Renoir inserts a character of Jewish descent into a micro-society that is quite capable of activating exclusionary mechanisms. In La Règle du jeu, however, the character is not in an intermediate position, but at the top of the social scale by both his title and his wealth. As if to reinforce the intertextual relationship, Marcel Dalio plays both Rosenthal in La Grande Illusion and de la Chesnaye in La Règle du jeu; and the latter is mentioned as related to the former. Although the character’s Jewishness is less emphasized in La Règle, it is pointed out, interestingly, by one of the servants, who generally show as much class consciousness and snobbery as their masters: “La mère de la Chesnaye avait un père qui s’appelait Rosenthal et qui arrivait tout droit de Francfort.”

Robert de la Chesnaye devotes much of his time and energy to restoring mechanical puppets, which, although ingenious in design, manage to combine often frenetic activity with dull lifelessness. The mindless apparatus produces a grotesque likeness of musical sounds according to his whims of the moment. Collecting is apparently his main professional activity: he affectionately refers to it as “ma carrière.” De la Chesnaye is not alone in his lack of industriousness, a trait that seems to be shared
by several members of his aristocratic milieu. He obviously derives more childish satisfaction from his noisy automatons than from the less compliant women in his life, whom he also wistfully dreams of collecting: “Marceau, y a pas des moments où tu voudrais être Arabe?” As mounting chaos swirls around him, he clings to the vestiges of a dying social order embodied in the metonymic device of his mechanical dolls. During the series of skits that precede André’s death, the visual joke of the player piano producing the sounds of Saint-Saëns’s *Danse macabre*, while the erstwhile pianist (Charlotte) looks on, will reinforce the feeling of empty, sterile agitation that characterizes Robert’s environment. The shadows on the wall of the closing scene will similarly accentuate the parallel between the mindless puppets and the mechanical behavior required by the rules of this waning game.

The blurred line between humans and machines in *La Règle* is conveyed through the dialogue as well. Octave’s character is defined when Lisette comments at seeing him depressed and lacking appetite: “Décidément, y a quelque chose de cassé.” The romantic link between André and Christine is initially represented through the technological medium of the radio. It is an improvised radio interview which transmits André’s disappointment and anger to Christine, who is first seen in the background, preparing herself for an elegant social outing (much like an actor preparing to go on stage), while the radio itself is seen in the foreground. The intrusion of the aviator’s public lamentation of unrequited love disturbs the placid surface, or the established rules, of the secure world which Christine inhabits. Christine comments to Lisette as she applies makeup: “Qu’est-ce qui est naturel de notre temps?” Octave tells Christine, after she has discovered, through a looking-glass, her husband’s longtime affair with Geneviève: “On est à une époque où tout le monde ment. Les prospectus des pharmaciens, les gouvernements, la radio, le cinéma, les journaux... Alors pourquoi veux-tu que nous autres, les simples particuliers, on ne mente pas aussi?”

When faced with conflict, disagreement, or the necessity of making a painful choice, Robert constantly utters lenitive replies designed to temporize and to assuage his interlocutors: “Lisette, ne dramatisons pas.” When he wants to leave Geneviève, his
attempt to mollify her makes him sound as weak as Louis XVI in La Marseillaise:64 "Ma chère amie, excusez-moi. Je n'avais pas l'intention de vous faire de la peine; seulement mettez-vous à ma place." He ineffectually seeks to appease his mistress—"Ennui, ennui! Mais vous avez de ces mots, ma chère..."—in much the same way as his wife: "Le mensonge! Vous exagérez..." As he pathetically tells Marceau: "Moi, je ne voudrais faire de la peine à personne, surtout pas aux femmes." Of course, through his indecisiveness and lack of resolve, he ends up hurting everyone. Robert’s constant and useless appeasement, at a farcical level, recalls more tragic instances of appeasement on the part of French and British politicians.65

In 1939, with Europe on the brink of another war, Renoir did not reiterate his previous calls for common understanding across national lines. Robert de la Chesnaye’s unrealistic internationalism stands as a pale reflection of Rosenthal’s in La Grande Illusion: "Je suis contre les barrières, contre les murs.” He tells Octave this is why he’ll invite his rival to la Colinière, despite André’s obvious attraction to Christine: "Autant qu’ils se voient, qu’ils s’expliquent.” Robert’s love of openness can also reach a ridiculous level, as when he forbids his gamekeeper Schumacher from fencing off the rabbits that are damaging the grounds: "Je ne veux pas de grillages. Je ne veux pas de lapins. Arrangez-vous, mon ami.” This reduced form of internationalism, that refuses to recognize often conflicting practical realities, stands in somewhat pathetic contrast to Rosenthal’s recognition of the artificiality of “les frontières.”

Many of Renoir’s films offer a means of escape, however imaginary or fantastic, from the harsh realities of contradictory social and political forces. In Les Bas-Fonds, the two lovers (Pepel and Natacha) apparently elude abject poverty and despair, finding at least the hope for renewal on the open road. Boudu similarly finds symbolic refuge from confining societal strictures in the openness of a pastoral, if unromanticized, setting. At a somewhat more shallow and superficial level, art transcends jealousy and ambition in French Cancan; just as love provides an apparent antidote to greed and the lust for power in Eléna et les hommes.66 While the representatives of an outdated aristocratic social order come to accept the inevitability of their demise in La Grande Illusion, their
downfall allows the reconciliation and escape to freedom of the men who exemplify the dynamism of the working and bourgeois classes. The world of *La Règle du jeu*, however, is totally closed, with a determinism seemingly as inescapable as that of Gabin’s doomed character in *La Bête humaine*. Those who do not conform to its norms have no means of escape. They are either beaten into submission (Christine) or physically eliminated (André). The film’s mixture of tragedy, farce, and dark foreboding does not allow for the redemption of any of the characters. Despite numerous instances of slapstick comedy, this is perhaps Renoir’s bleakest film, the one that through its trenchant satire would most justify Daniel Serceau’s sweeping assessment of Renoir’s work as radically subversive: “Renoir opère une critique radicale des valeurs de la culture occidentale, d’essence judéo-chrétienne, dont l’Idéal paraît contraire et en quelque sorte compensatoire aux relations marchandes qui fondent l’essentiel des rapports sociaux” (224).

**Homosexuality and Decadence**

In a section of *French National Cinema*, on the representations of “social realities, women, and the working class” (165-78), Hayward, discussing Jean Gabin’s special status in French popular culture as an energetic embodiment of working-class masculinity, articulates the links between class and sexuality as they were depicted in a large segment of French cinematic production before the war: “The working-class male is potent, capable of violence but/and unimpeachably ‘straight.’ Perversity (i.e.: homosexuality) is the reserve of the bourgeoisie, signifying their decadence” (167). *La Règle du jeu* is situated in a clearly decadent upper-class milieu; and it includes a minor, but conspicuous, character who is easily identifiable as homosexual. Renoir’s film is thus an early case study—and a fairly rare one in mainstream French cinema—in the portrayal of a gay man on screen.

The only noticeable character in *La Règle* who does not have a name is “l’inverti,” who is identified early in the film, playing cards at Geneviève’s elegant apartment. Speaking about Christine’s less-than-blissful conjugal situation, he says
jocularly: “Elle n’avait qu’à pas se marier! Je me suis marié, moi?” To which Saint-Aubin derisively replies: “Oh, toi...” While clearly a part of his wealthy milieu, the gay male character is thus identified as different from the outset. At la Colinière, the same character will be mainly a source of comic relief, at one point attempting to start a pillow fight. The treatment of “l’inverti” constitutes one of the more disturbing elements of Renoir’s film. Like some other minorities, such as Jews or Gypsies, homosexuals constitute what I have called trans-Europeans, whose identities and collective representations largely transcend national borders. The degree of their acceptance within a society provides an indication of that society’s openness to, or refusal of, the possibility of a widely inclusive multinational form of social organization. In La Règle, the gay character seems to be integrated, albeit grudgingly, within his affluent micro-society. However, the best that can be said about his portrayal is that he is as ridiculous as all the other characters.68

“L’inverti” is often seen with another relatively marginalized character, Charlotte de la Plante (played by Odette Talazac). When Geneviève arrives at la Colinière, Charlotte, looking quite enveloppée (Marceau will emphasize her bulk by hiding behind her during the chase scene, as well as behind Octave who is disguised/revealed as a bear), scolds her: “Toi, tu te maigris! Méfie-toi; ça te jouera un vilain tour.” Not to be outdone, “l’inverti” calls out: “Dis donc, Geneviève, tu me donneras l’adresse de ton coiffeur.” All of the scenes involving these two characters achieve their comic effect by playing upon derogatory stereotypes of effeminate gay males and overweight, masculinized females. When André is greeted by Christine, in front of the other guests, upon his arrival at la Colinière, two commentaries on their professed “friendship” are presented in parallel. With a smirk, Saint-Aubin tells the General: “Ça se passe en famille.” Meanwhile, “l’inverti” wonders aloud to Charlotte: “Enfin, ont-ils, ou n’ont-ils pas?” She dismissively, and self-assuredly, answers: “Oh, sûr!” His wistfully concupiscent reply—“Dommage!”—situates him at the same level of banal jealousy as Saint-Aubin, the only difference being his sexual orientation.
Lisette’s obsession with remaining Christine’s maid, while she repeatedly rebuffs her Alsatian husband’s advances, also has homosocial overtones. After they have both been expelled from la Colinière, Marceau tells Schumacher (who has once again been turned down by his wife in favor of Christine): “Oh, c’est pas avec toi qu’elle est mariée, va, c’est avec Madame!” As flirtatious as Schumacher is serious, Lisette exhibits a more blatantly flippant attitude towards her marriage of convenience than Robert. For both couples, it is the partner identified as Germanic (Schumacher, Christine) who is more committed to what the French partner (Lisette, Robert) seems to consider mainly as a socially useful conjugal arrangement.

A Shooting War

The lengthy hunting—or, more accurately, shooting—scene, one of the most famous in La Règle, imparts a lingering sense of foreboding, given the film’s historical context (by 1939, France was bordered, or surrounded, by fascist regimes in Italy, Germany, and Spain). Whether or not Renoir intended it, the scene of the massacre of the small animals, who are inexorably led to the waiting, immobile shooters by a group of servants commanded by Schumacher, constitutes a troubling premonition. It should be noted that even in this film made just before the war, distinctions are drawn between characters identified as Germanic: unlike most of the participants, Christine does not seem to enjoy the shooting party. The uselessness, in practical terms, of the hunt is highlighted by the fact that the game was not shot for food; even the servants are uninterested in eating rabbit. De la Chesnaye and his privileged guests are merely indulging in hunting as a ritualistic aristocratic pastime—the very activity which, redefined as poaching, places the impoverished Marceau outside of lawful society.

Everyone may have their reasons, as Octave puts it (“Sur cette terre, y a une chose effroyable, c’est que tout le monde a ses raisons”) but the reasons of this shooting party are particularly paltry.

Schumacher, the meticulous, orderly, and ultimately murderous gamekeeper, is from the eastern region of Alsace, where a German dialect is widely used, and which
was, along with most of the region of Lorraine, the motive and the goal of *la Revanche* so ardently championed by Barrès. Schumacher’s animus towards Marceau (who “poaches” on both his hunting and conjugal territory), quickly takes on national overtones. Abruptly announcing to his wife, “je t’emmène en Alsace,” Schumacher tells her that “là-bas”, shiftless troublemakers like Marceau are ruthlessly dealt with: “Les bracos, les crapules, les Marceau, quoi, on sait les dresser. Un bon coup de fusil! La nuit, dans la forêt; et puis on n’en parle plus.” Meanwhile, in a contrapuntal use of depth of field, Marceau is grotesquely quivering with fear in the background. Also, when he first catches Marceau poaching, Schumacher tells a bemused de la Chesnaye that “pendant la guerre, j’ai tiré sur des gars qui en avaient fait moins que lui.” Although it is not specified, the reference to “la guerre” can only be to the First World War. On which side would Schumacher, the Alsatian, have been fighting? In the context of 1939, the implication of a booted, rifle-bearing character, who has a German-sounding name, ruthlessly pursuing a hapless Frenchman (Marceau), is inescapable. Of course, the gamekeeper Schumacher will end up killing “le héros national,” André Jurieu, while believing he is shooting at Octave.

The character of Marceau, with his cigarette dangling from his mouth at just the right angle, his crumpled *casquette*, and his untranslatable *gouaille*, incarnates a comically theatrical form of Frenchness. Where the Germanic Schumacher is rigid and somewhat plodding in his speech and bearing, Marceau always seems to slide out of various entanglements (generally of his own making), with varying degrees of success, usually managing to ingratiate himself, while Schumacher often arouses reactions of hostility. As Jean-Pierre Boon points out, it is no doubt easier for spectators to identify with Marceau, the prey, than with Schumacher, the hunter (the parallel with the hunting scene is obvious): “par l’attention et la sympathie qu’il accorde au braconnier, Renoir porte le spectateur à s’identifier avec lui” (343). When Schumacher has resolved to shoot Octave, who is apparently courting his wife Lisette, he peremptorily tells a hesitant and frightened Marceau: “Maintenant on ne se quitte plus.” The mistaken Schumacher’s target will in fact be André, as he runs towards Christine. The embodiments of France
and Germany, both upper- and lower-class, are thus locked together when the real shooting begins.

Andrew compares *La Règle du jeu* to Renoir's adaptation of Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*. He describes André as a romantic figure, as doomed and out of place as Emma Bovary: "In both films, spontaneity being impossible, the romantic is doomed to die, leaving the suffocating structure intact" (1995, 281). This portrait of André derives from his repeatedly mentioned status, by Octave and other characters, as a gallant if somewhat befuddled hero, a technologically-updated embodiment of the tradition of chivalry. However, this modern-day knight turns out to be almost as useless and self-absorbed as his rival Robert de la Chesnaye. The trans-Atlantic flight in his larger mechanical toy achieved nothing of practical value. As André himself points out, his sole motivation was to impress Christine. Once the flight is over, he seems to have no more interest in aviation. At la Colinière, André Jurieu, the *chevalier du ciel*, joins other self-styled modern-day knights: the General and the knights of industry (the la Bruyères). In the opening scene of *La Règle*, the arriving solo aviator is compared by the radio reporter to Charles Lindbergh, whose 1927 solo flight across the Atlantic had created the sort of enthusiastic pandemonium depicted in the film, upon his arrival at Le Bourget Airport. By 1939, however, Lindbergh was no longer simply an intrepid and somewhat innocent aviator. He had visited nazi Germany, had praised the technical sophistication of the Luftwaffe, had received a medal from Hermann Goering, and was advocating American isolationism as a response to the threat of a new war in Europe. In retrospect, given the deadly role of aviation during the war, the character of André Jurieu adds another element of foreboding to Renoir's film.

**Conclusion**

The thematic diversity of the Renoir corpus includes not just a isolated satire of technocratic European institutions (*Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe*), but also several films that include a favorable perception of cross-cultural points of contact which transcend, but do not negate, nation-based identity and solidarity. Renoir, it should be noted, never became
a propagandist for a united Europe. However, many of his most important films are marked by an awareness of the inextricability of European interrelationships, not just at the traditional level of elites, but inclusive of a wide spectrum of citizens. The widespread pre-war illusion of national self-sufficiency (often associated with a colonial empire) was thereby implicitly undermined. While Barrès could make Europe end at France’s eastern border, Renoir, with some exceptions, does not present in his films a splendidly isolated French nation, inherently at odds with its permanently hostile neighbors. Although they may not always be free of tensions and conflicts, exchanges between Europeans, across national borders, are generally depicted as both inevitable and potentially beneficial. This relatively favorable European topos is all the more remarkable in the increasingly disastrous historical context of the 1930s, when nazi Germany was preparing to carve out its own version a “New Europe.”

In spite of this context, La Grande Illusion, perhaps Renoir’s best-known film, emphasizes the Franco-German relationship, generally portraying Germans in a sympathetic light, more as potential partners than as immutable adversaries. Through frequent references to other European countries, it outlines a limited form of transnationalism, one that takes into account nationalism as an established force but also gives a broader content to human self-definition. It is generally inclusive of minority groups such as Jews who have often been excluded by more traditional forms of nationalism in Europe. However, it represents Great Britain as somehow more distant and separate than other European countries. A Europe that is mainly structured around the reconciliation of France and Germany, and that allows a more limited form of participation for some its members: it is difficult not to detect a parallel with the current situation of the European Union.

The extremes in French attitudes towards Germany might be represented by Germaine de Staël’s laudatory reevaluation of German literature on the one hand, and Maurice Barrès’s denunciation of inherent German barbarism on the other. Such attitudes partly reflect the level of nationalistic ideology as well as the shifting balance of power between the two countries during the nineteenth century. Renoir, while no
theoretician of literary influence or nationalism, generally portrayed Germans as he did other Europeans, with neither excessive sentimentality nor demonization. His films acknowledge the inescapably central place of Germany among France’s potential European partners. In this sense, both Barrès and Renoir were right too early: just as Barrès’s worst predictions about German behavior became all too true during the nazi regime, Renoir’s depictions of transnational interaction and exchanges at all social levels, with Germans as privileged interlocutors for the French, would become self-evident during the post-war years.

Renoir’s work provides an important transition from the age of nationalism to a growing realization of interdependency and the need for practical cooperation between countries—a realization that would only yield results after the Second World War. By stressing the need for dialogue, without occluding real conflicts, some of his films (particularly Toni and La Grande Illusion) present a less romanticized view of Europe, with its promise as well as its contradictions, that is distinct from both Barrès’s negation of the very idea of European commonality of interests and Hugo’s utopian prophecy of European unity as the foundation for everlasting peace and progress. Through Renoir’s work, the idea of Europe can be seen as becoming less fanciful and more of a practical—and therefore less exalting—issue.
Chapter 7

An Open Ending

Instead of a conclusion, this study leads to a new introduction. The creation and development of durable European institutions after the Second World War, at first limited to a small group of countries, has changed the terms of the European literary topos, and has led to a flurry of publications—indeed, almost a separate genre—that seek to explain the conditions in which these institutions were created, how they are likely to evolve, what their impact will be in social and cultural terms, and to what extent their development has been accompanied by the emergence of a shared European identity.1 European unity having been partly accomplished, its concept is no longer perpetually beyond the historical horizon. The partial reality has eliminated some of the more fanciful predictions, positive or negative, about what would result from the creation of multinational institutions in Europe.

Unlike the numerous grand schemes for a République européenne that periodically surfaced and failed in the course of previous centuries, the current process of European integration has progressed slowly and fitfully through a series of limited but cumulative stages. Through this process, European unification or federalism has ceased to be an often derisive synonym for some kind of new Golden Age. It has moved from the comprehensive, if often unrealistic, visions of individual writers, to the practical and circumscribed domain of public opinion. This move from dream to partial reality has been reflected in the type of literature that deals with Europe, a literature that for the most part no longer bears the imprint of utopianism.
From Fiction to Reality

It is no coincidence that the movement toward European union began with the relative geopolitical decline that followed the end of the Second World War: the east-west division of Europe, the dismantling of its colonial empires, and the loss of political and economic centrality. If there is such a thing as "Western Civilization," Europe is no longer its political, economic, or even cultural center. The current drive towards a European union is notable for its limited ambitions—indeed, that is part of its appeal. The twentieth century has amply demonstrated that utopian dreams of transforming the world can lead to historical nightmares. As opposed to the strong emotional mystique of traditional patriotism, no one is willing to die for Europe. Neither is there any European equivalent to such a transformational concept as the creation of a "new Soviet man." In its postwar institutional application, the concept of a united Europe has not—to put it mildly—given rise to a widespread new form of idealism. It remains a painstakingly lengthy and arduous process that has not been accompanied by movements of mass enthusiasm. The day-to-day process of European integration over the past half-century, even though it has achieved positive, tangible results, has been less than awe-inspiring: usually far removed from participation by ordinary citizens, it has mostly involved haggling between bureaucrats of several countries over such mundane matters as sugar quotas, competition in the telecommunications industry, and the pricing of dairy products. Yet, through this arguably mediocre process has been elaborated the most successful attempt in the world, so far, at multinational cooperation and integration, while any foreseeable threat of war among European Union countries has been banished.

At its narrowest, the goal of the European process of unification is simply to avoid a reoccurrence of the increasingly destructive wars that have periodically ravaged the continent. To paraphrase Victor Hugo's nemesis, *l'Europe, c'est la paix*—a sufficient rationale in itself, one that has inspired a number of authors. In its most extensive form, proponents of stronger European unity point to an established pattern of intercultural commonality within the current ethnic, religious and linguistic diversity of
the continent, a commonality that in turn calls for a greater degree of political integration. It is therefore increasingly artificial national borders, and not fundamental cultural distinctions, that divide Europeans. While the idea of a united Europe is several centuries old, the driving force for its actual, and modest, beginnings derived in large part from the carnage and rubble of World War II—as well as that of World War I and the Franco-Prussian War. Despite its initial focus on economic development and trade between its members, what is now called the European Union started out with a clearly political objective: to achieve lasting peace between France and Germany, by making the two countries so economically interdependent as to make another war seem unthinkable. The French-German partnership has indeed been the basic building block of European integration since the inception of the European Coal and Steel Community in 1951. To a large extent, the step-by-step approach initially advocated by Jean Monnet has proven to be remarkably successful. Indeed, within a half-century after the end of World War II, the European Union has gone from the sort of concrete, specific areas of economic cooperation outlined by the French Planning Commissioner (1945-1950), to a novel form of political integration.

The difficulty of reconciling future aspirations toward a united Europe with its warfare-ridden past is evident when one considers the symbolism of May 9, the official European Day. On that day in 1950, the French Foreign Minister, Robert Schuman, inspired by Jean Monnet, proposed in a speech to act swiftly on “un point limité mais décisif,” the creation of a common Franco-German organization, which was also open to other European countries, to oversee the production of coal and steel. As the basis of the armament industry, coal and steel carried an important practical and symbolic weight after the Second World War. By pooling their resources on these items, France and Germany sought to prevent the reemergence of rival arms industries, while laying the foundations of the future European Union. A period of lasting peace in Europe was thus initiated, in part, by merging and consolidating the basic industrial components of modern warfare. Declared the European Day in 1985, May 9 falls, fittingly or ironically, the day after most of Europe commemorates the unconditional surrender of nazi
Germany in 1945. The celebration of European unity thus follows closely the remembrance of what is arguably the worst and the most divisive period in the history of the continent.

The evolution of the European Union constitutes a unique social, political and constitutional experiment: never before have established, developed nation-states, with separate languages and cultures, attempted to achieve political integration or unity through peaceful means. The supranational institutions that have evolved in the course of this attempt, such as the European Parliament, the European High Court and the European Central Bank, are also unique, both in their current roles and in their potential development. The successive treaties signed by the members of what is now the European Union constitute a legal and political corpus that increasingly resembles the framework of a constitution. Indeed, the passage of time, along with each institution created by the treaties, strengthens the constitutional edifice, and with it the emerging sense of permanence of a shared European identity. The progressive process of integration through limited, practical steps seems to have developed a dynamic of its own. As Paul Sabourin puts it: “En vérité, l'intégration économique débouche rapidement sur un commencement d'intégration politique, dès qu'on envisage une monnaie unique, une banque centrale, des ajustements de politique budgétaire” (60).

**Us and Them**

One of the most appealing features of the ongoing process of European protofederalism has always been the promise of taming the exclusionary tendencies that lead to racism and warfare. Englobing several ethnic, religious and cultural groups, a united Europe should thus be, if not immune to the temptations of internecine rivalries, at least capable of resolving them through peaceful means. Similarly, a culturally diverse Europe should be less inclined than a more homogeneous nation-state to resort to oppressing or excluding minority groups in order to establish an “identity” for its majority, an issue that has become all the more crucial since the level of ethnic and religious diversity within the European Union was increased by the arrival of immigrants.
from Turkey, North Africa, or sub-Saharan Africa. While Europe has amply displayed its capacity for intolerance and racism, it also does have a tradition of cultural syncretism. In an insightful analysis, Rémi Brague finds cultural “secondarité” to be one of Europe’s defining features, with Rome and Christianity each acknowledging their respective debt to Greece and Judaism, and thereby establishing a historical pattern of cultural borrowing and reformulating for Europe as a whole.

The demise of communism as a credible internationalist ideology has removed one obstacle towards broader European integration. With the end of the Cold War and of the East-West division of Europe, the European Union is free to expand in the direction of its previously closed eastern borders. However, the current lack of an obvious adversary, or Other, has renewed the debate over the European identity (or identities) and over the limits of Europe, by removing a fixed point of reference, however negative. The development of the European Union has encountered significant popular opposition within the past few years, even as it has begun to assume a more substantial and visible role in the daily life of its “citizens.” The main motive for opposition—and the political left and right wings converge on this point—is that Europe risks losing the diversity of its cultural heritage, becoming one vast, soulless marketplace where what Paul Valéry called *l’esprit* has been eliminated, albeit peacefully. It is interesting that the negative model often invoked in this regard is the United States, whose status has been inverted: it is no longer a federal model for Europeans to emulate, but a pervasive economic and cultural menace, that tends towards a reductive homogenization of smaller cultural groups.

It seems unlikely that a united Europe will totally avoid what René Girard calls *la mimésis de l’antagoniste*, whereby a formerly disunited group coalesces around the opposition to a common adversary. To a large extent, the role of *l’antagoniste* has been transferred from the defunct Soviet Union to the United States—where, as the reasoning goes, anonymous, atomistic individuals, devoid of cultural links, have been reduced to their purely economic dimensions. Within the current opposition to Europe as a clone of some vague American dysfunctional model, we could be witnessing the displacement of
traditional nationalism onto a Greater Europe, leading to new, and perhaps less warlike, rivalries between larger multinational blocks. Of course, the simplistic and somewhat self-serving dichotomy between the soulless American marketplace and the European gathering of cultures tends to obscure the numerous instances of barbarity that contributed to much of the original driving force for European integration. However, such a dichotomy—and with it, the establishment of a negative model against which unity can be fostered—may well be an unavoidable stage of the process.

Continuing Research
I plan to continue this study by examining the works of an author who was actively involved in the diverse attempts at European federalism that emerged after the Second World War. One of the most consistent proponents of European unification was a literary critic of Swiss origin, Denis de Rougemont, who through his pro-European writings and organizational activities participated in the creation of several European cultural associations. Rougemont was involved in the organization of the European Conference held in the Hague in May 1948, that provided part of the impetus for the establishment of the Council of Europe the following year. While this institution largely failed to fulfill its promise, the very fact of its creation, so soon after the war, did in turn set the stage for the 1950 Schuman Declaration.

The project of European federalism was articulated and promoted by intellectuals from several countries, some of whom had met during the war years, while in exile in Great Britain or the United States. Rougemont was one of the most visible in his support for such initiatives as the one launched under the aegis of Jean Monnet and Robert Schuman. As Monnet's biographer points out, his was not a totally isolated voice before and after the war: "Avec Denis de Rougemont, acquis à la cause du fédéralisme européen, Bertrand de Jouvenel qu'il connaît depuis les années trente, les contacts sont également assez étroits" (Roussel, 706). As Mark Mazower argues (199-202), outright federalists such as Monnet have been few in number and relatively little-known.
However, their influence has been significant in shaping both the initial European institutions and the continuing debate on their future development.

While Rougemont obviously lacks the stature of the authors I have examined in the previous chapters, he was a writer and public intellectual who produced several texts directly related to the issue of Europe. He was also one of the first writers to attempt a comprehensive literary history of the idea of Europe. Rougemont certainly inscribed the much greater number of authors and texts he investigated within a teleological framework, in a manifest attempt to ascertain to what extent each one had announced or refuted the idea (or his idea) of European unification. During my discussion of a much shorter list of authors, and despite my original intent, I have been partly guilty of similarly projecting a pattern of meaning into the past, if only through the chronological presentation of each author. My unpremeditated illustration of the hermeneutic circle provides another incentive to re-examine the authors I have chosen, through an analysis of the particular readings Rougemont made of some of their texts. It is in part through a critique of Rougemont’s progressive historical schema that I will seek to refine my interpretations of the variations of the European literary topos.
Notes

Chapter 1. Introduction

1 For lack of a better term, I will refer to Europe as a continent, even though its geographical limits remain unclear. The border between Europe and Asia, traditionally set along the Ural mountains, is even more problematic than such outlying nations as Iceland, Malta, or Turkey, or such leftovers of European colonial empires as the French Départements d'outre-mer.

2 A European Day (May 9); a flag (12 yellow stars on a blue background); a common passport (with the bearer’s nationality in smaller print); and an anthem (Beethoven’s Ode to Joy, customarily played after the national anthem).

3 See Derek Heater’s The Idea of European Unity for detailed analyses of the main projects aimed at achieving peace and unification in Europe, from Sully’s “Grand Design” to the more limited and realistic proposals of Monnet and Spaak.

4 I use the word “author” in a broad sense, thus including the filmmaker Jean Renoir. Similarly, the word “texts” will in the relevant cases include films.

5 The page numbers will refer to Bunge’s translation. The same excerpt from Herder’s book is translated by Menze and Palma as “This, too, a Philosophy of History.” The complete text is found in a bilingual German-French edition (1964).

6 Unlike the famous question from Lettres persanes, Valéry’s “Mais qui donc est Européen?” has no satirical connotation.
For brief descriptions of these two poems, see the indispensable biography edited by René Pomeau, *Voltaire en son temps* (1:314-6 and 1:173-81, respectively).

2 Besterman summarized as follows Voltaire’s written work in terms of quantity and variety:

About fifteen million of Voltaire’s written words have come down to us, enough to make twenty Bibles. This vast quantity of writing is in every conceivable form: plays and dialogues, novels and stories, epic and lyric poetry, encyclopedic essays, scientific and learned papers, polemics and squibs of every description, book reviews, and of course, most numerous of all, letters, and again letters, since twenty thousand have survived, addressed to 1700 correspondents ranging from popes to peasants and from ministers to mistresses, and perhaps as many again have perished—and what letters! The subjects dealt with in these twenty Bibles and these twenty thousand letters correspond broadly to the entire range of knowledge in the eighteenth century, from paleontology to economics, from history to biology, from biblical criticism to semantics, from abbeys to Zoroaster. (1969, 533)

3 “Voltaire” was of course itself a *nom de plume* for François-Marie Arouet (see Pomeau 1998-94, 1:115-8, in this regard).

4 The principal European wars of the middle of the eighteenth century, which figure prominently in the Voltairean corpus, were the War of Austrian Succession (1740-48) and the Seven Years War (1756-63).

5 It should be noted that Voltaire’s travels abroad were often involuntary. He repeatedly experienced forced exile from France, or internal exile from Paris. When traveling to such countries as Holland, he would usually stay in one city for fairly short periods. His most frequent trips abroad were from Cirey to Dutch or German cities. As Pomeau points out, he never saw Spain, Italy, or Greece: “Voltaire n’est pas un méditerranéen. La limite méridionale de ses voyages se situe à la hauteur de Lyon et de Genève. Hasard? Choix plutôt, car son Europe est une Europe nordique” (1958, 40). While frequent, Voltaire’s travels were therefore relatively limited in geographical terms. He never did a grand tour of Europe, never crossed the ocean to visit the New World or the Asian countries of which he had written at great length. After 1728, he never
returned to see the British model he had extolled. Perhaps mindful of the ignominious aftermath to his stay at the Prussian court (1750-53), he never went to see the Russia of Catherine II which he so admired.

6 Quotes from Voltaire’s letters refer to Besterman’s “Definitive” edition of his correspondence. Besterman’s edition of Voltaire’s notebooks is also used in this chapter. Since the critical edition of the complete works published by the Voltaire Foundation is as yet unfinished, quotes from Voltaire’s other works are taken from the 1885 Moland edition. In most cases, I have updated the eighteenth-century spelling.

7 See chapter 1 of Schlereth in this regard. Besterman highlighted Voltaire’s command of European languages, at a time when French was dominant:

Voltaire had a far greater knowledge of modern languages than was general in France at that time, or since for that matter. He wrote a large number of letters in English and Italian, and a certain number wholly or partly in Latin, Spanish and German. But they are all isolated letters, though the English ones are fairly numerous during Voltaire’s stay in England in 1726-28, and the Italian ones when he was elected to many Italian academies in 1745-46 (he never visited Italy). (1969, 263-4)


9 For an overview of this campaign, see Pomeau (1988-94, 4:230-60).


11 See A.-M. Rousseau (219-31) in this regard.

12 Long after his death, Voltaire continued to cast a long polemical shadow across French political and religious life. For instance, in the section entitled “1878: Jeanne d’Arc ou Voltaire?” (408-9), Contamine shows how the commemoration of the centennial of Voltaire’s death during the Third Republic became, by reaction, the
occasion for the emergence of Jeanne d’Arc as a right-wing, anti-Republican symbol. See also Goulemot and Walter in this regard.

Voltaire’s concern for political substance over constitutional form is visible in his 1752 *Pensées sur le gouvernement*: “La liberté consiste à ne dépendre que des lois. Sur ce pied, chaque homme est libre aujourd’hui en Suède, en Angleterre, en Hollande, en Suisse, à Genève, à Hambourg; on l’est même à Venise et à Gênes, quoique ce qui n’est pas du corps des souverains y soit avili. Mais il y a encore des provinces et de vastes royaumes chrétiens où la plus grande partie des hommes est esclave” (23:526).


See Besterman 1956 for an analysis of Voltaire’s reaction to the 1755 earthquake that leveled Lisbon.

See Maillard (particularly chapters 6-8) for a study of the evolution of Charles de Gaulle’s conception of Europe.

In the *Essai sur les mœurs*, the term “système” is often used to describe Europe as a set of varying, but interconnected, political and cultural entities. For example: “Vous ne voyez point le Danemark entrer dans le système de l’Europe au XVIe siècle” (13:122).

See Schlereth (11-7) and chapter 8 of Pomeau 1991 in this regard.

In a text written during the Napoleonic regime, Germaine de Staël bemoaned the end of unhampered transnational travel: “On voyageait, il y a vingt ans, d’une extrémité de l’Europe à l’autre sans obstacle; la Révolution française seule avait troublé ce bonheur” (*Dix Années d’exil*, 191).

For his part, J.-J. Rousseau, in a letter to Charles Bonnet (15 Oct. 1755), referred to France as “la patrie commune du genre humain” (*Correspondance complète*, vol. 3, letter 328). Other quotes from Rousseau’s works in this chapter are taken from vol. 3 of his *Œuvres complètes.*

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A typically ironic critique of Bossuet's *Discours sur l'histoire universelle* is found in Voltaire's *Les Lettres d'Amabel* (1769): “Nous avons lu ensemble un livre de son pays, qui m'a paru bien étrange. C'est une histoire universelle du monde entier, dans laquelle il n'est pas dit un mot de notre antique empire, rien des immenses contrées au-delà du Gange, rien de la Chine, rien de la vaste Tartarie. Il faut que les auteurs, dans cette partie de l'Europe, soient bien ignorants” (21:438).

See chapter 1 of Perkins 1965 for an overview of how Voltaire represented various countries and cultures in his texts.

See Badir (167-76) in this regard.

Variations on this theme are also found in chapters 12 and 13 of *La Défense de mon oncle* (26:389-94).

For lists of the works in which Voltaire mentions China, see Guy (440-1) and Song (235-42). See Song (153-74) for a study of Voltaire’s understanding of Confucian thought, and its status as a philosophical model in his writings.

In his consideration of history, Voltaire did not consider all Asian cultures as worthy of praise or even much interest. He was particularly categorical about the Mongols and Turks: “Ce grand continent de la Tartarie, bien plus vaste que l'Europe, n'a jamais été habité que par des barbares. Leurs antiquités ne méritent guère mieux une histoire suivie que les loups et les tigres de leur pays. Ces peuples du nord firent de tout temps des invasions vers le midi” (*Essai sur les mœurs*, 11:435).

See chapter 5 of Widenor Maggs concerning the influence within Russia of Voltaire’s construction of a philosophical China.

For his part, J.-J. Rousseau was less sanguine about the “prétendue sagesse des lois” (*Discours sur les sciences et les arts*, 3:11) of Voltaire’s China. See Guy, (227-31 and 338-40) concerning the quarrel between Voltaire and Rousseau over the representation of China. Rousseau was not the only philosophe to differ from Voltaire on the interpretation of Chinese society. In his *Commentaire sur l'esprit des lois* (1777), Voltaire tries to refute Montesquieu’s description of China (30:430-1) and India.
(30:443-4) as despotic states. See Brumfit (111-21) concerning the influence of Montesquieu’s theory of climatic determinism on Voltaire.

29 See Park for a study of the reception of *L’Orphelin* since it was first performed on stage.

30 This text also provides an example of Voltaire’s ironic descriptive method, which consists in describing an event (in this case a religious ritual) in purely physical terms, thus evacuating any emotional connotations, leaving only an absurdly empty practice. This *reductio ad absurdum* allowed him, for instance, to refute a sacred text, or to deny the validity of an established power structure.

31 See chapter 1 of Guy for background on the rivalries between the different church orders engaged in missionary efforts in China.

32 It should be noted that, in his *Jugement sur le projet de paix perpétuelle* (3:591-600), a text that was not published during his lifetime, Rousseau sounded a more realistic note, pronouncing Saint-Pierre’s project inapplicable in the political environment of his time. For an overview of the attitudes of the principal eighteenth-century French writers towards war and pacifist projects, see Meyer (167-90).

33 For a brief survey of European peace projects, see Pomeau (1991, 250-3). For a comparison of the projects of Saint-Pierre and Kant, see Wood.

34 See Perkins 1961 for a comparison of the positions of Voltaire and Saint-Pierre.

35 See for instance his *Défense de Louis XIV contre les annales politiques de l’abbé de Saint-Pierre* (29:267-71). Voltaire sought to obtain a historical text by Saint-Pierre when he was working on the *Siècle de Louis XIV* (see D1642 and D1644 in this regard). In a letter to Nicolas Thieriot (20 Aug. 1756), he dismisses Saint-Pierre as “un fou sérieux qui traite Louis XIV de grand enfant” (D6976).

36 See S. Mason’s analysis of Montesquieu’s “vision of Europe” in this regard.

37 Another Voltairean survey of the varying levels of progress in Europe is found in the allegorical *Eloge historique de la raison* (21:513-22).

38 For accounts of these trips, see Vercruysse (1966, 26-66).
The other small European republic that Voltaire praised in terms similar to Holland was Switzerland: “L’égalité, partage naturel des hommes, subsiste encore en Suisse autant qu’il est possible. Vous n’entendez pas par ce mot cette égalité absurde et impossible par laquelle le serviteur et le maître, le manœuvre et le magistrat, le plaideur et le juge, seraient confondus ensemble; mais cette égalité par laquelle le citoyen ne dépend que des lois, et qui maintient la liberté des faibles contre l’ambition du plus fort” (Essai sur les mœurs, 11:528). However, the Swiss image was clouded in Voltaire’s works as a result of his conflicts with the Genevan authorities, echoes of which are found in his 1767 allegorical play on Geneva, Les Scythes (6:261-334).

“The Encyclopédie (1751-1772), under the direction of Diderot and d’Alembert, and Voltaire’s Dictionnaire philosophique (1764) owe much in both ideology and form to [Bayle’s] earlier work” (Whelan, 10). Voltaire praised Bayle, notably in the article “Philosophie” of the Dictionnaire philosophique. See Rétat (252-64 and 359-71) for an analysis of the evolving role of Bayle’s Dictionnaire in Voltaire’s work.

Voltaire, who was imprisoned for 11 months in the Bastille during the Régence, who was banished into internal or external exile for much of his life, whose works were often condemned and burned as blasphemous, had concrete reasons to feel persecuted in general and to fear censorship in particular. See Gay (66-87) and chapter 1 of Conlon concerning Voltaire’s attempts to escape censorship.

See Vercruysse (1966, 11-23) and chapter 6 of Van Strien-Chardonneau in this regard.

For an account of this episode, see Pomeau (1988-94, 1:203-11).

See Casini in this regard.

For a study of the importance of their friendship, see chapter 11 of Perry.

Among other things, Voltaire found in John Locke the philosophical foundation he needed for his “anti-systematic empiricism” (Hutchison, 205). See Hutchison (202-22) concerning the role Voltaire played in making Locke more accessible to French readers in the Lettres philosophiques.
47 See Gay (125-38) concerning Voltaire’s attitude towards a proposed tax (le vingtième) that would have resulted in a loss of privileges for the French church.

48 Voltaire’s enthusiastic espousal of liberal capitalism was another bone of contention with J.-J. Rousseau. In the Précis du siècle de Louis XV, he referred derisively to a famous passage of Rousseau’s Discours sur l’origine de l’inégalité (3:164):

Il s’est trouvé des esprits assez aveugles pour saper tous les fondements de la société en croyant la réformer. On a été assez fou pour soutenir que le tien et le mien sont des crimes, et qu’on ne doit point jouir de son travail; que non seulement tous les hommes sont égaux, mais qu’ils ont perverti l’ordre de la nature en se rassemblant; que l’homme est né pour être isolé comme une bête farouche; que les castors, les abeilles et les fourmis, dérangent les lois éternelles en vivant en république. (15:434)

49 See Perkins 1962 on Voltaire’s general conception of the means to enhance national strength and international stability.

50 See Laurent-Hubert for a discussion of the Essai as monetary history.

51 Chapter 81 of the Essai sur les mœurs, devoted to “Mœurs, usages, commerce, richesses, vers les XIIIe et XIVe siècles” (12:53-7), provides a defense of luxury as a sign of increasing trade and progress. A more entertaining variation on the same theme is found in Le Mondain and Défense du mondan (10:83-93).

52 An early version of this Voltairean conception is found, in English, in his notebooks: “England is meeting of all religions, as the Royal Exchange is the rendez-vous of all foreigners” (81:51).

53 For studies of Voltaire’s love-hate relationship with Shakespearean drama, see Gunny (26-48), A.-M. Rousseau (447-95), D. Williams (1966, 314-41), as well as Besterman’s 1967 edition of Voltaire’s texts on Shakespeare. In de Beer and Rousseau’s edition of the accounts of Voltaire’s British visitors, Voltaire delivers this characteristically mordant reply to a comment that Shakespeare’s dialogue is not low, but natural: “Avec permission, Monsieur, mon cul est bien dans la nature, et cependant je porte des culottes” (164).
Germany as a cultural and (potentially) national entity, since it was divided into a series of mini-states, and the object of proprietary disputes among Prussia, Austria, England, and France, seems to have attracted comparatively little attention on Voltaire’s part. His best-known image of German principalities is the Thunder-ten-tronckh castle of *Candide*. The idle aristocracy of this *conte philosophique*, with its obsession on the required “quartiers de noblesse,” is closer to a miniature version of the French monarchy, with all its failings, than to the enlightened models Voltaire perceived in Holland and especially Great Britain. In most of his writings, no German state aside from Prussia seemed to hold any influence or promise. Chapter 178 of the *Essai sur les mœurs*, for instance, which is devoted to Germany at the beginning of the seventeenth century, characterizes it as a large but politically inconsequential area: “Il était impossible que ce vaste état, partagé en tant de principautés désunies, sans commerce alors et sans richesse, influât beaucoup sur le système de l’Europe” (13:40).

A detailed chronology of Voltaire’s stay in Prussia is found in Magnan (399-421). Most of his book is devoted to an analysis of Voltaire’s correspondence during this period.


See Meyer (30-38) and Lavicka in this regard.

Frederick’s famous first letter to Voltaire (8 Aug. 1736) set the tone: “Ah! que la gloire ne se sert-elle de moi pour couronner vos succès! […] Si mon destin ne me favorise pas jusqu’au point de pouvoir vous posséder, du moins puis-je espérer de voir un jour celui que depuis si longtemps j’admire de loin” (D1126). A few months later (8 Feb. 1737), Frederick continues with similar flatteries: “Continuez, Monsieur, à éclairer le monde. Le flambeau de la liberté ne pouvait être confié à de meilleures mains. Je vous admirerai de loin, ne renonçant cependant point à la satisfaction de vous voir un jour” (D1281). As H. Mason points out (52-4), Voltaire’s lengthy correspondence with the openly gay Frederick often takes on homoerotic connotations, even allowing for the stylistic effusions of the period, which may partly account for Emilie du Châtelet’s
misgivings and apparent jealousy toward Frederick. During his stay in Prussia, Voltaire does sound like a jilted lover in his letters to Mme Denis (2 Sept. and 29 Oct. 1751), when reacting to Frederick’s infamous comment, as told by La Mettrie: “J’aurai besoin de lui encore un an tout au plus; on presse l’orange et on en jette l’écorce” (D4564 and D4597). It should be noted that Magnan (1-72) has convincingly established that Voltaire later rewrote the letters he had sent to his niece from Prussia, in an effort at exacting revenge against Frederick, the erstwhile “Salomon du nord.”


60 See Wilberger (1976, 26-7) and M. Mervaud (89-90) in this regard.

61 As is detailed by Wilberger (1972, 19-62, and 1976, 199-233).

62 See chapter 8 of Wilberger 1976 in this regard.

63 Discussions of Voltaire’s correspondence with Catherine are found in Lioublinski and in chapter 5 of Wilberger 1976.

64 See Pomeau (1988-94, 5:47-63) for an overview of Voltaire’s approbatory reactions to Russia’s armed expansionism, directed against both Turkey and Poland.

65 Voltaire was fairly consistent in his treatment of the Ottoman Empire as the arch-enemy of Christian Europe. While he often praised the Arabs for their relative tolerance and their wide-ranging contributions to the arts and sciences, he generally categorized the Turks as aggressive and ignorant. The idea of the essential otherness of the Turks is found in the Essai sur les mœurs:

On peut demander comment, au milieu de tant de secousses, de guerres intestines, de conspirations, de crimes et de folies, il y a eu tant d’hommes qui aient cultivé les arts utiles et les arts agréables en Italie, et ensuite dans les autres états chrétiens. C’est ce que nous ne voyons pas sous la domination des Turcs. Il faut que notre partie de l’Europe ait eu dans ses moeurs et dans son génie un caractère qui ne se trouve ni dans la Thrace, où les Turcs ont établi le siège de leur empire, ni dans la Tartarie, dont ils sortirent autrefois. (13:178)

66 See Dzwigala and Rostworowski concerning Voltaire’s generally negative views on Poland (which occupies a limited place in his work). In the Essai sur les mœurs, he depicts it as constantly embattled: “La Pologne était le seul pays qui, joignant le nom de république à celui de monarchie, se donnât toujours un roi étranger, comme
les Vénitiens choisissent un général de terre. C’est encore le seul royaume qui n’ait point eu l’esprit de conquête, occupé seulement de défendre ses frontières contre les Turcs et contre les Moscovites” (13:126). As Dzwigala concluded, Voltaire eventually arrived at “a scathing denouncement of this nation’s role in the ‘history of civilization’” (118). In effect, through his acquiescence of Poland’s partition, Voltaire symbolically wrote it out of existence.

67 For a discussion of Voltaire’s possible personal motivations on this issue, see Lévy (227-34).

68 The famous Voltairean dictum on the necessity of God’s existence—“Si Dieu n’existait pas, il faudrait l’inventer”—is found in “Epître à l’auteur des Trois Imposteurs” (10:402-5). The same text predicts the eventual triumph of philosophical tolerance, which includes the end of Jewish particularism:

Les enfants de Sara, que nous traitons de chiens,
Mangeront du jambon fumé par des chrétiens.

69 Chapter 53 of the Essai sur les mœurs is entitled: “De l’Orient au temps des Croisades, et de l’état de la Palestine,” which is described as arid and desolate, and is unfavorably compared to Switzerland (11:438).

70 Similar passages are found in other texts, situating the Jews as immutably avaricious, barbaric, and degenerate, based on the affirmation of their innate and unvarying ethnic character, rather than on traditional religious bigotry. It is not difficult to see the propaganda uses someone like Labroue could make of such statements as “enemies of humankind” during the Occupation:

On ne voit, au contraire [des Arabes], dans toutes les annales du peuple hébreu, aucune action généreuse. Ils ne connaissent ni l’hospitalité, ni la générosité, ni la clémence. Leur souverain bonheur est d’exercer l’usure avec les étrangers; et cet esprit d’usure, principe de toute lâcheté, est tellement enraciné dans leurs cœurs, que c’est l’objet continuels des figures qu’ils emploient dans l’espèce d’éloquence qui leur est propre. Leur gloire est de mettre à feu et à sang les petits villages dont ils peuvent s’emparer. Ils égorgent les vieillards et les enfants; ils ne réserver qu que les filles nubiles; ils assassinent leurs maîtres quand ils sont esclaves; ils ne savent jamais pardonner quand ils sont vainqueurs; ils sont ennemis du genre humain. Nulle politesse, nul science, nul art perfectionné dans aucun temps chez cette nation atroce. (Essai sur les mœurs, 11:209)
Voltaire’s well-known anticlericalism coexisted easily with a vigorous opposition to atheism. As Gay argues, “Voltaire had genuine, deep religious convictions; he was an emotional, even a mystical deist” (240). Far from professing atheism, Voltaire’s Sermon ends with the hope that “cette secte de chrétiens” will return to a deistic “religion sainte et naturelle” (24:454). The same theme of Judaism and Christianity as monstrous perversions of natural religion is found in the Examen important de Milord Bolingbroke: “Je conclus que tout homme sensé, tout homme de bien, doit avoir la secte chrétienne en horreur. Le grand nom de théiste, qu’on ne révère pas assez, est le seul nom qu’on doive prendre” (26:298). For examples of Voltaire’s defense of theism, see Histoire de Jenni (21:523-76), and four articles in the Dictionnaire philosophique: “Athée,” and “Athéisme” (17:453-76); “Théisme,” and “Théiste” (20:505-8).

See chapter 5 of Gay for a discussion of this issue.

Schwarzbach makes another parallel that is perhaps not as felicitous as he intended: “Même s’ils refusent de l’avouer, les Juifs doivent à Voltaire, malgré toutes ses erreurs grotesques, l’invention de leur histoire et la découverte de leur Bible; de même Christophe Colombe avait découvert mais profondément méconnu un nouveau monde, évidemment déjà bien connu de ses autochtones” (87). The “autochtones” of the New World probably had similar feelings about being discovered by Europeans as the Jews had about Voltaire discovering their Bible.

In keeping with his method of classification, Voltaire also detected a race-based hierarchy of languages:

Partout on a trouvé des idiomes formés, par lesquels les plus sauvages exprimaient le petit nombre de leurs idées: c’est encore un instinct des hommes de marquer leurs besoins par des articulations. De là sont formées nécessairement tant de langues différentes, plus ou moins abondantes, selon qu’on ait plus ou moins de connaissances. Ainsi la langue des Mexicains était plus formée que celle des Iroquois, comme la nôtre est plus régulière et plus abondante que celle des Samoyèdes. (Essai sur les mœurs, 12:387).
Ironically, Voltaire also produced a short text on albinos that pointedly satirized racial prejudices: “mais si nous pensons valoir beaucoup mieux qu’eux, nous nous trompons assez lourdement” ("Relation touchant un maure blanc amené d’Afrique à Paris en 1744," 23:191).

See de Gain concerning Voltaire’s use of Las Casas.

The *Essai sur les mœurs* includes a strong condemnation of slavery that recalls the well-known encounter with a mutilated slave in chapter 19 of *Candide*: “Nous leur disons qu’ils sont hommes comme nous, qu’ils sont rachetés du sang d’un Dieu mort pour eux, et ensuite on les fait travailler comme des bêtes de somme: on les nourrit plus mal; s’ils veulent s’enfuir, on leur coupe une jambe, et on leur fait tourner à bras l’arbre des moulin à sucre, lorsqu’on leur a donné une jambe de bois. Après cela nous osons parler du droit des gens!” (12:417). See Davies concerning Voltaire’s ambiguous representation of colonization.

See Montaigne’s *Essais*, “Des sauvages” (1, 31) and “Des coches” (3, 6).

Voltaire also uses human sacrifices, as practiced by the Aztecs, in order to highlight the Inquisition as an example of European barbarity: “On reprochait à Montezuma d’immoler des captifs à ses dieux: qu’aurait-il dit s’il avait vu un *autodafé*?” (*Essai sur les mœurs*, 12:351).

Chapter 3. The European Spirit of Germaine de Staël

To avoid repetition, I will generally drop the *particule*. For descriptions of Staël’s family background, see chapter 1 of Ghislain de Diesbach’s biography, and chapter 1 of Balayé 1979.

The issue of French citizenship was not fully formulated until the Revolution. Necker was not the only foreigner to serve as a French government minister in the eighteenth century. During the Regency (1715-1723), John Law, as *Contrôleur Général des Finances*, unsuccessfully attempted to modernize the French monetary system.
Although born and raised in Paris, Staël was often regarded with suspicion as a foreigner during the later phases of the Revolution. She could, and at various times did, lay claim to French, Swiss, and Swedish citizenship. In a letter to the French Justice Minister (9 Jan. 1797), for instance, she argued for her rights as a French citizen, or, if she could not have this status recognized, as a foreigner born in France (Correspondance, 4:25-8). Ironically, in its early phase, the Revolution would give a very expansive definition to the new form of French nationality, granting citizenship, and thus access to elective office, to foreigners such as Thomas Paine and Jeremy Bentham. Benjamin Constant, for his part, would have to wait until Napoleon’s coup d’état in 1799 to gain access to his first position in a French legislative body, the Tribunat.

3 As Staël wrote in the first part of her Considérations sur la Révolution française, several chapters of which are devoted to an impassioned defense of her father’s policies: “Etranger et protestant, il était tout à fait hors de la ligne des choix ordinaires; mais il avait montré une si grande habileté en matière de finances” (85). The voluminous writings of Necker have been summarized and commented by Grange. For a critique of Staël’s defense of Necker’s policies, see Gwynne (203-10).

4 Whenever possible, I have used recent critical editions of Staël’s works. References from the 3-volume compact edition of her Œuvres complètes will be identified by OC. Quotes from the novels will be identified, in accordance with the established usage among Staël scholars, by part and letter (Delphine), or by book and chapter (Corinne).

5 For discussions of the role and the myth of Jacques Necker within Staël’s writings, see “La Statue intérieure” (Balayé 1994, 25-45), and chapter 1 of Gutwirth.

6 See Hannin regarding Suzanne Necker’s career, which was largely thwarted by her husband, who disapproved of female writers.

7 It was during a dinner party for a group of philosophes, hosted by Mme Necker, that the decision to commission a statue of Voltaire had been made in 1770. See Pomeau (1988-94, 4:425-9) in this regard.
See Gutwirth (84-93) for some examples of how other women writers fared during the Revolutionary period.

For instance, see Kramer (143-54) regarding the relatively little known friendship between Staël and Lafayette. For a discussion of Staël’s often uneasy friendship with Byron, see Forsberg (47-55).

The Société des études staëliennes, has greatly contributed to the renewal of critical analysis of Staël’s work. Founded in 1929 by a descendant of Staël, the Comtesse Jean de Pange, it publishes the Cahiers Staëliens and organizes the Colloque de Coppet. Simone Balayé, the dean of Staël studies, is the current president. As Pierre Dubé’s bibliography indicates (18-26), the number of publications devoted to Staël’s work has vastly increased over the past two decades.

The most influential books in this regard have been Gutwirth’s Madame de Staël, Novelist and the collection of articles she co-edited with Goldberger and Szmurlo, Germaine de Staël. Crossing the Borders. In an indication of the renewed recognition of Staël’s literary and political importance, the fourth volume of Histoire des femmes en Occident (Fraisse and Perot, eds.), devoted to the nineteenth century, features an excerpt from De la littérature (549-53), one of two literary “Paroles de femmes” that concludes the volume.

For discussions of French critical reactions to Staël’s novels at the time of their publication, see “Delphine et la presse sous le Consulat” and “Corinne et la presse parisienne de 1807” (Balayé 1994, 231-63). These are two of Balayé’s articles on Staël that have been collected in a volume published in 1994: Madame de Staël: écrire, lutter, vivre. Quotes from the articles in this book are identified here by title and page number.

As Carla Hesse has shown, the number of women who wrote and published increased substantially after the Revolution.

For extended analyses of Emilie du Châtelet’s work and social role, see Badinter, and Ehrmann.

An telling personal anecdote on Napoleon’s attitude towards women is found in Le Mémorial de Sainte-Hélène. When asked by Staël, during a reception in his honor,
who was "à ses yeux la première femme du monde," Napoleon responded: "celle qui a fait le plus d’enfants" (2:188). For an account of the context of this abrupt rhetorical exchange, see Diesbach (201-3).

16 “The social sphere—that of interpersonal relationships—is the one in which women dominate, even though its edicts must conform to the masculine code. It is this code that is the boundary of Delphine: it decrees that there be no conceivable femininity other than that which accords preeminence to men” (Gutwirth, 108).

17 See Gengembre and Goldzink for a discussion of the role of prevailing opinion in Corinne. See “Destins de femmes dans Delphine” (Balayé 1994, 61-76) concerning the pessimistic Staëlian view of the oppressive effects of imposed gender roles.

18 For a description of Staël’s political activities during the Revolutionary period, see Gwynne (13-48).

19 Some of these topoi are encapsulated in the second of Rousseau’s four “Lettres à Malesherbes” (Jan. 1762), where he provides this recollection of the momentous “inspiration subite” that led to the publication of his first Discours:

tout à coup je me sens l’esprit ébloui de mille lumières, des foules d’idées vives s’y présentèrent à la fois avec une force et une confusion qui me jeta dans un trouble inexprimable; je sens ma tête prise par un étourdissement semblable à l’ivresse. Une violente palpitation m’oppresse, soulève ma poitrine; ne pouvant plus respirer en marchant, je me laisse tomber sous un des arbres de l’avenue, et j’y passe une demi-heure dans une telle agitation qu’en me relevant j’aperçus tout le devant de ma veste mouillé de mes larmes sans avoir senti que j’en répandais. (1:1135)

20 Staël also rejected Rousseau’s primitivism, which she saw as paradoxical: “Il est remarquable qu’un des hommes les plus sensibles et les plus distingués par ses connaissances et son génie ait voulu réduire l’esprit et le cœur humain à un état presque semblable à l’abrutissement” (Lettres sur Rousseau, OC 1:3). However, as May argues, Staël found in Rousseau the figure of “the victim and the outcast” (310), with which she identified, as a woman who did not conform to the social dictates of her time. Letzer draws an interesting contrast between Staël’s approach to the “cult” of Rousseau and the
more critical attitude of Isabelle de Charrière. See also Diamond, chapter 3 of Hogsett, and Poulet for discussions of Staël’s ambivalent interpretations of Rousseau’s legacy.

In a letter to Goethe (29 April 1800), Staël wrote: “La lecture de Werther a fait époque dans ma vie comme un événement personnel, et ce livre, joint à la Nouvelle Héloïse, sont les deux chefs-d’œuvre de la littérature selon moi” (Correspondance, 4:260). The main link between Delphine and Laclos’s novel is in the parallel between the characters of Mme de Vernon and the Marquise de Merteuil.

Gutwirth’s comment on one of Staël’s early works of fiction could also apply to Delphine and Corinne: “The genuine dilemma we sense being posed is that of the intelligent but ill-guided, emotionally vulnerable young woman who is made to pay for her passing weakness through the perfidy or the unbendingness of men she should have been able to trust” (58). See chapter 2 of Gutwirth for a discussion of Staël’s early fictional texts.

For Staël, the rigid class structure of pre-Revolutionary France determined social relations and esthetic models, which privileged such values as “la grâce, le goût et la gaieté,” and which led into a somewhat superficial and frivolous esprit:

Non seulement la grâce et le goût servaient en France aux intérêts les plus grands, mais l’une et l’autre préservaient du malheur le plus redouté, du ridicule. Le ridicule est, à beaucoup d’égards, une puissance aristocratique: plus il y a de rangs dans la société, plus il existe de rapports convenus entre ces rangs, et plus l’on est obligé de les connaître et de les respecter. [...] La classe qui dominait en France sur la nation, était exercée à saisir les nuances les plus fines; et comme le ridicule la frappait avant tout, ce qu’il fallait éviter avant tout, c’était le ridicule. (De la littérature, 2:267)

See for instance the exchange between Delphine and Léonce over the latter’s somewhat flippant attitude, strictly based on aristocratic honor, over the possibility of civil war in France (3, 22 and 3, 23).

Within her “Nord/Midi” European dichotomy, Staël posited Protestant nations as more favorable than their Catholic counterparts to the development of the principles of the Enlightenment. In Des circonstances actuelles (222-41), she had advocated the
establishment of Protestantism as the official religion of the French Republic. See chapter 4 of Isbell 1994 concerning the evolution of Staël’s religious thought.

26 Staël’s commendatory portrayal of Constant, through the character of Lebensei, stands in contrast with Constant’s less flattering depictions of her in his novels, Adolphe and Cécile (1957, 5-83 and 137-85, respectively). See “Madame de Staël et Madame de Malbée dans Cécile de Benjamin Constant” (Balayé 1994, 279-90) and Didier in this regard.

27 Staël and her husband, the Baron of Staël-Holstein, were legally separated in 1800 (he died two years later), but they had been living apart from several years. Her conjugal situation was no doubt a factor in her inclusion of a letter advocating the legalization of divorce in Delphine (4, 17). See chapter two of Diesbach concerning the conditions of Staël’s marriage.

28 See Nietzsche’s Beyond Good and Evil (163-5) for a German example of misogynistic reactions to Staël’s work. See Balayé 1987 for a review of more recent instances of misogynistic articles within the French press.

29 Staël’s warnings to women who would seek public recognition through literary or political careers are most famously encapsulated in De l’Allemagne: “la gloire elle-même ne saurait être pour une femme qu’un deuil éclatant du bonheur” (2:218). See Kristeva for a discussion of this famous Staël’s dictum.

30 See “Le Système critique de Madame de Staël: théorie et sensibilité” (Balayé 1994, 307-20) in this regard.

31 See Hogsett (75-82) concerning Staël’s vision of the historical development of Europe and the associated notion of perfectibilité. See Behler for a discussion of the role of perfectibility in the political analysis of the Revolution by Staël and Constant.

32 “Le fanatisme, à diverses époques, étouffa les sentiments de douceur qu’inspirait la religion chrétienne; mais c’est l’esprit général de cette religion que je devais examiner; et de nos jours, dans les pays où la réformation est établie, on peut encore remarquer combien est salutaire l’influence de l’évangile sur la morale” (De la littérature, 1:142).
However, Staël clearly rejected Voltairean irony, which she perceived not as social criticism, but as a mockery of human suffering: “Si la constitution de France est libre, et si ses institutions sont philosophiques, les plaisanteries sur le gouvernement n’ayant plus d’utilité, n’auront plus d’intérêt. Celles mêmes qui ont pour but, comme dans Candide, de se moquer de l’espèce humaine, ne conviennent point sous plusieurs rapports dans un gouvernement républicain” (De la littérature, 2:345). Although she admired Voltaire’s tragedies, Staël also unjustly characterized Candide in a similar way in De l’Allemagne: “il semble écrit par un être d’une autre nature que nous, indifférent à notre sort, content de nos souffrances et riant comme un démon, ou comme un singe, des misères de cette espèce humaine avec laquelle il n’a rien de commun” (2:115). See chapter 3 of Billaz for a detailed analysis of Voltaire’s influence on Staël and the Coppet group.

As Karyna Szmurlo has detailed, Staël posited individual languages, in an illustration of what would today be called the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, as the discursive organizational framework of the “spirit” of their respective national groups: “Le réseau de grammaire montre l’esprit du peuple qui l’a fait naître, indépendamment de l’élite, indépendamment du niveau intellectuel” (177).

However, in an indication that she was more comfortable with “le Nord” as a literary concept than as an actual region or climate, Staël reacted in a less favorable way in her Carnets de voyage, when, during her 1803-04 trip through Germany, she encountered a particularly harsh winter:

Non, je ne vivrai jamais dans le Nord; mon âme n’a plus assez de jeunesse pour se passer de soleil. Si l’on est mécontent des hommes, les regards ne rencontrent dans la campagne que des brouillards ténébreux. Où trouver dans un tel pays l’image de l’espérance? Le génie poétique, quand il existe, doit y avoir sans doute plus de profondeur, de sensibilité, d’énergie; il s’élève d’autant plus haut qu’il trouve tout en lui-même; mais comment porter la vie réelle lorsque rien autour de soi ne l’embellit, et qu’on ne peut trouver dans le spectacle d’une nature riante les sensations involontaires qui suspendent en nous jusqu’au pouvoir de réfléchir? (Balayé 1971, 54)

Seeking to delegitimize—mainly through sustained sarcasm and unsubstantiated innuendo—her standing as the principal intellectual opponent of the
Empire, Henri Guillemin heaped scorn on Staël for her early attempts to curry favor with Napoleon Bonaparte, who had not yet made clear his imperial ambitions (Guillemin’s 1966 polemic, timed to coincide with the bicentennial of Staël’s birth, is simply an expanded version of his 1959 book). A more balanced appraisal of Staël’s dealings with Napoleon’s regime is offered by Michael Polowetzky, who contrasts her political motives with those who supported the regime out of self-interest: “Mme de Staël was prepared to join or later to reconcile herself with Napoleon out of much higher motives. But at the same time, she did not intend to play a passive role as these others were. Because of this situation, an alliance between these two powerful personalities was impossible from the beginning” (38). The evolution of Staël’s attitude towards Napoleon can be compared to Ludwig van Beethoven’s early enthusiasm for, followed by bitter disappointment with, the man who crowned himself Emperor in 1804 (which led to the famous anecdote of the name “Bonaparte” being crossed out from the manuscript of the Third Symphony).

37 During the Revolution, the word “nation,” which had in the eighteenth century simply designated the inhabitants of a country, came to refer to a collective political entity of citizens. The term “nationalism,” which would dominate political thought in the nineteenth century, appeared shortly afterward.

38 See Blaeschke for a discussion of Staël’s articulation of political and literary freedom. For an overview of the different forms of resistance by European intellectuals to the cultural uniformity of the Empire, see Broers (1996a, 105-25). In De l’Allemagne, Staël pointed to the cultivation of national pride as a necessary aspect of political independence:

En littérature, comme en politique, les Allemands ont trop de considération pour les étrangers et pas assez de préjugés nationaux. C’est une qualité dans les individus que l’abnégation de soi-même et l’estime des autres; mais le patriotisme des nations doit être égoïste. La fierté des Anglais sert puissamment à leur existence politique; la bonne opinion que les Français ont d’eux-mêmes a toujours contribué à leur ascendant sur l’Europe; le noble orgueil des Espagnols les a rendus jadis les souverains d’une portion du monde. (1:56)
In the chapter of Considérations entitled “De la première guerre entre la France et l’Europe” (part 3, chapter 5), Staël blames both the intrusions of European monarchs and the extremism of French Jacobins for starting the war: “une chose est incontestable; c’est que la convention de Pillnitz a commencé la longue guerre européenne. Or les Jacobins désiraient cette guerre aussi vivement que les émigrés: car les uns et les autres croyaient qu’une crise quelconque pourrait seule amener les chances dont ils avaient besoin pour triompher” (269). Staël helped to obtain the position of Minister of War for her lover, Louis de Narbonne (from Dec. 1791 to March 1792). She praises his patriotism and defends him against the suspicion of transnational class solidarity: “Grand seigneur, homme d’esprit, courtisan et philosophe, ce qui dominait dans son âme, c’était l’honneur militaire, et la bravoure française. S’opposer aux étrangers dans quelque circonstance que ce fût, lui paraissait toujours le devoir d’un citoyen et d’un gentilhomme” (269). See Isbell 1997 for a discussion of Staël’s influence during Narbonne’s brief stint as a French government minister.

Staël recommended for France the British model of a limited monarchy with a parliamentary upper house patterned after the House of Lords. She therefore decried the elimination of all aristocratic titles by the Constituent Assembly in June 1790: “il serait fort à désirer que les titres tels qu’ils existaient, n’eussent été supprimés qu’en étant remplacés par la pairie et par les distinctions qui émanent d’elle” (Considérations, 221). In Dix Années d’exil, she also sought to balance hereditary and popular representation: “Il faut dans une monarchie et peut-être même dans une république des magistrats héréditaires, des sages à vie, toute une aristocratie conservatrice, mais une partie du gouvernement, celle qui consent les impôts, doit émaner directement de la nation” (77). While Staël analyzed the British system in terms of political and economic liberalism, she was largely oblivious to the social issues of her day. In particular, she does not seem to have grasped the importance of the industrial revolution during her stay in England. See Gwynne (254-61) for a discussion of Great Britain as Staël’s political model.

See Diesbach (471-6) in this regard. See Dix Années d’exil (196-209) for Staël’s account of this period of isolation from her friends and associates.
A detailed chronology of that dangerous trip across Europe, accomplished while Napoleon was invading Russia, is found in *Dix années d'exil* (535-44). See Palme concerning Staël's stay in Sweden.

Tocqueville seems to have foreseen the Cold War in *De la démocratie en Amérique* (1835):

> Il y a aujourd'hui sur la terre deux grands peuples qui, partis de points différents, semblent s'avancer vers le même but: ce sont les Russes et les Anglo-Américains. [...] L'Américain lutte contre les obstacles que lui oppose la nature; le Russe est aux prises avec les hommes. [...] Pour atteindre son but, le premier s'en repose sur l'intérêt personnel, et laisse agir, sans les diriger, la force et la raison des individus. Le second concentre en quelque sorte dans un homme toute la puissance de la société. L'un a pour principal moyen d'action la liberté; l'autre, la servitude. Leur point de départ est différent, leurs voies sont diverses: néanmoins, chacun d'eux semble appelé par un dessein secret de la Providence à tenir un jour dans ses mains les destinées de la moitié du monde. (1:597-8)

Staël, who coined the term “vulgarité” (*De la littérature*, 1:8), also displayed her class-based prejudice in several texts. In August 1792, Narbonne was forced into hiding at Staël’s house (that is, the residence of the Swedish ambassador). Staël commented on the “commissaires de la classe la plus subalterne” who wanted to search her house for the fugitive: “Les gens du peuple sont prenables tout de suite ou jamais: il n'y a presque point de gradations ni dans leurs sentiments, ni dans leurs idées” (*Considerations*, 281-2).

"*Delphine* and Corinne had a success and a popularity that were, simply, immense. *Corinne* alone was published in more than forty editions between 1807 and 1872” (Gutwirth, 285). See chapter 8 of Gutwirth regarding Staël’s literary reputation since her death. As Vallois points out, the novel’s success was not limited to France, nor was it apolitical: “*Corinne ou l'Italie* jouira d’un succès d’opposition français mais surtout européen. On ne compte pas moins de 14 éditions et contrefaçons en France, en Angleterre, en Suisse et en Allemagne entre 1807 et 1810” (110).

See Chouillet for an analysis of Staël’s partial reappraisal of the Nord/Midi opposition, with Italy as the revalorized source of “l’enthousiasme comme expérience et
comme idéal de vie” (23). See Deguise for the position of Greece within the Staëllian north-south distinction.

47 Staël often used the theme of the superiority of British political institutions, as had Voltaire, in order to highlight corresponding French shortcomings:

L’esprit public gouvernait l’Angleterre; les hasards et les intrigues les plus imprévus et les plus misérables disposaient du sort de la France. Cependant Voltaire, Montesquieu, Rousseau, Buffon, des penseurs profonds, des esprits supérieurs, faisaient partie de cette nation ainsi gouvernée, et comment les Français n’auraient-ils pas envié l’Angleterre, puisqu’ils pouvaient se dire avec raison que c’était à ses institutions politiques surtout qu’elle devait ses avantages? (Considerations, 79)

48 Upon his return to England after a one-year stay in Italy, Oswald finds confirmation of his initial impression, even though he had been partly swayed by Corinne’s arguments:

Dès qu’il eut mis le pied sur la terre d’Angleterre, il fut frappé de l’ordre et de l’aisance, de la richesse et de l’industrie qui s’offraient à ses regards; les penchants, les habitudes, les goûts nés avec lui, se réveillèrent avec plus de force que jamais. Dans ce pays, où les hommes ont tant de dignité et les femmes tant de modestie, où le bonheur domestique est le lien du bonheur public, Oswald pensait à l’Italie pour la plaindre. Il lui semblait que dans sa patrie la raison humaine était partout noblement empreinte, tandis qu’en Italie les institutions et l’état social rappelaient, à beaucoup d’égards, que la confusion, la faiblesse et l’ignorance. (16, 4)

49 Vallois (109-13) has analyzed the identification established between the main character and her native land: “cet objet hybride et énigmatique d’une Femme-Pays” (113). During her triumph, Corinne’s poetic improvisation is on the theme: “la gloire et le bonheur de l’Italie” (2, 3). Through her gift for spontaneous poetic improvisation, Corinne is likened, as Vallois has detailed, to a divinely inspired prophetess or Sybil.

50 As is stressed throughout Corinne, the character of Oswald is shaped by rigorous English norms of conduct:

Lord Nelvil avait sans doute tout l’esprit nécessaire pour admirer l’imagination et le génie; mais il croyait que les relations de la vie sociale devaient l’emporter sur tout, et que la première destination des femmes, et même des hommes, n’était pas l’exercice des facultés intellectuelles, mais l’accomplissement des devoirs particuliers à chacun. […] Les mœurs d’Angleterre, les habitudes et
les opinions d'un pays où l'on se trouve si bien du respect le plus scrupuleux pour les devoirs comme pour les lois, le retenaient dans des liens assez étroits à beaucoup d'égards. (13, 3)

51 See Corinne's letter to Oswald (6, 3), responding to his characterization of Italians as lacking in virility. See Vallois (133-50) and Gutwirth (209-15) for discussions of the feminized representation of Italy in Corinne. Staël was not alone in her characterization of Italy as essentially feminized. As is discussed in chapter 5, Maurice Barrès also developed a discourse of feminization in his writings on Italy, albeit for far different esthetic and political purposes.

52 For discussions of the Staëlian representations of various Italian regions and cities in Corinne, see "Corinne et la ville italienne" (Balayé 1994, 91-109) and Gutwirth (183-90).

53 See Polowitzky (131-8) regarding the circumstances under which De l'Allemagne was banned.

54 Staël's "portrait d'Attila" has often been described by critics as an unflattering allegorical reference to Napoleon: "Un seul homme multiplié par ceux qui lui obéissent remplit d'épouvante l'Asie et l'Europe. Quelle image gigantesque de la volonté absolue ce spectacle n'offre-t-il pas?" (1:373). For analyses of the veiled attacks on Napoleon and his militarized regime in De l'Allemagne, see "Pour une lecture politique de De l'Allemagne" (Balayé 1994, 213-29) and Isbell (1994, 90-107).

55 See chapter 1 of Isbell 1994 and chapter 5 of Solovieff in this regard.

56 Chapter 1 of Solovieff is devoted to brief analyses of the main German authors discussed by Staël. A longer analysis of Staël's presentation of Goethe's Faust is found in Isbell (1994, 70-90). Staël's presentations of German authors were enormously influential. As Nash points out, "De l'Allemagne determined what came to be considered in France the canon of German Romantic literature" (1993, 84).

57 Staël's presentation of the Schlegel brothers' work is found in part 2, chapter 31 of De l'Allemagne. See chapter 6 of Solovieff regarding the intellectual and personal links between Staël and A.W. Schlegel. For a detailed account of Staël's 1803-04 stay in Germany, see chapter 8 of Diesbach.
As Isbell writes: "France, England, Italy, and America all owe the modern term Romantic to De l'Allemagne" (1994, 132). See chapter 4 of Solovieff for a detailed analysis of Staël’s treatment of the thematics of German Romanticism. See Mueller-Vollmer regarding the influence of Staël’s work in the context of the elaboration of a specifically American cultural and literary identity.

See Balayé (1979, 177-81) and Macherey 1987 concerning the importance of the role played by German philosophy within the Staëlian rhetorical construct of Germany. For an analysis of Staël’s highly personal treatment and presentation of Kant’s thought, see Isbell (1994, 131-41).

In a fiery extension of the Enlightenment metaphor, Staël establishes among French philosophes a distinction between British-influenced liberal thinkers of the first half of the eighteenth century (who saw a role for religion) and the atheistic materialists of the second half (whom she sees as having provided the intellectual stimulus for the excesses of the Revolutionary period): “Il me semble qu’on pourrait marquer dans le dix-huitième siècle, en France, deux époques parfaitement distinctes, celle dans laquelle l’influence de l’Angleterre s’est fait sentir, et celle où les esprits se sont précipités dans la destruction: alors les lumières se sont changées en incendie, et la philosophie, magicienne irritée, a consumé le palais où elle avait étalé ses prodiges” (De l’Allemagne, 2:108)

“C’est ainsi que Mme de Staël a été conduite à présenter Kant comme un philosophe de l’enthousiasme, image surprenante qu’elle a réussi à imposer en France, jusqu’à ce que la traduction des textes fondamentaux de celui-ci, après 1830, aient donné les moyens de la rectifier” (Macherey 1987, 33).

Staël’s affirmation of the need for national independence is not linked to a uniform prescription concerning the type of political association. In Considérations sur la Révolution française, she does not advocate German political centralism along the lines of the French model: “L’Allemagne a bien assez de forces à présent pour maintenir son indépendance, tout en conservant ses formes fédératives” (68). However, she sees Italian unity as useful, given its history: “Le despotisme ne s’est établi chez les Italiens
que par la division; ils sont, à cet égard, dans une situation très différente de celle de l’Allemagne. Le sentiment patriotique en Italie doit faire désirer la réunion” (68).

63 Projecting her long-standing north/south dichotomy within Germany, Staël saw the northern part of the country as more developed and more inclined towards thoughtful deliberation, due to the influence of the colder climate. Meanwhile, the more temperate southern part had a lesser degree of the sort of climatic stimulus that would encourage intellectual activity: “L’Allemagne méridionale, tempérée sous tous les rapports, se maintient dans un état de bien-être monotone, singulièrement nuisible à l’activité des affaires comme à celle de la pensée” (1:76).

64 See Réau (388-90) for a depiction of Staël as an irresponsible literary Germanophile, applauding the defeat of Napoleon and France.

65 Savary’s letter is also found in Dix Années d’exil (200-1). The successor to the notorious Joseph Fouché as Napoleon’s Minister of Police, Savary played a role during Victor Hugo’s childhood, by having his mother’s lover, Victor de Lahorie (who was also Victor’s godfather), arrested in 1810. See Robb (28-9) in this regard.

66 One of the great ironies of French literary history, in light of the officially sanctioned neoclassicism of the Empire, is the transformation of the historical figure of Napoleon Bonaparte into a tragic icon of Romanticism after his loss of power and death in forced exile, a literary and political process in which Stendhal (along with Victor Hugo and other writers) was a major participant. For discussions of Stendhal’s bitter criticism of Staël over her appraisal of Napoleon’s regime, see Pellegrini 1966 and Félix-Faure. In Les Misérables, the character of Marius, whose evolution as a young man parallels that of Hugo, is transformed into an ardent admirer of Napoleon at the same time as he becomes reconciled with the memory of his dead father, a former officer in the imperial army: “Napoléon devint pour [Marius] l’homme-people comme Jésus est l’homme-Dieu” (2:502). Hugo’s association of Napoleon with Jesus is less unlikely than it would appear. See Bowman in this regard.

67 A comprehensive history of the development of the Coppet group and its influence remains to be written. For a brief overview, see “Le Groupe de Coppet:
conscience d'une mission commune” (Balayé 1994, 321-42). See Balayé and Amend for an example of a common bibliography for the members of the Coppet group. For a list of the regular and occasional visitors to Staël’s Swiss home, see Jasinski.

68 For discussions of some of the individual variations on these themes, see Calame, Fink, Rosset, and Tilkin.

69 See Goldberger, and part 3 of Kadish and Massardier-Kenney, for discussions of the issues linked to translating Staël’s work into English.

70 See chapter 8 of Manent for an analysis of Benjamin Constant as a theoretician of liberalism. See also chapter 3 of Broers 1996b in this regard.

71 Mindful of the volatile social and political context in 1830, Hugo was quoting himself. The famous phrase linking romanticism and liberalism, or poetic renewal and political transformation, had been written a few weeks earlier for a preface to a recently deceased author’s collection of poems (“Sur M. Dovalle,” 12:173-6).

Chapter 4. Victor Hugo’s European Utopia

1 All quotes from the works of Victor Hugo are taken from the 1985-90 Œuvres complètes edition published by Robert Laffont (“Bouquins” collection). The volumes will be numbered in this chapter as follows: 1-3 (Romans I-III); 4-7 (Poésie I-IV); 8-9 (Théâtre I-II); 10 (Politique); 11 (Histoire); 12 (Critique); 13 (Voyages); 14 (Chantiers); 15 (Océan). A last volume (Index), announced as forthcoming, was unfortunately never published.

2 Other smaller revolutionary moments include the failed insurrection of 1832, which is depicted in parts 4 and 5 of Les Misérables.

3 Hugo quickly moved beyond Musset’s famous characterization of the Romantic generation, in chapter 2 of his 1836 novel, La Confession d’un enfant du siècle, as afflicted with lingering historical trauma: “Toute la maladie du siècle présent vient de deux causes; le peuple qui a passé par 93 et par 1814 porte au cœur deux blessures. Tout
ce qui était n'est plus; tout ce qui sera n'est pas encore. Ne cherchez pas ailleurs le secret
de nos maux" (559).

4 In June 1848, Hugo, the visionary poet who heralded the people’s messianic role, was actively involved, during assaults against the barricades, in the ruthless suppression of the Parisian workers’ revolt. Robb (273-8) presents Hugo as hoping for death as a way of resolving these contradictions. Hugo did call for clemency after the end of the fighting, as he would after the Commune. In Choses vues, he contrasted “le peuple” with “la société,” and depicted both as barbaric during the fighting: “Rien n’est plus glaçant et plus sombre. C’est une chose hideuse que cet héroïsme de l’abjection où éclate tout ce que la faiblesse contient de force; que cette civilisation attaquée par le cynisme et se défendant par la barbarie. D’un côté le désespoir du peuple, de l’autre le désespoir de la société” (11:1053).

5 An example of the Romantic correspondence between the human and divine realms, with the poet as the privileged intermediary between the two, this poem announces the later shift in Hugo’s work toward an exaltation of the poet as the herald of historical finality:

Le poète en des jours impies
Vient préparer des jours meilleurs,
Il est l’homme des utopies;
Les pieds ici, les yeux ailleurs.
C’est lui qui sur toutes les têtes,
En tout temps, pareil aux prophètes,
Dans sa main, où tout peut tenir,
Doit, qu’on l’insulte ou qu’on le loue,
Comme une torche qu’il secoue,
Faire flamboyer l’avenir! (4:923)

6 As had Voltaire, Hugo called for the abolition of monasteries in Europe:

En tant qu’institution et que mode de formation pour l’homme, les monastères, bons au dixième siècle, discutables au quinzième, sont détestables au dix-neuvième. La lèpre monacale a presque rongé jusqu’au squelette deux admirables nations, l’Italie et l’Espagne, l’une la lumière, l’autre la splendeur de l’Europe pendant des siècles, et, à l’époque où nous sommes, ces deux illustres peuples ne commencent à guérir que grâce à la saine et vigoureuse hygiène de 1789. (Les Misérables, 2:404)
See Laforgue for a comparison of the speeches of the conventionnel and Enjolras in Les Misérables as complementary expressions of revolutionary myths.

After his mother’s death, Hugo, the former ultra-royalist, would mark his gradual reconciliation with his father—and his new ideological distance from the increasingly conservative Restoration monarchy—by taking the Noblesse d’Empire title which the general had acquired through his service to Napoleon’s regime. This belated gesture of filial loyalty and comparatively liberal political transformation is echoed in Les Misérables when the character of Marius becomes an admirer of Napoleon, and starts calling himself a Baron, out of newfound respect for his estranged, deceased father (2:499-503).

For accounts of Hugo’s childhood trips abroad, see chapters 2 and 3 of Robb. Adèle Hugo’s famous book, Victor Hugo raconté, is a useful source, but obviously influenced by her husband’s ongoing elaboration of his own mythology. As recounted by Robb, Hugo’s father displayed a great deal of zeal and ingenuity in his efforts to wipe out resistance to French occupation: “A local specialty adopted by the General consisted of creating a display of severed heads to set an example. His personal innovation was to arrange the heads over church doors” (31).

In June 1878, Hugo suffered a stroke that largely terminated his career as a creative writer, and especially as a poet—a fact which was kept hidden from the reading public by the continued publication of works he had previously written. In effect, some of Hugo’s “posthumous” works were published while he was still alive, just as his secular canonization into a patron saint of the Third Republic occurred in part before his death in 1885.

1848 was of course a year of revolutions throughout Europe. As was the case in France, all of them were ultimately defeated. The events of June 1848 had an important effect on the development of Marxist theory. In The Class Struggles in France, 1848-1850, Marx paid a backhanded compliment to Hugo’s oratory at the National Assembly: “the brilliant tirades of an old ‘louisphillipic’ notability, Monsieur Victor Hugo” (196).
Ironically, Voltaire represented the embodiment of what the young ultra-royalist despised: “Il fallait tout le venin de Voltaire pour mettre cette fange en ébullition; aussi doit-on imputer à cet infortuné une grande partie des choses monstrueuses de la révolution” (“Sur Voltaire,” Littérature et philosophies mêlées, 12:145). As in the case of Napoleon, Hugo’s evaluation of Voltaire’s literary and political legacy would later be radically transformed. For a discussion of the origins of Gavroche’s song in Les Misérables (2:960-1), see Vercruysse 1963.

Examples of Hugo’s graphic output, with corresponding references to Hugo’s texts, are found in Georgel. See also the collection of articles edited by Blondel and Georgel in this regard.

See Dédéyan (1:117-39) and Robb (118-22) regarding the profound influence of the author of Smarra ou les démons de la nuit (1821) on Hugo’s early works. An overview of the short-lived “frenetic” literary movement is found in the collection of texts edited by Steinmetz.

While he campaigned for the abolition of slavery, Hugo exhibited traces of traditional racial prejudice. See Aref (133-67) for a discussion of Hugo’s generally paternalistic representation of Africans in Bug-Jargal.

In its depiction of the radical alienation of a condemned man, who is clinically observing his own incarceration, Le Dernier Jour d’un condamné can be compared to Albert Camus’s L’Etranger. As Brombert points out (34-5), Hugo’s reiterated critiques of the pernicious effects of the penal system prefigure Michel Foucault’s comprehensive analysis in Surveiller et punir (see 261-9 for Foucault’s references to Le Dernier Jour d’un condamné and Claude Gueux).

Hugo’s constant denunciations of prostitution as one of the worst results of poverty, as incarnated by the character of Fantine in Les Misérables, did not prevent him from regularly frequenting prostitutes in proletarian districts. As Robb puts it: “Prostitution was now one of Hugo’s major sources of information on the class of misérables” (260).
Hugo later served as more liberal reference for, and occasional contributor to, the short-lived journal *L'Europe littéraire* (1833-34). See chapter 6 of Palfrey in this regard. Heinrich Heine, who lived in France for much of his life, published part of his *De l'Allemagne*—a belated reply to Staël’s famous book—in *L’Europe littéraire* (see Dédéyan, 2:277).

From “Réponse à un acte d'accusation” (*Les Contemplations*, 5:263-8):

Et sur l’Académie, aïeule et douairière,
Cachant sous ses jupons les tropes effarés,
Et sur les bataillons d’alexandrins carrés,
Je fis souffler un vent révolutionnaire.
Je mis un bonnet rouge au vieux dictionnaire.
Plus de mot sénateur! plus de mot roturier!
Je fis une tempête au fond de l’écritier,
Et je mêlai, parmi les ombres débordées,
Au peuple noir des mots l’essaim blanc des idées; (5:265)

“[La muse moderne] sentira que tout dans la création n’est pas humainement beau, que le laid y existe à côté du beau, le difforme près du gracieux, le grotesque au revers du sublime, le mal avec le bien, l’ombre avec la lumière” (*Préface de Cromwell*, 12:9).

In another chapter of *De l’Allemagne* whose influence is visible in Hugo’s work, “De l’art dramatique” (1:251-9), Staël made a similar point concerning classical French theater, which was in her view excessively bound by conventional rules, and thereby limited in terms of its potential audience:

Si l’on voulait risquer en France dans une tragédie, une innovation quelconque, aussitôt on s’écrieraient que c’est un mélodrame; mais n’importe-t-il pas de savoir pourquoi les mélodrames sont plaisirs à tant de gens? En Angleterre, toutes les classes sont également attirées par les pièces de Shakespeare. Nos plus belles tragédies en France n’intéressent pas le peuple; sous prétexte d’un goût trop pur et d’un sentiment trop délicat pour supporter de certaines émotions, on divise l’art en deux; les mauvaises pièces contiennent des situations touchantes mal exprimées, et les belles pièces peignent admirablement des situations souvent froides à force d’être dignes: nous possédons peu de tragédies qui puissent ébranler à la fois l’imagination des hommes de tous les rangs. (1:257-8)
In "Quelques Mots à un autre" (*Les Contemplations*, 5:290-4), Hugo presented himself as seeking to revitalize the French language and unshackle its poetic expression:

C'est horrible! oui, brigand, jacobin, malandrin,
J'ai disloqué ce grand niais d'alexandrin;
Les mots de qualité, les syllabes marquises,
Vivaient ensemble au fond de leurs grottes exquises,
Faisaient la bouche en cœur et ne parlaient qu'entre eux,
J'ai dit aux mots d'en bas: Manchots, boiteux, goitreux,
Redressez-vous! planez, et mêlez-vous, sans règles,
Dans la caverne immense et farouche des aigles! (5:292)

22 For a discussion of Bakhtinian theory as it applies to Hugo's plays, see Ubersfeld (461-506).

23 In *Les Misérables*, as Brombert writes: "The Valjean-Christ parallel is clearly indicated in the chapter entitled 'Une Tempête sous un crâne,' [2:174-87] which describes Valjean's great moral crisis culminating in the decision to turn himself in to save the falsely accused tramp. Valjean yields to the same 'mysterious power' that some two thousand years earlier had impelled another condemned man to 'march on,'" (98). There is a strong undercurrent of paternalism in Hugo's sentimentalist depictions of chaste, saintly heroes (Valjean, Gilliatt, Gauvain), who willingly accept the final sacrifice of their hopes and desires.

24 The year 1793 saw the worst of the Terror, and thus the perversion of the ideals of 1789 that Hugo exalted. Just as he had with Waterloo in *Les Misérables*, Hugo attempted to integrate "quatrevingt-treize," that symbol of bloody civil war and repression, into a wider meaning. However, as Sandy Petrey argues, Hugo's last novel in fact tends to subvert the interpretation of historical unfolding and finality which is found in much of his work, upholding instead a transhistorical moral and filial imperative: "The irrelevance of historical conflict to the final personal stories is matched by the general stasis of the civil war from the beginning to the end of the novel" (15).

25 This fascination, if not always admiration, is visible in such poems as "À la colonne" (*Les Chants du crépuscule*, 4:691-8) and "Lui" (*Les Orientales*, 4:533-6):

Tu domines notre âge; ange ou démon, qu’importe!

320
Ton aigle dans son vol, haletants, nous emporte.
L’œil même qui te fuit te retrouve partout.
Toujours dans nos tableaux tu jettes ta grande ombre;
Toujours Napoléon, éblouissant et sombre,
Sur le seuil du siècle est debout. (4:535)

27 The final defeat of the greatest “sabreur,” Napoleon, was for Hugo an exceptional turning point of history, that had been divinely preordained:

Il était temps que ce vaste homme tombât. [...] Napoléon avait été dénoncé dans l’infini, et sa chute était décidée. Il gênait Dieu.

Waterloo n’est point une bataille; c’est le changement de front de l’univers. (Les Misérables, 2:262)

28 The collective work of this multinational “dynasty” of inventors produced a decisive improvement in maritime transportation, the steamship, which would be central to Gilliatt’s epic quest in Les Travailleurs de la mer. In William Shakespeare, Hugo provided detailed examples of the sort of individuals he wanted to learn about in historical texts, all of whom were, instead of famous kings, unknown commoners who had made important inventions, innovations, and discoveries:

Comment s’appelait le marchand anglais qui le premier en 1612 est entré en Chine par le Nord, et l’ouvrier verrier qui le premier en 1663 a établi en France une manufacture de cristal, et le bourgeois qui a fait prévaloir aux états-généraux de Tours sous Charles VIII le fécond principe de la magistrature électorale, adroitement raturé depuis, et le pilote qui en 1405 a découvert les îles Canaries, et le luthier byzantin qui, au huitième siècle, a inventé l’orgue et donné à la musique sa plus grande voix, et le maçon campanien qui a inventé l’horloge en plaçant à Rome sur le temple de Quirinus le premier cadran solaire, et le pontonnier romain qui a inventé le pavage des villes par la construction de la voie Appienne l’an 312 avant l’ère chrétienne, et le charpentier égyptien qui a imaginé la queue d’aronde trouvée sous l’obélisque de Louqsor et l’une des clefs de l’architecture, et le gardeur de chèvres chaldéen qui a fondé l’astronomie par l’observation des signes du zodiaque, point de départ d’Anaximène, et le calfat corinthien qui, neuf ans avant la première olympiade, a calculé la puissance du triple levier et imaginé la trirème, et créé un remorqueur antérieur de deux mille six cents ans au bateau à vapeur, et le laboureur macédonien qui a découvert la première mine d’or dans le mont Pangée, (12:448)
See Brombert (56-60) for an insightful analysis of this chapter. In Quatrevingt-treize, the opposing political ideals espoused in their extreme forms by Cimourdain and Lantenac are incarnated by inanimate objects: the traveling guillotine as opposed to the immobile dungeon—"Une Bastille de province" (3:954)—of la Tourgue. The eventual triumph of a mechanical over an architectural metaphor provides a more chilling version of "Ceci tuera cela" (Notre-Dame de Paris, 1:618-28). Instead of the dissemination of ideas through print, the modern republic is ruthlessly spreading its authority. Identifying la Tourgue with the monarchical past and the guillotine with the Revolution (or at least with its worst incarnation, the Terror), Hugo illustrates his own ambiguous response to the bloody imposition of what, nevertheless, remains for him a worthy ideal for the future: "Un édifice est un dogme, une machine est une idée" (9:1061).

No attempt has been made in this chapter at a comprehensive review of the critical literature devoted to Hugo. The bibliographical studies by Ward (1985) and E. Grant are only offered here as examples of partial compilations of what can only be described, to use a Hugolian term, as an oceanic corpus.

Examples of the projections of his name include: the giant H formed by the cathedral’s towers in Notre-Dame de Paris, and by the ship wedged between two vertical rocks in Les Travailleurs de la mer; the "Hougomont" chapter in Les Misérables (2:242-7); the recurrent UG found in Bug-Jargal, and in the much-maligned "bug-pipe" belonging to Gilliatt in Les Travailleurs (see Robb, 416-8). An entertaining account of Hugo’s experiments with table-turning during his stay in Jersey is found in Mutigny.

As several critics have pointed out, in his 1878 "Discours pour Voltaire," Hugo seems to have written his own funeral oration:

Il avait à son lit de mort, d’un côté l’acclamation des contemporains et de la postérité, de l’autre ce triomphe de huée et de haine que l’implacable passé fait à ceux qui l’ont combattu. Il était plus qu’un homme, il était un siècle. Il avait exercé une fonction et rempli une mission. Il avait été évidemment élu pour l’œuvre qu’il avait faite par la suprême volonté qui se manifeste aussi visiblement dans les lois de la destinée que dans les lois de la nature. (Actes et paroles IV, 10:985)
See Ozouf for a discussion of the Panthéon’s often controversial role as a repository of national and republican symbolism.

For examples of the varied interpretations that followed Hugo’s funeral, see Ben-Amos (512-6).

Hugo’s “mauvaise réputation,” according to Laster, even extends to many of the textbooks used in French lycées.

Perhaps the most famous example of unmitigated revulsion with Voltaire’s intellectual legacy, on the part of some Romantics—which included neither Staël nor Hugo—is Musset’s implacable poem, “Rolla” (139-46), with its vengeful depiction of a quasi-Satanic philosophe, spreading an insidiously appealing, maleficent anti-Gospel of nihilistic atheism:

Dors-tu content, Voltaire, et ton hideux sourire
Voltige-t-il encore sur tes os décharnés?
Ton siècle était, dit-on, trop jeune pour te lire;
Le nôtre doit te plaire, et tes hommes sont nés.
Il est tombé sur nous, cet édifice immense
Que de tes larges mains tu sapais nuit et jour. (143)

This two-volume collective book was originally intended as a means of bringing together texts by writers associated with the liberal opposition to Bonaparte’s regime. See Seebacher (82-94) in this regard.

See Gohin for an analysis of the religious connotations in Hugo’s use of the word “transfiguration.”

In Choses vues, Hugo cites some of the atrocities committed by French troops during the “pacification” of Algeria, concluding with: “L’armée — faite féroce par l’Algérie” (11:1256)—thereby attributing the behavior of French soldiers, perversely, to the influence of the colonized Algerians. What Hugo generally objected to in the French colonial enterprise was the means, not the end.

Hugo provides in the final 1831 poem (4:673-4) of Les Feuilles d’automne a list of oppressed European nationalities, struggling against despotic kings (the future Pair de France did not include Louis-Philippe among them). Occupied Poland is represented as a suffering “sœur” of France in a short 1835 poem (Les Chants du
Hugo would return to the issue of oppression within Poland, this time committed by Russian troops, in his 23 Nov. 1853 speech in Jersey (Actes et paroles II, 10:442-5). By then, he envisioned that nineteenth-century struggles over national independence and unity would be transcended by future European federalism: “Saluons, au-delà de toutes ces convulsions et de toutes ces guerres, saluons l’aube bénie des Etats-Unis d’Europe!” (10:445). By contrast, Voltaire, it will be recalled, had acquiesced in the 1772 partition of Poland by Austria, Prussia, and Russia.

Strangely, Robb classifies this speech among the “circumstantial” texts that “should really be filed under the heading of etiquette” (288). The issue of European unity was, however, examined and advocated by Hugo so often, and in such widely divergent contexts, that it can hardly be dismissed as just a case of the author telling his audience what it wanted to hear.

Hugo’s generally positive perception of the United States was fundamentally altered by the persistence of slavery, which had been permanently banned in France in 1848. Hugo’s 1859 appeal to spare the life of John Brown is found in Actes et paroles II (10:512-4). See Lebreton-Savigny (219-64) for an analysis of reactions in the American press to Hugo’s interventions against slavery and in favor of Brown.

However, in his 1868 letters of support for the establishment of a republic in Spain (Actes et paroles II, 10:610-4), Hugo included the country in his future Europe.

Hugo did, however, often make use of English words in his writings. See Barrère in this regard. See Leuillot for an account of the translation of Shakespeare’s works by Hugo’s son, a project with polemical ramifications that was undertaken during the period of exile.

For a brief overview of the impact of Hugo’s work in Russia, see Sokologorsky. For a detailed analysis of Hugo’s influence on Dostoevsky, see Babel Brown.

See the Hugo-Schéelcher correspondence in this regard.

As Dédéyan stresses, Hugo “n’accepte de reprendre une attitude fraternelle envers l’Allemagne qu’après une guerre de revanche” (4:243). Of course, this attitude
existed during both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, on either side of the disputed border. What distinguished Hugo from the unreconstructed revanchists of the Belle Epoque was his enthusiastic willingness to move beyond seemingly perennial nationalistic rivalries: “car [l’Allemagne] repentie et convertie à l’idéal démocratique verrait alors en la France une sœur aînée et en l’Europe une commune patrie” (Dédéyan, 4:243).

See Dédéyan (2:425-35), and Savy (129-32), regarding Hugo’s trips to Germany and Switzerland in 1839 and 1840, which led to the publication of Le Rhin in 1842. Reproductions of Hugo’s graphic output during these trips are found in J. Gaudon. Hugo returned to the Rhine during the 1860s. See Dédéyan (3:17-37) for accounts of those trips. Hugo’s interest in the region is visible as early as his 1827 play, Cromwell, in which the title character says:

On dit les bords du Rhin fort beaux. Toute ma vie,
J’ai de les parcourir conservé quelque envie. (8:208)

For one of the exceptions to this Hugolian pattern of travels within northern Europe, see Olivé-Basso.

Hugo’s poetic impressions of the Rhineland would become a major reference in Barrès’s 1921 Le Génie du Rhin.

For an analysis of Les Burgraves as a work of transition away from the Romantic drama, and toward the epic genre, see Halsall (175-87).

See Dédéyan (2:404-24) for an overview of the attitudes of French writers towards the Rhine and its disputed status during this period.

In a prescient pamphlet, “Après Sadowa” (originally entitled “France et Allemagne”), published after the 1866 Prussian victory over Austrian troops at Sadowa, Quinet noted that German unity was being achieved not in the spirit of democratic self-determination, but through despotic militarism that was reminiscent of Ancien Régime practices. The exiled Quinet warned that the process of German unification, long called for by artists and philosophers, would be completed against France: “Combien de fois l’avènement de cet empire n’avait-il pas été appelé depuis 1813, par les écrivains et les
penseurs nationaux, comme une éternelle représaille contre l’empire de Napoléon!” (166). In an interesting echo of Staël’s Nord/Midi division of Europe, he posited a natural alliance between Great Britain and a united Germany: “L’Angleterre et l’Allemagne unifiée pèseraient sur la France, l’Italie et l’Espagne, comme les Anglo-Saxons pèsent sur l’Amérique méridionale” (177).

54 *Les Misérables* provides this description of Marius, a character who shares several traits with Hugo as a young man: “Son profil, dont toutes les lignes étaient arrondies sans cesser d’être fermes, avait cette douceur germanique qui a pénétré dans la physionomie française par l’Alsace et la Lorraine” (2:553).

55 In his presentation of the Rhine as the uniting line between France and Germany, Hugo pays little attention to Holland and Switzerland.

56 Hugo’s fascination with the figure of Charlemagne was already visible in *Hernani* (8:539-670). Act 4 is set at Charlemagne’s tomb, a locale which inspires clemency to Charles V, the new Emperor. This is one of the “German” elements of Hugo’s “Spanish” play. See Jacques in this regard.

57 For a discussion of Hugo’s rhetorical attempt at using the historical myths of the two rulers of multinational empires, Charlemagne and Napoleon, in order to transcend nationalistic rivalries, see Morrissey. Interestingly, Hugo had used the two emperors as an implicitly self-aggrandizing parallel for literary giants in his 1831 preface to *Marion de Lorme*: “Pourquoi maintenant ne viendrait-il pas un poète qui serait à Shakespeare ce que Napoléon est à Charlemagne?” (8:685).

58 Since Paris was surrounded by Prussian troops, the Assembly met in Bordeaux. It would subsequently vote to meet in Versailles instead of Paris, a move that was laden with highly conservative symbolism. See Rosa for an analysis of Hugo’s political action during the Franco-Prussian War and the Commune.

59 The catalyst of Hugo’s dramatic exit from the Assembly was his support for the long-time militant for Italian unity, Giuseppe Garibaldi, who had (successfully) fought on the French side during the war, and who was being made a scapegoat for the defeat. Hugo’s speech on this issue is found in *Actes et paroles III* (10:766-70).
A similar image, comparing the two Napoleons, is found in *Les Châtiments* ("Chanson," 5:180-1):

Quand il tomba, lâchant le monde,  
L'immense mer  
Ouvrit à sa chute profonde  
Le gouffre amer;  
Il y plongea, sinistre archange,  
Et s'engloutit. —  
Toi, tu te noieras dans la fange,  
Petit, petit.

Hugo's support for Bonaparte during the 1848 presidential election was not based on naive beliefs as to the future emperor's intentions. Rather, it was intended to hamper Bonaparte's main opponent, General Cavaignac, who had overseen the June 1848 repression. Lamartine, also a candidate, fared badly. Ironically, Hugo had argued in 1847 against a law banning members of the Bonaparte family from returning to France (*Actes et paroles I*, 10:137-41). Prior to the election, Hugo had also argued, as a matter of principle, against the exclusion of Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte from the list of candidates—a point of principle he would soon come to regret (*Choses vues*, 11:1093-6). See Robb (281-3) for an account of this episode. For a detailed study of *L'Evénement* as a reflection of Hugo's social and political thought, see Firmberg.

Marx did share Hugo's contempt for the "single individual," Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte. It is at the beginning of this text that Marx made his famous pronouncement, in comparing Napoleon I to his nephew, about the uneven recurrence of historical events: "Hegel remarks somewhere that all facts and personages of great importance in world history occur, as it were, twice. He forgot to add: the first time as tragedy, the second as farce" (15).

See Parkhurst Ferguson for a discussion of the French language as an agent of enforced cultural homogenization in *Quatrevingt-treize*.

For a discussion of the role of railways in Hugo's vision of progress, see Charles (30-41).
For an analysis of the efforts of the Symbolist and especially Parnassian schools of poetry to establish themselves in part through opposition to the immense literary figure of Hugo, see Nash 1992. Ironically, in his 1831 preface to *Les Feuilles d’automne* (4:559-674), Hugo had tried to show that he was well aware of political and social events throughout Europe, while defending the value of producing art—in this case, his collection of poems—that did not have direct political relevance:

"Au dehors, ça et là, sur la face de l’Europe, des peuples tout entiers qu’on assassine, qu’on déporte en masse ou qu’on met aux fers; l’Irlande dont on fait un cimetière, l’Italie dont on fait un bagne, la Sibérie qu’on peuple avec la Pologne; partout d’ailleurs, dans les états même les plus paisibles, quelque chose de vermoulu qui se disloque, et, pour les oreilles attentives, les bruit sourd que font les révolutions, encore enfouies dans la sape, en poussant sous tous les royaumes de l’Europe leurs galeries souterraines, ramifications de la grande révolution centrale dont le cratère est Paris. (4:559)"

In *Choses vues*, Hugo summarized attacks from the right with an 1850 "dialogue" that is reminiscent of Voltairean irony:

"Je veux un système d’impôts qui ne dépouille pas le pauvre.
Vous êtes un ennemi de la propriété.
Je veux remédier à un ensemble de faits sociaux qui font fatalement du malheureux un misérable, et sous le poids desquels tant d’infortunées mères mettent au jour des filles pour le lupanar et des fils pour le bagne.
Vous êtes un ennemi de la famille.
Je veux un clergé non salarié, libre, pur, digne, pratiquant Jésus et non Loyola.
Vous êtes un ennemi de la religion.
Je veux le gouvernement régulier et pacifique de tous par tous et pour tous.
Vous êtes un ennemi de la société.
Je veux la suppression de la guerre.
Vous êtes un ennemi de l’humanité.
Je veux l’abolition de la peine de mort.
Vous êtes un buveur de sang. (11:1229-30)."

For examples of interpretations of Hugo’s social and political thought as prefiguring Marxist ideology, see chapter 5 of Petrovska.

As Robb recounts (292-3), Proudhon ran into Hugo at the Conciergerie prison in August 1851, when the national poet was showing his solidarity with his sons, who, as
contributors to the newspaper *L'Événement*, had incurred the wrath of Bonaparte’s censors. A poetic expression of Hugo’s outrage is found in “A quatre prisonniers (après leur condamnation)” (*Les Châtiments*, 5:102-3). Proudhon was less than overwhelmed by Hugo as a would-be revolutionary: “V. Hugo est révolutionnaire depuis 30 ans. — Il croit que la fraternité toute seule peut résoudre la question sociale” (4:294). As for the peace conference of August 1849, whose President was Hugo, Proudhon provided this contemptuous evaluation: “C’est le congrès de la Ste Alliance bourgeoise” (3:225).

**Chapter 5. The Shrunken Europe of Maurice Barrès**

1 Except where indicated, quotes are taken from the 20-volume *L’Œuvre de Maurice Barrès*. Aragon’s preface was originally a 1948 article in *Les Lettres Françaises*, which was reprinted in *La Lumiére de Stendhal*.

2 Blum was an admirer and friend of Barrès until the Dreyfus Affair. In *Souvenirs sur l’Affaire*, he describes Barrès, with retrospective disappointment, as a mentor and literary model: “Je suis sûr qu’il avait pour moi de l’amitié vraie, presque une sollicitude de frère aîné [...] il était pour moi, comme pour la plupart de mes camarades, non seulement le maître mais le guide; nous formions autour de lui une école, presque une cour” (543-4). See Miguet for Barrès’s relationship with Proust. For appraisals of Barrès by Cocteau and Malraux, see Boisdeffre (184-6 and 197-8, respectively). Montherlant contributed a preface to volume 11 of *L’Œuvre* (ix-xviii).

3 See Bonnet for an account of this episode.

4 Aragon’s reexamination of Barrès (25 years after the death of the author of *Les Déracinés*), as well as his belittling of Gide, also had more to do with politics than stylistics. It corresponded to the French Communist Party’s repositioning as a nationalist movement during and after the Resistance; and it attacked the erstwhile fellow traveler who had become heretical by criticizing the Soviet Union in *Retour de l’U.R.S.S.*

329
As the bibliographies compiled by Zarach and by Field attest, Barrès's writings have generated a voluminous amount of critical literature. Concerning the political aspects of Barrès's thought, critics are generally divided into two broad types of interpretation: those who, like Sternhell, see in him one of the precursors of Fascism, and those who maintain his links to a democratic, albeit authoritarian, tradition, not unlike Gaullism (in a division Barrès might have appreciated, most of the latter are French). The differing views concerning Barrès are often sharply expressed. Refusing any assimilation between his "Land and Dead" and the German doctrine of *Blut und Bloden* that nazism would later draw upon, Jean-Marie Domenach rails against the "demi-ignorants qui présentent Barrès en pré-fasciste" (142). François Broche, at the end of a long book devoted to Barrès, mentions Sternhell’s first book in his bibliography, only to summarily dismiss it: "Il s’agit d’une interprétation très réductrice, confinant à la caricature: Barrès antisémite, nationaliste au sens péjoratif de ce mot, penseur étroit, faux, dangereux. La thèse est d’autant plus séduisante qu’elle repose sur une exceptionnelle connaissance de l’œuvre. Elle n’en est pas moins, à nos yeux, complètement erronée" (536). For overviews of the differing interpretations by historians of the emergence of fascism, see Burrin (606-32) and Soucy (1995, 1-11).

See Philippe Barrès’s 1963 article in this regard.

See aphorism 475 of *Human, all too Human*.

To use René Rémond’s terms, Barrès and Maurras represent the “Bonapartist” and “Legitimist” branches, respectively, of the French Right. See the Barrès-Maurras correspondence, *La République ou le Roi*, and Curtis in this regard.

For an overview of French right-wing reactions to the 1870-1 war, see El Gammal.

In *La Grande Pitié des églises de France* (1914), the quest for an unbroken chain of the Dead leads Barrès to attempt to link, or reconcile, Christianity with the paganism that preceded it within the same Land: "C’est l’heure d’achever la réconciliation des dieux vaincus et des saints. Je sens leur parenté; elle dérive pour moi de tant de siècles passés aux mêmes lieux, et je crois qu’ils peuvent aujourd’hui
s’entr’aîmer. Un peuple a dans l’âme un sanctuaire qu’il tend sans cesse à restaurer. Je veux sauver les sources pures, les profondes forêts, à la suite des églises. Et pour maintenir la spiritualité de la race, je demande une alliance du sentiment religieux catholique avec l’esprit de la terre” (8:172).

11 The ambiguities of Barrésian rootedness are highlighted by his first electoral campaign. As Serman points out (124), Barrès, who had been living in Paris, initially had few contacts in his district of Lorraine, and knew very little about it.

12 “[Ce] fut un crime de céder aux menaces brutales de l’Angleterre” (Scènes et doctrines du nationalisme, 5:328). While he wrote at length about such countries as Germany, Italy, or Spain, Barrès was by comparison relatively silent about Great Britain. Its northern, non-Latin status might have led him to assimilate Britain to Germany. However, as a practical matter, Barrès could obviously not conflate France’s main ally and what he saw as its eternal German foe. Two fairly long articles on the British war effort are found in Chronique de la Grande Guerre. Barrès described his impressions during a trip to Great Britain in 1916 (8:278-378). He also related an earlier visit to British and colonial troops stationed in France (6:1-48). His praise highlighted the somewhat stereotypical differences he saw between the British and French national characters, while positioning them as complementary: “L’indomptable patience de la race anglaise, son invincible volonté de ne jamais céder combattent étroitement associées à nos puissances d’elan. Volonté anglaise, enthousiasme français, ce génie de chaleur, ce génie de froide persistance briseront l’organisation germanique qui les nie, qui les hait, qui les voudrait détruire” (42).

13 At the end of Une Journée parlementaire, Madame Thuringe, whose husband, a crooked Député, has been forced to commit suicide—by other crooked members of the National Assembly—tells her young son: “Regarde, petit enfant, regarde bien ces hommes et apprends à les mépriser: ce sont tous des canailles!” (4:551).

14 See Berstein (336-52) in this regard.
Having already participated in Boulanger’s attempt to create a new regime, Barrès supported Paul Déroulède’s coup attempt in 1899. Both of these episodes degenerated into farce. See Bécarud for an analysis of Barrès’s parliamentary career.

For his part, the founder of the first overtly fascist party in France, Georges Valois, proudly proclaimed Barrès’s work in *La Cocarde*, along with Georges Sorel’s *Réflexions sur la violence* (1908), to be among the forerunners of fascism: “c’est Maurice Barrès qui a le premier vu la possibilité de fondre le socialisme et le nationalisme” (6). See chapter 3 of Sternhell 1983 and chapter 5 of Soucy 1986 concerning Valois’s paradoxical political evolution.

For more recent and scholarly assessments of the impact of the French Revolution within Europe, see the collections of essays edited by Gilli (1988), and by Mason and Doyle (1989).

In his first trilogy, Barrès had given an inchoate formulation of his call for a strong leader: “Toi seul, ô maître, si tu existes quelque part, axiome, religion ou prince des hommes” (*Sous l’œil des barbares*, 1:132).

See Sabourin (49-73) for brief discussions of the transformations of nationalism in France since the Revolution, and of nationalistic counter-arguments against potential European supranationality.

Germany was also, since Immanuel Kant, the national embodiment of the universalistic model of logic which Barrès rejected. A major theme of Barrès’s second trilogy is the perverting influence of Kant’s philosophy, through his disciple, Bouteiller, on a group of young French men who are briefly his students at a lycée in Nancy. A rootless intellectual, Bouteiller attempts to raise his pupils “au-dessus des passions de leur race, jusqu’à la raison, jusqu’à l’humanité” (*Les Déracinés*, 3:19). Barrès portrays him as oblivious to the folly of his endeavor: “Déraciner ces enfants, les détacher du sol et du groupe social où tout les relie, pour les placer hors de leurs préjugés dans la raison abstraite, comment cela le gênerait-il, lui qui n’a pas de sol, ni de société, ni, pense-t-il, de préjugés?” (24).
See chapter 26 of Richard concerning Barrès’s episodic links with the “decadent movement.”

Barrès often used whole sentences or passages more than once in the course of his books, several of which are collections of articles and speeches. Also, many texts published in *Chronique de la Grande Guerre* were later included in *L’Œuvre*. Barrès’s notion of the ego as the crystallization of pre-existing deterministic factors has Freudian and Jungian implications, which have not escaped critics. See Parisier Plottel in this regard.

In his overview of the *Culte du Moi* trilogy, Barrès also equated *les Barbares* with foreigners:

> Dans le même sens les Grecs ne voyaient que barbares hors de la patrie grecque. Au contact des étrangers, et quel que fût d’ailleurs le degré de civilisation de ceux-ci, ce peuple jaloux de sa propre culture éprouvait un froissement analogue à celui que ressent un jeune homme contraint par la vie à fréquenter des êtres qui ne sont pas de sa patrie psychique. Ah! Que m’importe la qualité d’âme de qui contredit une sensibilité! Ces étrangers, qui entravent ou dévoient le développement de tel *moi* délicat, hésitant et qui se cherche, ces barbares sous la pression de qui un jeune homme faillira à sa destinée et ne trouvera pas sa joie de vivre, je les hais. Ainsi, quand on les oppose, prennent leur pleine intelligence ces deux termes Barbares et Moi. Notre *moi*, c’est la manière dont notre organisme réagit aux excitations du milieu et sous la contradiction des Barbares. (*Examens des trois romans idéologiques*, 1:30)

The issue of just how personal has been addressed at length by Tronquart.

“La nation, comme l’individu, est l’aboutissant d’un long passé d’efforts, de sacrifices et de dévouements. Le culte des ancêtres est de tous le plus légitime; les ancêtres nous ont faits ce que nous sommes” (Renan, 904). See Todorov (247-61) concerning the links between Renan’s formulation of nationalism and Barrès’s determinism. See chapter 4 of Birnbaum 1993 for an overview of Renan’s paradoxical status as an intellectual reference for both left-wing republicans and right-wing nationalists.

Gide was quoting the opening poem of Hugo’s *Les Feuilles d’automne*, “Ce Siècle avait deux ans...” (4:565-7). Ironically, as is indicated by his infamous comment as to who was the greatest French lyric poet—”Victor Hugo, hélas!”—Gide was not
particularly partial to Hugo's work in esthetic terms. However, he did sense in the multifarious Hugolian heritage an antithesis to the blindly xenophobic resentment of a single-minded ideologue such as Barrès.

27 Barrès also posthumously enlisted to his cause another writer with links to Lorraine, Paul Verlaine, albeit with somewhat more reason. At the poet's death in 1896, Barrès pronounced him a patriot:

Il fut notre Musset et notre Henri Heine. Heine, de qui Dieu me garde de médire! est un étranger, un Allemand, il a des traditions secrètes qui nous déconcertent. De là notre malaise, tandis que Paul Verlaine, né à Metz, fils d'un héros de la Grande Armée, amusé par les chansons populaires, par les mots des gavroches et les ingéniosités des camelots, était notre cher compatriote. Et dans son lit d'hôpital, avec le bonnet de coton un peu sur l'oreille, "à la crâne", fumant sa pipe de terre, en dépit de tous ses malheurs compliqués, je l'ai toujours reconnu comme un brave enfant, un Français du type traditionnel et populaire. ("Les Funérailles de Verlaine," 2:406)

28 Barrès also opposed projects to honor Diderot, for similar reasons: "Ce qu'il y a de vrai dans Diderot, c'est un prodigieux génie révolutionnaire. Voilà un écrivain capable, comme pas un, de poser sous tous les principes, sous toutes les pierres de la société, des pétards de dynamite" (Les Maîtres, 12:99).

29 Taine had already elaborated the critique of Rousseau's "social contract" as a blindly abstract concept, applicable only to the purely fanciful notion of a society composed of atomistic individuals who lack historical links:

Appliquez Le Contrat social si bon vous semble, mais ne l'appliquez qu'aux hommes pour lesquels on l'a fabriqué. Ce sont des hommes abstraits, qui ne sont d'aucun siècle et d'aucun pays, purs entités écloses sous la baguette métaphysique. En effet, on les a formés en retranchant expressément toutes les différences qui séparent un homme d'un autre, un Français d'un Papou, un Anglais moderne d'un Breton contemporain de César, et l'on n'a gardé que la portion mince, un extrait infiniment écourté de la nature humaine [...] puis, par une seconde simplification aussi énorme que la première, on les a supposés tous indépendants, tous égaux, sans passé, sans parents, sans engagements, sans traditions, sans habitudes, comme autant d'unités arithmétiques, toutes séparables, toutes équivalentes, et l'on a imaginé que, rassemblés pour la première fois, ils traitaient ensemble pour la première fois. (183-4)
See the previous chapter for a discussion of Hugo’s utopian vision of a United States of Europe, with Paris as its capital.

Through his denunciation of Zola and other Dreyfusards, Barrès contributed to the wide use of the term “les intellectuels,” to which he ironically gave a consistently pejorative sense. They were in his view the rootless propagators of Kantian abstraction:

Il y a en France une morale d’Etat. On peut dire que le kantisme est cette doctrine officielle. [...] Ce kantisme de nos classes prétend régler l’homme universel, l’homme abstrait, sans tenir compte des différences individuelles. Il tend à former nos jeunes lorrains, provençaux, bretons, parisiens de cette année d’après un homme abstrait, idéal, identique partout à lui-même, tandis que nous aurions besoin d’hommes racinés solide dans notre sol, dans notre histoire, dans la conscience nationale, et adaptés aux nécessités française de cette date-ci. La philosophie qu’enseigne l’Etat est responsable en première ligne si des personnes croient intellectuel de mépriser l’inconscient national et de faire fonctionner l’intelligence dans l’abstrait pur, hors du plan des réalités. Un verbalisme qui écarte l’enfant de toute réalité, un kantisme qui le déracine de la terre de ses morts. (Scènes et doctrines du nationalisme, 5:66)

In a study of publishing strategies during the Dreyfus Affair, Silverman (18) found that nearly 200 books, directly or indirectly linked to the issue that polarized France, were published between 1894 and 1906.

Ironically, as Burns points out (58), Barrès really did have a lot in common with Dreyfus, a patriotic career officer who had been forced to leave his native Alsace after the Franco-Prussian War.

See Sternhell (1972, 267-73) concerning the implications of this Barrésian distinction. Sternhell links Barrès’s rejection of universally applicable moral norms to the rise of a tribalist form of nationalism in several countries: “We are here in the presence of a general European phenomenon” (10).

Reinach, who in his Histoire de l’Affaire Dreyfus had been sharply critical of Barrès, also gave real meaning to the term union sacrée. He sought out reconciliation at the outbreak of the war, going so far as to join Barrès’s Ligue des Patriotes.

For an outline of this affair and its effects on internal French politics, see Poliakov (358-63).

See chapter 7 of Soucy 1972 and chapter 5 of Sternhell 1972 in this regard.
See chapter 1 of Birnbaum 1979 for a historical analysis of the political variations of the “deux cents familles” metaphor.

In 1800, the German philosopher Johann Fichte had taken the concept of national economic self-sufficiency to an absurd extreme, positing in *L'Etat commercial fermé* a system of totally autarchic nation-states, with sealed borders.

Concern with the preservation of the “healthy” values of vanishing agricultural societies was of course not limited to France. As Mazower argues (92-5), this concern was linked to the interwar eugenics movement in much of Europe, and prompted attempts to limit urban growth.

Although he sharply criticized Staël for her “Germanophilia,” Barrès largely adopted her conceptual model of opposition against enforced universalism through the revalorization of individual national cultures. However, he inverted the poles of that model: while Staël sought literary renewal outside of the dominant French tradition at the beginning of the nineteenth century, Barrès saw Germany as the domineering embodiment of abstract universalism at the century’s close.

Later in his career, Barrès would provide an inverted version of the same idea, rejecting, on the basis of their common national origin, philosophers and artists as diverse as Hegel, Marx, Wagner, and Nietzsche:

> On a discuté souvent pour savoir si le petit Breton Renan s'était diminué en échangeant la foi de ses pères contre l’hégélianisme. [...] Il est clair que certains ouvriers français, en adoptant le marxisme, certains amateurs, en se livrant aux rêves wagnériens, d’autres curieux, en applaudissant les délires de Nietzsche, ont trahi la cause de la France. (*Les Grands Problèmes du Rhin*, 10:368)

It is clear that a hegemonic form of ultra-nationalism developed in Germany well before the advent of nazism. See Leiberich in this regard.

Victor Hugo’s *L’Année terrible* (6:3-182) covers both the Franco-Prussian War and the Paris Commune.

Fustel de Coulanges’s text is also found in Hartog (376-82).

For a historical overview of the disputed status and representations of Alsace, see Mayeur.
Barrès’s mistrust of German culture often reached a ridiculous level: “N’y a-t-il pas, en dépit de son attirance, quelque danger dans cette séduction du lied? N’envahit-il pas notre sensibilité sans bénéfice pour le meilleur de notre être? Quel engourdissement délicieux de la pensée! Quels états d’âme de volupté indécise!” (Les Grands Problèmes du Rhin, 10:398).

As Birnbaum points out (1993, 306-8), Barrès’s version of nationalism also shares common traits with Johann Herder’s organic societal model. For a brief discussion of the Herderian Volkstaat, see Lambropoulos (64-70).

Ironically, Barrès found the best model for a social protection system—which he cast, as was his custom, in nationalistic terms—in Germany:

Quand tout reste encore à créer dans la République française en fait d’assistance, l’Allemagne s’est déjà avancée très loin dans la voie du socialisme pratique. Elle possède quatre grandes lois d’assurances obligatoires qui prévoient et assistent les maladies, les accidents, les infirmités et la Oldiesse. [...] Ces réalisations pratiques d’une nation occupée de s’assurer le bien-être ou, pour dire toute ma pensée, préoccupée de se conserver, est-ce du socialisme? C’est du nationalism et la seconde étape fatale du protectionnisme. (Scènes et doctrines du nationalisme, 5:271)

For Barrès, Germany’s technical sophistication was not matched by its moral development. In a typically absurd attempt to simply equate “le germanisme” with an unreconstructed form of primal barbarity, he turned the visit of Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore into an illustration of German primitivism and lack of civilized standards: “Quand Tagore faisait au milieu [des Allemands] sa tournée triomphale, leur loyalisme guerrier trouvait parfaitement moyen de s’allier à la délicieuse primitivité qu’il recommandait” (Une Enquête aux pays du Levant, 11:466).

In a text written fifteen years after the death of Barrès, François Mauriac testifies to his lasting influence on this issue in La Rencontre avec Barrès: “rappelons Barrès au milieu de nous, non pour ranimer une doctrine dépassée, mais pour recevoir de sa bouche le maître mot, qui renferme tout notre destin et celui de l’Europe: le Rhin” (120).
Barrès exemplified, to use Walter Benjamin’s phrase, the “introduction of esthetics into political life” (241). See volume 2 of Chronique de la Grande Guerre for examples of the cultural and political links between France and Spain that Barrès promoted: “Les Affinités franco-espagnoles” (35-43), and “Les Voix françaises de l’Espagne” (195-205).

Barrès’s journalistic account of this wartime trip was originally published as “Le Voyage d’Italie” in Chronique de la Grande Guerre (8:120-202). It was reprinted, with an introduction, as Dix Jours en Italie, in L’Œuvre (9:61-121). See also Chronique (4:317-35) for Barrès’s enthusiastic reaction to Italy’s decision to enter the war in 1915.

Ironically, in privileging instinctual emotion over formalistic reason, Barrès often sounds close to Rousseau. In Scènes et doctrines du nationalism, Barrès gives his interpretation of the struggle between Antigone and Creon, with the former embodying native instinct, while the latter has only rootless intellect. He draws this lesson from their opposition: “Ainsi la meilleure dialectique et les plus complètes démonstrations ne sauraient pas me fixer. Il faut que mon cœur soit spontanément rempli d’un grand respect joint à de l’amour. C’est dans ces minutes d’émotivité générale que mon cœur me désigne ce que je ne laisserai pas mettre en discussion” (5:26).

Barrès describes in great detail Astiné’s exotic form of rootlessness and its deleterious effect on Sturel’s attachment to his native land:


Les vallées de l’Euphrate et du Tigre, qui baignaient le Paradis terrestre; Babylone et Ninive, la Perse, l’Inde, l’Ionie! — de telles syllabes prononcées déterminent en Sturel de profonds ébranlements. (Les Déracinés, 3:82)
As Carroll points out, Barrès links the mystical figures of Hugo and Napoleon as associated embodiments of national unity: “For if Napoleon is given the title of ‘Professor of Energy,’ Hugo’s title is ‘Master of French Words’” (39).

Said devotes a few paragraphs to Barrès, defining the author of Une Enquête aux Pays du Levant as advocating “the cultivation of intellectual imperialism, as ineradicable as it is subtle” (245). See Frandon for an inventory of the sources of Barrésian Orientalism.

For instance, Russia is for Barrès clearly not a part of Europe. In Scènes et doctrines du nationalisme, he contrasts Anatole France, “ce véritable Français,” with Leo Tolstoy, “ce véritable Asiatique” (5:62).

See chapter 5 of Ahmad and chapter 11 of Clifford for detailed critiques, from very different perspectives, of Said’s construction of an essentialized European entity.

Barrès provides an example of the ambiguity that some revanchist right-wing elements exhibited towards the colonialist policies of the Third Republic (see Michel in this regard):


Doty argues that the Barrésian corpus was sufficiently protean to have inspired two opposing versions of French nationalism: “Malraux is a prime example of how one could move on to the Barrès of ‘the novel of national energy’ and ‘bastions of the East’ as preparation for Gaullism; one must remember that Charles de Gaulle, himself, was a student in those same prewar years. Read differently, that same Barrès could prepare fascists, Pétainists, and the backers of Algérie française” (246). However, the contrasts between the political legacies of Maurice Barrès and Charles de Gaulle remain glaring: de Gaulle never called for, or participated in, a coup d’état as a means of achieving his political goals. Instead, he scrupulously adhered to democratic principles and institutions while in office. He also advocated and practiced reconciliation with Germany. Jean
Charlot finds crucial differences between the two forms of nationalism: "De Gaulle est un visionnaire qui s’attache à mettre la France à l’heure de son temps; Barrès est un réactionnaire qui cultive la nostalgie du temps passé" (658).

Chapter 6. Europe on the Screen: Jean Renoir

1 For depictions of Jean Renoir’s childhood, see chapter 2 of Bertin, and chapters 3-5 of Bergan.


3 In 1952, Renoir characterized his arrival in the United States as the beginning of a new period in his life, rather than a temporary respite: “Il m’est arrivé quelque chose de très important, à moi comme à des millions d’autres gens, et cette chose, c’est la Deuxième Guerre mondiale qui a été la cause de mon départ en Amérique où je devais rencontrer des gens importants pour moi, et où il m’a semblé que je naissais une seconde fois” (1974b, 269).

4 For an extended analysis of the consequences of Renoir’s prolonged absence from France on his postwar films, see Bergstrom.

5 For a complete listing of Renoir’s visual and textual output, see Viry-Babel’s useful reference book.

6 For an overview of the vast critical literature on Renoir, see Faulkner’s invaluable Jean Renoir: A Guide to References and Resources. Unfortunately, Faulkner’s Guide was published nearly twenty years ago. It consequently does not cover
some of the most important scholarly studies of Renoir's work, such as Sesonske's book.

7 Bazin was influential in linking the depth of field technique to a more active notion of spectatorship: "La profondeur de champ bien utilisée n'est pas seulement une façon plus économique, plus simple et plus subtile à la fois de mettre l'événement en valeur; elle affecte, avec les structures du langage cinématographique, les rapports intellectuels du spectateur avec l'image, et par là même elle modifie le sens du spectacle" (1958, 143).

8 Bazin's analysis of Renoir's realism was sometimes expressed in lyrical, and somewhat overstated, terms: "La connaissance chez Renoir passe par l'amour et l'amour par l'épiderme du monde. La souplesse, la mobilité, le modelé vivant de sa mise en scène, c'est son souci de draper, pour son plaisir et pour notre joie, la robe sans couture de la réalité" (1971, 84). For his part, Renoir always problematized the issue of cinematographical realism (see for instance "Le Réalisme dans La Grande Illusion," 1974a, 144-6). In 1946, he wrote: "Vouloir 'faire vrai' est une erreur colossale: l'art doit être artificiel et constamment recréé. C'est cette facilité de recréation qui était la raison d'être du cinéma et, en l'oubliant, il se perd lui-même" (1974b, 58).

9 Renoir's Cahiers interviews have been translated and collected in Part 1 of Renoir on Renoir. See François Truffaut’s famous 1954 article for the opposition he establishes between les auteurs and la tradition de qualité.


11 Concerning Boudu sauvé des eaux, Faulkner has a rigidly political interpretation: "The whole point of Renoir's revision [of René Fauchois's play] is to preserve the sense of the incompatibility of two social classes and the irrevocable barriers between them" (1986, 32). Boudu as the representative of which social class? The lumpenproletariat? If so, what is the alternative social structure this class would establish? In Faulkner’s analysis, even Boudu’s fish-out-of-water habits participate in social criticism, by unmasking bourgeois hypocrisy: "Certainly we have no difficulty recognizing the absurdity of these wholly habitual practices of bourgeois life" (1986, 34).
These practices include personal hygiene, basic table manners, and not spitting in books... All of which are apparently “absurd” and representative of bourgeois capitalism. Faulkner does not seem to acknowledge that Boudu’s spitting in Balzac’s *La Physiologie du mariage* is metaphorical. He seeks to endow the anarchistic Boudu with some sort of politically revolutionary function. In the case of *Une Partie de campagne*, while Faulkner acknowledges its “moving depiction of disillusionment as the price of sexual (and adult) awareness,” he interprets Henriette’s brief affair with the working-class Henri as having “undermined the security of bourgeois existence and its values” (1986, 42n). Henriette may well be dissatisfied or unhappy; but she is nevertheless firmly enounced in her role as a bourgeois wife.

12 Faulkner tends to characterize much of Sesonske’s analysis as idealistic and non-historical. For example:

*Le Crime de M. Lange* is a well-known film, but I have avoided enumerating those qualities that would continue to recommend it to the popular taste (“taste is merchandise,” said Brecht). I mean to say that *Le Crime de M. Lange* has a social function that has been honored rather more by appreciative gestures than critical analyses. Far from being the unique creation of Renoir’s “personal moral universe,” or confirming some monolithic Renoir “world-view,” (Sesonske, 188) *Le Crime de M. Lange* is very much a product of specific historical circumstances. To plead that the film “transcends the politics of the moment” is to elect an idealist criticism designed to obscure the historical importance of the film for us today and to mystify the political activism of the filmmakers involved. (1986, 70-1)


14 In a strange episode that reflects the political tensions of the period, Renoir, along with much of the left-wing press, denounced Carné’s film as fascist. Carné mentioned this episode in his autobiography: “À peine *Le Quai des brumes* était-il sorti, que le réalisateur de *La Chienne* s’en alla clamer partout qu’il s’agissait d’un film fasciste!” (117). See Andrew (1995, 267-9) regarding Renoir’s vicious attack on Carné’s *Le Quai des brumes* (which he contemptuously dubbed “le cul des brèmes”).

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Ironically, Renoir, who came to be identified as the major film director of the French left, was clearly sensitive about his privileged origins. In 1936, he wrote about the need to return cinema to its "popular" roots:

Les réalisateurs de films sont des fils de bourgeois. Ils apportent dans cette carrière les faiblesses de leur classe décadente. Le public des salles d'exclusivités, qui décide bien souvent du succès des films au départ, est aussi un public de bourgeois. Ce n'est qu'après qu'ils ont sanctionné le succès d'un film que les salles des quartiers se précipitent pour le voir. De sorte que le cinéma, cet art essentiellement populaire, est fabriqué et dirigé par des gens qui, nous le voyons d'année en année, s'éloignent de plus en plus du peuple. Car le fossé qui se creuse entre le Paris de beaux quartiers et le Paris qui travaille, entre l'Etoile d'une part, et la Bastille de l'autre, devient chaque jour de plus en plus profond. Bientôt il sera infranchissable, et la capitale de la France sera divisée en deux villes ennemies. Sans plus attendre, il faut restituer le cinéma français au peuple de France. Il faut l'arracher aux marchands de la mise en scène, aux commerçants truqueurs, aux vedettes falsifiées. (1974b, 81-2)

Renoir's highly cooperative style of filmmaking (see Strebel, 169-76, in this regard) was in a way reflected by the idealized collective of artists/workers depicted in Le Crime de M. Lange.

In a 1936 article, Renoir opposed any limitation of foreign films screened in France as a way of protecting the domestic film industry: "Parlons d'abord de la question des films étrangers. Je considère le contingentement comme une stupidité arbitraire. [...] je suis de ces naïfs qui croient encore que le cinématographe peut présenter un intérêt culturel et que cet intérêt culturel ne se limite pas aux seules productions françaises" (1974b, 82).

The same year, Renoir began a speech in London by saying he would never shoot a film in Great Britain (as René Clair had done in 1936 with The Ghost Goes West):

Mon plaisir d'être parmi vous est immense, et je tiens tout de suite à vous remercier de votre accueil en vous affirmant que je ne ferai jamais de films en Angleterre. En effet, les films que j'y ferai seraient fort mauvais, tandis que ceux que vous faites sont fort beaux, et je crois que notre manière de lutter ensemble pour un bon cinématographe international, c'est que vous continuiez à faire de bons films anglais, et que de notre côté nous essayions de faire pour le mieux en
France. [...] Qu'on ne s'y trompe pas. Je ne suis pas contre l'adoption par notre cinéma des techniciens ou d'artistes étrangers. Au contraire, ces camarades nouveaux nous arrivent tout imprégnés du parfum de leur folklore national, et leur apport à notre métier ne peut être qu'un enrichissement. (1974b, 46)

20 Hayward sees a "paradox" in the fact that regular state-sponsored subsidization has not arrested French cinema's decline: "ever since Word War II, France's cinema, more than that of any other Western country, has been at the receiving end of state aid and legislation intended to facilitate its growth. Yet the more it receives, the less productive it becomes, both in terms of film output and in terms of generating income by increasing audience numbers" (38).

21 Satyajit Ray, who met Renoir in India while he was working on The River, refers to his "charming broken English" (113). By then, Renoir had been living in the United States for nearly a decade. He was, at least, more willing to learn English than had been Victor Hugo.

22 See Faulkner (1986, 171-2), and Bertin (320-5), concerning the conditions of production of this film.

23 In Ma Vie et mes films, Renoir illustrated his idea in the form of culinary conviviality, a device he used often in La Grande Illusion: "Lorsqu'un fermier français se trouve à dîner à la même table qu'un financier français, ces deux Français n'ont rien à se dire. Ce qui intéresse l'un laisse l'autre parfaitement indifférent. Mais si nous imaginons une réunion entre notre fermier français et un fermier chinois, ils auront des tas de choses à se raconter" (Renoir 1974a, 260).

24 For a discussion of this film, see Durgnat (347-56).

25 For the obviously extreme example of certain low-grade French comedies, see Jeancolas.

26 Of course, the mere capacity for global distribution of cultural products does not necessarily make them less chauvinistic or narrowly provincial, as is visible in many American films.

27 See Buchsbaum 1996 for a discussion of Renoir's evolution concerning nationalism during the late 1930s.
28 Sesonske suggests this was an early case of color-blind casting, making Toni "one of the very few 1930s films in which a black man is treated as simply another person" (167).

29 Puccini's opera (1900) was itself based on an 1887 French play by Victorien Sardou, in which Sarah Bernhardt played the title role.

30 This was not an unusual practice for Renoir. In his 1932 film, Boudu sauvé des eaux, he transformed the René Fauchois play it was based on, including the main character, brilliantly played by Michel Simon. Instead of adopting the values of his benefactor, Boudu, the anarchistic loiterer and saunterer, subverts them, introducing ludic aimlessness into an overly orderly bourgeois world. Unlike Chaplin's lovable tramp, Boudu is loud, aggressive, and visibly filthy. Despite his childishness, neither is he asexual in the Chaplinesque mode. Renoir's adaptation/ transformation has been universally admired by critics, while the theatrical source of his film has generally been given short shrift. As Bazin put it, "Jean Renoir s'est inspiré de la pièce de René Fauchois dans Boudu sauvé des eaux mais il en a fait une œuvre probablement supérieure à l'original et qui l'éclipse" (1959, 77). However, Richard Boston (23-9) has quite rightly pointed out that Fauchois's play, a witty and irreverent work in its own right, includes several delightful comic episodes that are too often attributed exclusively to Renoir.

31 In "Family Diversions: French Popular Cinema and the Music-Hall," Andrew compares Le Crime de M. Lange to the Mistinguett star vehicle Rigolboche (directed by Christian-Jacque, 1936), which provides a very different representation of the success of a popular artist during this period.

32 "La lecture politique du Crime n'est pas niable: bien plus à gauche que le Front populaire, Prévert et Octobre communient dans le même espoir d'un changement profond par le moyen de l'action collective. Par la gentillesse dont elle est empreinte, cette fable généreuse annonce l'état d'esprit des congés payés, des auberges de jeunesse, du sport populaire" (Ory 1990, 284). By the time Renoir made La Règle du jeu, both the promise of the Popular Front and the "gentillesse" of his earlier films had dissipated.
(although paid vacations for French workers remained as a lasting achievement of the short-lived movement).

33 For discussions of the famous 360° shot of the courtyard during the murder of Batala, see Bazin (1971, 41-2), Sesonske (216), and Tifft (1996, 69-70).

34 See Chase for a discussion of Le Crime as an instance of “popular justice.”

35 As A. Williams (66-70) and Durgnat (118) point out, Le Crime de M. Lange referred back to the popularity of adventure stories published in weekly installments, and to their screen equivalents. The silent era had brought the phenomenon of crime/mystery series, often based on American dime novels, such as Arizona Bill (1912-14) and Nick Carter (1909-12). The best known serial melodramas, Fantômas (1913-14) and Les Vampires (1915-16), were directed by Louis Feuillade (and were later much admired by the Surrealists). Lange’s very successful creation, “Arizona Jim,” evokes the early Westerns, shot in the Camargue, that starred Joe Hamman as Arizona Bill.

36 See Buchsbaum (1988, 155-66) specifically for the “Role of Renoir” in La Vie.

37 Chapter 8 of Ory 1994 is devoted to French cinema during this period. See Ory (1994, 448-62), and Buchsbaum (1988, 250-70), for discussions of La Marseillaise as a Frontist film. See Garrity for other examples of representations of the French Revolution in film.

38 See Buchsbaum (1988, 252), and Michelson in this regard.

39 For the political context before and during the filming of La Marseillaise, see Lebovics.

40 From the “Night of 19 September” entry in Goethe’s Campaign in France 1792 (646-53).

41 The military commander of the palace, who wants to fight to the bitter end, is named de la Chesnaye, a name Renoir would use again in La Règle du jeu.

42 This scene, which includes a characterization of Louis XVI as a wimp (“une grosse chiffé”), and an admonition against women speaking at public meetings, calls out for an analysis of gender stereotypes.
See chapter 1 of Sorlin for an overview of such films from four European countries.

For examples of reactions to the film at the time of its release, see Faulkner (1979, 105), and Bertin (179).

During and immediately after the war, a wide range of artistic productions had more directly registered reactions of shock and revulsion at the unprecedented level of carnage. To cite just three examples, Henri Barbusse’s novel *Le Feu* (1916) vividly described the death and destruction of trench warfare; Abel Gance’s film *J'accuse* (1919) attacked the perceived indifference of civilians while soldiers were dying in battle; and Maurice Ravel’s *La Valse* (1919) provided a musical autopsy of the genteel pre-war Viennese Waltz tradition.

See Vincendeau 1992 for an analysis of the class-based representations of other forms of popular entertainment in French films of the 1930s.

Two references to the word “illusion” within the dialogue of *La Grande Illusion*, one at the Hallbach camp and one just before they reach Switzerland, indicate that Renoir was not a naïve dreamer:

- L’ingénieur: “Encore quelques semaines et ça [le tunnel] sera terminé.”
- Maréchal: “La guerre sera finie avant, mon vieux!”
- L’ingénieur: “Tu te fais des illusions.”
- Maréchal: “Tu crois?”

- Maréchal: “Faut bien qu’on la finisse, cette putain de guerre, non? En espérant que c’est la dernière.”
- Rosenthal: “Tu te fais des illusions.”

See also Triggs regarding the use of different languages in *La Grande Illusion.*

The only reminder of the French colonial empire is a minor character known as “le Sénégalais,” who at Wintersborn attempts to strike up a conversation with Maréchal about the drawing he has just finished: “la justice poursuivant le crime.” Maréchal is as uninterested about this as he is about Pindar.

See Racine for an overview of the review’s reactions to the rise of nazism in Germany.

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For a comparison of the receptions of this film in 1937 and 1946, see Ferro (71-7).

See Renoir (1974b, 240-2) in this regard. For all his insistence on showing representatives of foreign countries as real individuals who share basic common traits with French nationals, Renoir was not above a certain level of stereotyping, applying in a 1937 article the apparently unsinkable “théorie des climats” that Montesquieu had articulated, in order to explain the superiority of French haute couture: “Tout repose sur les hommes, sur l’ambiance, sur le climat. Il y a des endroits où le climat est favorable au génie militaire, à l’industrie automobile; d’autres où le climat est favorable à la mode” (1974b, 129).

See Ma Vie et mes films (85-9) for Renoir’s account of a trip to Germany that coincided with Hitler’s coming to power.

See Bertin (85-7) in this regard. In a 1926 article, Renoir clearly presented his film as more than a psychological study or simple entertainment: “Si l’on veut bien y réfléchir, Nana n’est pas seulement une création sans moralité, une femme perdue par ses vices, c’est aussi la personnification de la déchéance d’une société” (1974b, 234). Interestingly, in Nana as in his 1938 film La Bête humaine, both adaptations of novels by Emile Zola, Renoir eliminated the French Second Empire context of impending war against Prussia.

For a brief overview of the paradoxical situation of French filmmaking during the Occupation, see Siclier (310-6). The Vichy regime also reorganized the French cinema industry, creating the national film school (I.D.H.E.C.) and the Comité d’organisation de l’Industrie Cinématographique (C.O.I.C.). Most of the structural changes implemented during the Occupation were retained after the Liberation, with the C.O.I.C. becoming the Centre National de la Cinématographie, or C.N.C. (for background on the creation and transformation of these institutions, see A. Williams, 249-51 and 276-8).

A case in point is provided by the murder of Séverine in Renoir’s La Bête humaine (1938), an adaptation of Emile Zola’s novel set in the burgeoning French
railway system (see Lagny for a detailed analysis of the narrative discontinuities and the “interplay of gazes” in this film). As was the case in Marcel Carné’s *Le Jour se lève* (1939), *La Bête humaine* stars Jean Gabin as a doomed worker, a role to which he was accustomed. Bazin devoted a few pages (1961, 79-82) to what he called the “mythologie” of Gabin and his special image in French cinematic history. See Vincendeau 1985 and 1993 for a discussion of Gabin’s status as an icon of working-class masculinity during the 1930s. Rearick (221-41) also discusses the Gabin “myth.”

57 See *Ma Vie et mes films* (131-35) for Renoir’s derisive comments on the song’s popularity.

58 In 1938, Renoir expressed his regret that the German public would not be able to see his film: “Dans *La Grande Illusion*, je me suis efforcé de montrer qu’en France on ne hait pas les Allemands. Le film a eu un gros succès. Non, il n’est pas meilleur qu’un autre, mais traduit simplement ce que le Français moyen, mon frère, pense de la guerre en général. [...] Ephémères comme la mode, nos films sombrent dans l’oubli et vont rejoindre ceux qui nous ont autrefois émus. Au moment précis où elle aurait pu être bienfaisante, *La Grande Illusion* est bannie du ‘Grand Reich’” (1974b, 241).

59 For an overview of the film’s tribulations, see Sesonske (438-40), and Faulkner (1979, 114-27).

60 See Sesonske (386-95) in this regard.

61 Along with their *vouvoiement* and their separate bedrooms, the artificial nature of their marriage is emphasized by their stiffness when greeting each other. While Christine effusively embraces Octave upon his arrival, she hardly notices Robert who, with much awkwardness—“Vous permettez?”—kisses her hand to greet her for the first time that morning.

62 The supercilious butler Corneille, for instance, expresses more contempt than de la Chesnaye when he repeatedly addresses Marceau and even the fearsome Schumacher as “mon ami.”

63 Strangely, Faulkner labels this idle aristocrat “that weak representative of the French *haute bourgeoisie*” (1986, 98).
The parallel between the two characters is reinforced by the oft-mentioned Austrian origin of de la Chesnaye's wife Christine, and by the couple's monarchical status at the center of a fractious, dying society.

See Tift 1992 for an analysis of farce and the historical moment of La Règle du jeu.

A 1956 Franco-Italian coproduction, Eléna et les hommes depicts a Polish princess who attempts to influence the political career of Rollan, a French general who is obviously modeled on Boulanger. As opposed to Barrès's grandiloquent treatment of the Boulanger episode, Renoir portrays it as comic opera, with the indecisive general ultimately renouncing power for love, while Eléna finds happiness with the unheroic but devoted Henri: "C’est bien simple, j’ai mon opinion là-dessus, je suis certain qu’Eléna, c’est Vénus" (Renoir 1974b, 281). Although Rollan exhibits a tendency toward fascist-style grandstanding in front of enthusiastic crowds, his saber-rattling against Germany turns to farce, as love conquers all and international tensions evaporate. Such a film, lightly depicting a Polish aristocrat, a French general, and the threat of a war with Germany, could probably not have been made in the 1930s.

The fact that Gabin’s character does not participate in the stage show in La Grande Illusion is consistent with this interpretation.

While none of the characters is presented as being overly intelligent, the sheer stupidity of some of them is brought out somewhat heavy-handedly through a recurring joke involving the young, sincere, and thus out-of-place Jacqueline, who is studying pre-Columbian art. When greeting her at la Colinière, Geneviève (whose apartment is full of Chinese art) asks: “C’est bien le chinois que tu apprends?” In a similar vein, the pompous Mme de la Bruyère, between references to her factory, thus sums up Jacqueline’s field of studies: “des histoires de nègres.” When told that the American continent was inhabited by “des Indiens,” she corrects herself: “évidemment, Buffalo Bill.”

This scene is one of the most vivid illustrations of the closed, deterministic environment of La Règle. The forest, normally an open space for the animals, gradually becomes a restricted and deadly enclosure as they are led towards the shooters.
See Conley for a Foucauldian analysis of the "illegalisms" of La Règle.

This tragedy of errors concludes the numerous parallel constructions that Sesonske (chapter 21) has detailed. For instance, during the stage show, the shots of the spectators reveal two illicit couples (Christine/Saint-Aubin, Lisette/Marceau), with each one being spied upon (by André and Schumacher, respectively).

In the last chapter of his autobiography, entitled "Feu la nation" (1974a, 259-62), Renoir somewhat hastily predicts the coming demise of national identities in favor of worldwide "horizontal" or class-based stratifications. Victor Hugo, it will be recalled, had similarly announced that the twentieth century would see the end of national borders within Europe.

**Chapter 7. An Open Ending**

In *L'Autre Cap*, Jacques Derrida refers to Paul Valéry's characterization of Europe, in a different historical context, as "une sorte de cap du vieux continent, un appendice occidental de l'Asie" (1004). Derrida's opposition between "une vieille Europe" and "une Europe qui n'existe pas encore," outlines the developing European identity by the very pursuit of it—an ongoing process rather than an established fact:


During the Cold War, many western Europeans thought of their smaller countries as precariously situated between the two rival superpowers, threatened by military domination on one side and by cultural asphyxiation on the other. The challenge for the would-be European pawns was to chart an independent course between this modern form of Charybdis and Scylla, by preserving an autonomous political and cultural
sphere in western Europe. This was the sort of apparently symmetrical threat that Régis Debray explored in *Les Empires contre l'Europe* (1985): “La puissance d'outre-Atlantique investit de l'intérieur les sociétés d'Europe; la puissance soviétique, bien qu'assise sur notre continent, les investit de l'extérieur, y compris dans cette portion de l'Europe qu'elle tient sous le joug” (113). Charles de Gaulle’s invocation of an autonomous Europe “de l'Atlantique à l'Oural”—at a time when the continent was in fact sharply divided—reflects this fear of effective elimination through absorption, gradual or otherwise, into one or the other of the global spheres of influence.

3 “L’Europe ne se fera pas d’un seul coup, ni dans une construction d’ensemble: elle se fera par des réalisations concrètes créant d’abord une solidarité de fait. Le rassemblement des nations européennes exige que l’opposition séculaire de la France et de l’Allemagne soit éliminée: l’action entreprise doit toucher au premier chef la France et l’Allemagne” (Schuman Declaration).

4 In his discussion of “The Borders of Europe,” Etienne Balibar argues, somewhat hastily, that the modern nation-state “is irreversibly coming undone” (218).

5 It should be recalled that the 1992 Maastricht Treaty created a “citizenship” of the European Union.

6 As Derrida reminds us, “Le nazisme n’est pas né dans le désert,” but on a continent that has long been proudly portrayed as a haven for “ce qu’on appelle aussi confusément la culture ou le monde de l’esprit” (1987, 179).

7 While several federalist projects had also surfaced in the aftermath of the First World War, they were all unsuccessful. See chapter 6 of Heater in this regard.

8 See Soucy (1995, 265-8 and 282-7) concerning Bertrand de Jouvenel’s prewar level of involvement with fascist ideology.


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