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The Shelley-Byron circle and the idea of Europe: Introduction

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The Shelley-Byron Circle and the Idea of Europe

Introduction

This book investigates how Percy Shelley, Lord Byron and their circle understood the idea of “Europe.” What geographical, political and ideological concepts did they associate with the term? Which locations, historical episodes and opposing “others” did they use to formulate those understandings? Through new readings of important texts--notably *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, *A Defence of Poetry* and *Hellas*--I analyze how Shelley and Byron construct ideas about Europe's culture, history, geography and future. In addition, the book gives sustained attention to under-read material, especially Percy Shelley's *Laon and Cythna* and Byron's *The Age of Bronze*, arguing that they are central to an understanding of the poets' work and thought. Shelley's and Byron's interest in Europe, I suggest, is part of an ongoing contemporary debate prompted by the political reshaping of the continent following the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars. By discussing the circle's writings in terms of contemporaneous materials (including political commentaries, travel writings, newspapers, treaties and diplomatic correspondence), I show how this wider context illuminates, and is illuminated by, the poets' ideas of Europe.

On one level therefore, this book provides fresh perspectives on Shelley's and Byron's writing and politics, particularly concerning their views on revolution, the classical tradition, the Greek War of Independence and European diplomacy. But the implications for Romantic studies go further still. As I outline below, scholars have recently invoked “cosmopolitanism” as a means to interpret Romantic writing outside its traditional relationship with nationalism. But there is a problem with this

approach: cosmopolitanism is an imprecise term, which, in its concern to transcend national loyalties, can too often ignore local contexts and steer perilously close to universalism. And although it presents itself as an idea “without limits,” unconstrained by parochial restrictions, cosmopolitanism nevertheless depends upon very particular advantages: wide travel, advanced education and mastery of many languages. For this reason, a new approach is needed which sees Romanticism outside both the limits of nationalism and the problematic connotations of cosmopolitanism or “world citizenship.” That approach can be found, this book argues, in a study of the idea of Europe, since an investigation of that concept engages with transnationalism as well as the specificities of particular locations and cultures. As I will show, “Europe” is a term rich with analytic possibilities: it can evoke totalizing narratives of common history or identity and also express a range of competing political and ideological systems. By focusing on ideas of Europe and tapping into this complexity, I show how the Shelley-Byron circle is interested in particular locations and local identities as well as transnational ideas about politics, history and culture. This book therefore sets out an approach--both to Shelley’s and Byron’s work and the Romantic period more generally--which can account equally for the local, the national and the transnational rather than privileging one perspective over the others. A focus on nationalist ideology in the period risks marginalizing important transnational concerns, especially regarding revolution, cultural encounter and the transmission of political and cultural ideas across borders. On the other hand, an over-emphasis on “cosmopolitanism” ignores the localism and sense of specific place that remains central to much Romantic writing. This book therefore explores the sometimes uneasy co-existence of local, national, transnational and even universalist perspectives, both within the works of individual writers and the debates

of their contemporary society. Acknowledging this interaction (and its consequent problems), leads to a more sophisticated understanding of identity and politics in the Romantic period.

The Idea of Europe

What does it mean to talk of Europe as an idea? In brief, I am interested in Europe as an ideological and cultural concept which is both “invented and experienced.”

“Europe”, I want to suggest, cannot be defined definitively; instead it signifies “a series of world-views, [...] of perspectives on reality, sometimes only dreamt or desired, sometimes experienced and realized.”¹ Furthermore, it is partly “an ideological program which can be mobilized and invoked” for specific purposes; rather than asking “what is Europe,” says Mikael af Malmberg, we should instead examine how various ideas of Europe are used for political and cultural ends: “how does Europe work as a practical category, as a classificatory scheme, as a cognitive frame?”² In this respect, Europe is continuously re-imagined in order to give particular meanings and order to the past and the future.³ Significantly, it is also a component in further constructions; it shapes perspectives on the world and acts as a “cognitive frame” for further interpretations of politics, cultures and so on. Ideas of Europe are thus both products and producers of complex interpretative processes.⁴

With this in mind, my book examines how ideas about Europe were constructed in the early nineteenth century, and how those ideas were subsequently used in ideological and political terms.

It would be misleading, however, to understand Europe simply as a “historically fabricated” invention.⁵ Europe, necessarily, is more than just an “idea” since it also consists of concrete applications: it is built upon (perceptions of) actual

reality and therefore affects understanding of the material world and its politics.⁶

Europe is not merely a “symbolic operation learned and communicated among human beings”; it is also a “reality of the material world and its human transformations by techniques and organization.”⁷ This relationship is symbiotic: figurative ideas of Europe stem from (interpretations of) actual historical events or geographical observations, and those ideas, in turn, reconstruct perceptions of Europe’s “reality.” In this respect, Europe exists on the porous boundaries between the real and the imagined, between the “material world” and its symbolic representations.

The Romantic Period: Europe and Nationalism

How have Romantic period studies imagined Europe thus far? Traditionally, the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries have been associated with emerging ideas of nationalism, which Stuart Woolf defines as the “identification of a people with the territorial nation state.”⁸ Histories of nationalism typically argue that the partition of Poland, the American and French Revolutions, and the local reactions to Napoleon’s conquests inspired a “blueprint for a political program of national autonomy, unity and identity.”⁹ This configures Europe as a place where hostile states are in perpetual competition and where peoples and communities increasingly define themselves by their distinctive “nationality.” Following this pattern, historians have attempted to show how British national identity emerged in the eighteenth century. Linda Colley suggests that the fifty years after 1776 were “one of the most formative periods [...] in the forging of British identity,” principally because prolonged conflict with France helped to shape a “particular sense of nationhood.”¹⁰ Similarly, for Gerald Newman, the theoretical components of nationalism--awareness of common language, war against a (French) other, hostility to Francophile upper-class culture, new secular

ideas of progress--combined to form a “consuming fire of nationalist demands and actions” as early as the 1740s.¹¹

Faced with this familiar interpretation, many literary critics associate the writing of the period with the development and consolidation of the nation state. The tellingly-titled *Romanticism in National Context* argues that “the Romantics looked within their own nations, seeking to put down new roots in history, in folklore and folksong, in pure, indigenous traditions of language, speech and expression, in bards and ballads.”¹² In this sense therefore, ideas about literary tradition and national history are mutually constitutive: some critics have suggested, for instance, that Walter Scott’s and William Wordsworth’s writings assert a nationalist purpose by “emphasizing the connection of a people to its land” and by connecting “nineteenth-century readers to the national past that defines them.”¹³ This also has implications for how British writing engages with “foreign” influences and peoples. Although the post-Revolutionary period witnessed the migration of ideas and literatures “across social, cultural, national borders,” Peter Mortensen characterizes this interconnection as a “phobic” relationship: the 1790s saw a rise in so-called “Europhobic” discourse, or a fear of “alien” influences in British literature and politics.¹⁴ This association of the Romantic period with nationalism has two important consequences. Firstly, it constructs Europe as a foreign space distinct and detached from Britain. As I will demonstrate, this is not necessarily a pervasive view: many of the individuals I discuss, regardless of political persuasion, see Britain as being inseparably connected to a shared European culture, history and politics. Secondly, this emphasis on nationalism interprets Europe as a patchwork of hostile states, divided by impenetrable cultural and political borders. Again, this is only one of many competing perspectives: ideas about rivalry and competition exist alongside

assumptions of mutual interest, common cultural foundations and even dreams of past and future unanimity. In order to appreciate the full complexity of ideas about Europe in the Romantic period, it is therefore necessary to challenge and moderate any over-emphasis on nationalism.

Beyond the Nation

How, though, is it possible to configure the period outside the terminology of nationalism? Recent theorists have investigated how texts, identities and communities refuse to be confined by national boundaries. After all, nationalism can only be understood in the context of “internationality,” since it constructs itself on the difference of “others” and on the interaction of purportedly discrete spaces and communities.¹⁵ For this reason, nationalism must necessarily co-exist with “transnationalism,” a term which, according to Stephen Vertovec, “broadly refers to multiple ties and interactions linking people and institutions across the borders of nation states.”¹⁶

A number of scholars have adopted a “transnational” approach by analyzing cultural encounters and texts outside the framework of nationalism. In Mary Louise Pratt’s terminology, these studies often talk about “contact zones”, or “social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash,” and mutually influence one another. Such “transcultural” interplay challenges the straightforward construction of nationhood in direct opposition to an enemy.¹⁷ Texts too can be understood in terms of transcultural circulation: literary works often travel beyond their culture of origin, either in translation or in their original language. Rather than being inseparably wedded to a particular nation or locality, they circulate in new contexts, both “locally inflected and translocally mobile.”¹⁸ Understanding these exchanges can therefore reconfigure

texts and identity politics outside the language of nationality without problematically dissolving the notions of community and people in a “postnational” abstraction.¹⁹ Importantly for my purposes, these perspectives also allow early nineteenth-century Europe to be understood outside the dominant ideologies of nation-building.

Indeed, some historians have re-conceptualized the period by looking beyond the standard emphasis on the rise of popular nationalisms and the nation state. Instead, Napoleonic rule imposed a measure of administrative and cultural uniformity across the continent, while the growth of empires caused transnational governmental procedures to be “exported to the rest of the world.”²⁰ Felicity Nussbaum’s dissatisfaction with the restrictive “boundaries of national histories and literatures” have led her to focus on “worldwide crossings” of people, goods and ideas in order to show the interaction of “the local, the regional and the global” in eighteenth-century cultural and commercial encounters. Significantly, this critique of nationalism opens analytical space for the local as well as the transnational, since it explores how “the regional, national, transnational and global are mutually implicated” rather than one obscuring or dominating the others.²¹

Several recent studies have examined these “worldwide crossings” in Romantic literary culture, arguing that the period was characterized by “*commerce des lumières* (exchange of enlightened ideas),” “transnational dialogue” and “new forms of cosmopolitan identities and politics.”²² Margaret Cohen and Carolyn Dever, for example, suggest that the early nineteenth-century novel developed not through “nationally distinct trajectories” but through “intersections and interactions among texts, readers, writers and publishing and critical institutions that linked together Britain and France.”²³ Central to this is the idea of “sentimental communities” of readers: the international popularity of works by Goethe, Staël and Rousseau created

“transnational communities” linked by a shared emotional sympathy that “transcends nations, classes, and patriarchal families.”²⁴ Karen O’Brien argues that eighteenth-century historians--Voltaire, William Robertson, Edward Gibbon--wrote “cosmopolitan histories” which explore “how national identities intersect with [...] one another” in “a common European civilization.”²⁵ Robertson, for example, discusses how the kingdoms of Europe, “formerly single and disjointed, became so thoroughly acquainted, and so intimately connected with each other, as to form one great political system.”²⁶

It might seem, therefore, that my interest in the idea of Europe is connected to this recent work on Romantic period “cosmopolitanism,” especially since I discuss ideas not necessarily grounded in nationalist ideology. In fact, however, there are several problems with using cosmopolitanism as an interpretative framework. The first regards the term “cosmopolitanism” itself.²⁷ Generally used to posit some sort of opposition to local loyalties and nationalisms, it “has acquired so many nuances and meanings as to negate its role as a unifying ethic.” Not only do the sheer range of those varieties (for example, Christian, bourgeois, feminist, or socialist cosmopolitanisms) invest the term with bewildering vagueness, but it also implies a “detached loyalty” to abstract concepts--for example, “the human”--which are “incapable [...] of providing any kind of political purchase.”²⁸ In brief, “the term cosmopolitanism is too imprecise and widely contested to serve as a useful register of interactions between homelands and others.” For example, it might denote someone utterly without roots or affiliations and alienated from society, or a “citizen of the world,” equally “at home” in different cultures.²⁹

There are other problems too. Thomas Schlereth defines cosmopolitanism as “an attitude of mind that attempts to transcend chauvinistic national loyalties or

parochial prejudices.” However, this suggests that the cosmopolitan is somehow removed from contexts and that it steers dangerously close to “universalism,” an erasure of difference which posits “an ideal for all men at all times.” Such pretension to universality is especially problematic because cosmopolitanism typically represents the “social aspiration of the elite intellectual class”: it is associated with the sophistication and wide travel of the rich and intellectuals.³⁰ This is a very considerable problem for those who would emphasize the unconventional or innovatory perspectives afforded by cosmopolitanism. Some have even suggested that the social exclusivity of “cosmopolitan taste” makes it politically reactionary, although it should be remembered too that cosmopolitanism’s refusal to be confined by a political state means it is sometimes “at odds with the dominant culture and questions its hegemony.”³¹ Indeed, radical writers--including, as I will show, the Shelley-Byron circle--sometimes manage to be both anti-establishment and totalizing when they attack governments for suppressing supposedly universal, but often quite personal, political ideals.³²

Regardless of the complex political connotations, cosmopolitanism in the sense of wide travel, advanced education and mastery of many languages is necessarily a minority experience. It might present itself as an idea unconstrained by local loyalties or parochial restrictions, but it nevertheless depends upon very particular circumstances. Given that cosmopolitanism in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries is so dependent on educational and financial advantages, to what extent does it really permit the erasure of cultural barriers that it purports to accomplish?

Europe: Beyond Nationalism and Cosmopolitanism

This book builds upon studies of Romantic period cosmopolitanism by seeking to view the period and its literature outside the framework of nationalism. However, I am not trying to identify and celebrate a “cosmopolitan Europe,” nor do I use “European” as a synonym for “cosmopolitan ideal.” Instead, I am interested in the range of meanings Europe possesses in the period. “Europe,” I will argue, is a term rich with analytic possibilities: it is used to evoke totalizing narratives of common history or identity and to express and legitimize numerous political and ideological systems. As Étienne Balibar says:

The name of Europe [...] has been connected to cosmopolitan projects, to claims of imperial hegemony [...] to the resistance that they provoked, to programs dividing up the world and expanding ‘civilization’ [...], to the rivalry of ‘blocs’ that disputed legitimate possession of it, to the creation of a ‘zone of prosperity’ north of the Mediterranean.³³

My purpose is to analyze the different interpretations and implications of “Europe” in the Shelley-Byron circle and, more widely, in early nineteenth-century Britain. By studying these various representations, I approach the period and its writing beyond the restrictive boundaries of nationalism, without falling into the vague and problematic connotations of cosmopolitanism or “world citizenship.”

In this sense, therefore, I am following recent work which, by reconsidering ideas about cosmopolitanism and nationalism, seeks new ways to understand the politics of identity and community. Bruce Robbins redefines cosmopolitanism as “an impulse [...] to transcend partiality that is itself partial”: it looks beyond local specificity and is also a product of it. In this respect, it is a methodological median between “false universalism” (which purports to erase or ignore local differences and

boundaries) and a restrictive preoccupation with those parochial divisions.³⁴

Nussbaum hopes for something similar when she calls for eighteenth-century “global studies,” which both “questions the boundaries of national histories” and avoids a homogenizing and universalist perspective.³⁵ My contention here is that a nuanced study of the idea of Europe can effect this possibility, principally because it has to acknowledge how locally-grounded and transnational ideas interact to construct concepts and interpretations of Europe.

Furthermore, it may well be unhistorical to speak of a binary distinction between nationalism and cosmopolitanism. In this case, new approaches are needed to conceptualize the period’s identity and community politics more fully. As several historians have observed, eighteenth and nineteenth-century intellectuals and revolutionaries often sought to represent their ideals and assumptions as simultaneously national, European and universal: “by representing French culture as the leading edge of civilization, [French thinkers] identified the cause of humanity with their own national causes and saw themselves at the same time as French patriots and upstanding citizens of a cosmopolitan Republic of Letters.”³⁶ For this reason, my analysis of ideas about Europe acknowledges the imbrication, rather than the incompatibility, of nationalist and transnational perspectives.

I am seeking, therefore, to complicate the concepts of nationalism and cosmopolitanism, and to understand the period in terms of the interactions and frictions between localism and universalism. Noting that “neither cosmopolitanism nor localism/nationalism are possible as pure positions,” David Simpson asks whether models can be found to negotiate these perspectives without succumbing absolutely to either of them.³⁷ What I am suggesting is that an investigation into the meanings of Europe assists this project, moving understandings of (Romantic) identity politics in

new directions and encompassing the full richness of the period's (trans)nationalism. Of course, this is not to imply that a European viewpoint is entirely unproblematic. As I will show, it can privilege local specificity--the supposed perfection of classical Greece, for example--just as it can construct Eurocentric universalisms. But since it can encompass both these perspectives, analysis of the idea of Europe can do full justice to conceptions of identity and society in the period.

The Idea of Europe and the Historical Moment

Why, though, am I focusing on the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries?

Many historians associate this period with significant developments in the history of the idea of Europe, particularly a decline in the notion of "Christendom" and its gradual replacement with secular understandings of collective European identity--for instance, shared "arts and inventions" or military superiority.³⁸ In this way, Europe came to be understood as a system of states held together by civil sovereignty, commerce and diplomatic mechanisms designed to prevent religious wars and the growth of a hegemonic power.³⁹ Montesquieu, for example, defined Europe in terms of "laws, morality, aristocracy, monarchy and liberty," treating it not just as geographical term, but also a "cultural, political and intellectual entity with its own history and its own distinctive features."⁴⁰ Enrique Dussel also traces to the eighteenth century the influential idea that Europe has its intellectual and cultural origins in ancient Greece: an ideological construct which ignores how Greek texts were mediated through Muslim civilizations and insists that Greek culture is "exclusively western and European."⁴¹

Furthermore, the tumultuous events following 1789 prompted prolonged competition over the political and ideological shape of Europe. How should it be

organized? What intellectual frameworks should justify or modify that structure?

The Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars can thus be seen partly as a struggle between competing ideas of Europe: should it be a homogeneously ruled empire, a network of rival regions, or an “association of nations”?⁴² Other problems, which now seem very contemporary, also emerged or became more intense at this time: difficulties of European nationalisms and conflict; questions about the geographical limits of Europe; the necessity of maintaining a “balance of power”; overtly imperial relations between Europe and the rest of the world. These enquiries became fused with earlier ideas about Europe as “a civilization superior to all others” and as a “commercially integrated community,” creating new and influential tensions in nineteenth-century constructions of Europe.⁴³

As this implies, relations with the non-European world were especially crucial. Woolf argues that, through comparison with the extra-European world, “a distinctive conviction was forged of what constituted the essence of Europe’s superiority”, namely “role of the rational state” in furthering “civilization and progress.” This, in turn, “justified the material exploitation” of the rest of the world. The emergence of new disciplines--anatomy, anthropology and philology--allowed Europeans to construct themselves and their “others” upon purportedly scientific foundations and according to renewed conviction of a unique “civilizing mission.”⁴⁴ This is not an entirely uncontroversial view: recent scholarship has suggested that, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, “there seems to arise a new desire [...] to construct an idea of Europe as ‘complete knowledge of itself’”; that is, to assume that Europe can be understood without reference to the rest of the world. Instead of identifying an inferior other outside Europe, Montesquieu, Staël and others transferred its function onto a “negative part, or moment, of the European self”--most usually the Italian or

Iberian south. By this means, they translate the ancient “discussion between freedom (Europe) and despotism (Asia)” “into a modern latitudinal rhetoric of north and south.” These eighteenth-century ideas--of an industrious north and a backward south--still inform modern “expectations of what we take Europe to be.”⁴⁵

Of course, one could criticize these perspectives for oversimplifying or misrepresenting the (pre) Revolutionary period as an exclusive “point of origin” for certain ideas of Europe. However, the wider point can be accepted without reservation: the Romantic period, with its prolonged military and ideological conflicts, oversaw profound debate about Europe’s history and potential future. This book sets out to uncover how those ideas of Europe were constructed, both by the Shelley-Byron circle and in wider British culture of the early nineteenth century.

However, my focus differs from the above examinations of Europe in two principal ways. Firstly, these historians usually “narrate” Europe, tracing changes in the concept over long periods of time. They talk, for example, about the increasing importance of secularism, or the establishment of a modern “rational state.” Writing a smooth trajectory of this kind is not my purpose here. Instead, I aim to show how ideas of Europe contain several contradictory narratives which run concurrently and are in debate. Secondly, while historians of the idea of Europe often focus on broad strands of time and sources, my study is of a much more specific group of individuals: the Shelley-Byron circle. As Peter Burke has argued, investigating the use of the word “Europe” is all very well, but we need to be sure whose idea is under discussion and under what contexts and constraints those thoughts operate. By identifying “the ‘repertoire’ of concepts available for expressing group identity in different places and times,” we can edge towards a “social history of consciousness of Europe.”⁴⁶

Percy Shelley and Byron are especially suited to such an investigation, not only because they experienced and were fascinated by the socio-political events of the period which saw Europe re-defined, but also because their works, as I will explore in detail, engage with many different ways to approach and understand Europe. They write about travel across borders (both within and outside European space); they discuss political change and the prospects of a new future for Europe; they show (problematic) interest in non-European cultures; and they identify ancient Greece and Rome as the “foundations” of European culture. Of course, focusing on particular individuals brings its own difficulties--their radicalism, relative wealth and (classically-based) education undoubtedly affects their conceptualization of Europe. They understand Graeco-Roman civilization, for example, not just in terms of its antiquarian interest, but as a living tradition which frames and inspires an understanding of Europe’s shared present and future as well as its common past. Furthermore, their perspectives are shaped by a British radical interpretation of “liberty” as freedom from religion, censorship and political “despotism.” My purpose is not, therefore, to operate under the illusion that Shelley and Byron are straightforward representatives of all British ideas of Europe. Instead I want to show, firstly, how their specific reflections contribute to wider understandings of the history of the idea of Europe and, secondly, how a study of “Europe” can inform readings of their work, allowing us to see it outside the frameworks of nationalism and cosmopolitanism.

Throughout the following chapters I read Percy Shelley’s and Byron’s works alongside the writings of their “circle,” a term I use broadly to refer to those people they traveled, corresponded or met with in a defined period of their careers. In this respect, I contribute to recent work in Romantic studies which examines authors and

texts in terms of sociability and community.⁴⁷ In general terms, I show how the circle discussed topics of mutual interest and how works were composed as part of group dialogues about, say, Napoleon's downfall, the Greek War of Independence, or the prospect of radical revolution. But I also highlight more specific interconnections: the significance of Hobhouse as an author who shared many of Byron's intellectual interests in politics and travel writing; Percy Shelley's suggestion that Byron write a poem on the French Revolution, a proposal which eventually inspired his own *Laon and Cythna*; Byron's engagement with political debates about international relations in the 1820s, and his association, through Thomas Moore and Hobhouse, with radical and Whig politicians and ideas. By showing how these individuals are part of interwoven group conversations and how the circle interacts with wider cultural discourses, I hope to avoid both an isolating focus on discrete individuals and the totalizations which would come from generalizing too broadly about ideas of Europe in the period.

Structure and Argument

Each chapter in this book deals with a specific moment in the careers of Byron or Percy Shelley, tracing their use and interpretations of Europe at that exact time. In his analysis of how texts both document and "critically construct" history, James Chandler explains how "case studies" are used to comprehend and interpret specific events according to the concerns of later commentators. Historical understanding is thus constructed by a "dialogue" between two specific moments. Clearly, my book can itself be seen in these terms, since it examines historical ideas of Europe in terms of recent developments in Romantic period studies and burgeoning interest in the meanings of Europe. However, the Shelley-Byron circle also engages in this process,

constructing ideas of Europe through a dialogue between the ideological concerns of their present (for example, radical politics) and interpretations of ancient and recent historical events or “cases,” such as Waterloo or Greek-Persian conflict. Moreover, case studies strive to identify both a unique instant and the wider schemes or structures for comprehending concepts at that moment.⁴⁸ In this way, the Shelley-Byron circle’s writings reveal certain cultural structures and patterns for understanding Europe in the nineteenth century, but they are also partly anomalous, imparting unique viewpoints that, for specific reasons (for example, their political perspectives or aristocratic backgrounds), cannot be seen as entirely “representative” of those general structures.

Part one of this book introduces the key ways in which the Shelley-Byron circle construct ideas about Europe, focusing on *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage* and other contemporaneous travel writings. The circle’s real and imagined journeys through European spaces prompt reflections on borders, local particularity and national rivalry. However, those same journeys also posit a transnational politics and culture, based on classical inheritance and the shared political implications of the Napoleonic wars. Chapter one focuses on Byron’s trip to the Near East in 1809-11. It examines his depiction of borders within and between European states, before considering how these boundaries construct ideas of Europe and its “others.” The chapter also introduces the problem of Greece and its supposed legacy, considered central to the development of European civilization, but problematically located within the Ottoman Empire. Chapter two investigates how Byron, Percy Shelley and their circle respond to the post-Waterloo political situation in 1815-16. In the face of competing political programs for reorganizing the continent, they acknowledge a new multiplicity surrounding ideas of Europe. At the same time, however, they also

articulate a singular history which narrates Europe's development according to a specific ideological agenda determined mainly by their radical suspicion of reactionary politics. Furthermore, they understand Europe in terms of "freedom" and "liberty," concepts which simultaneously evoke and challenge the potential for European unity. Chapter three focuses on Byron's residence in Italy between 1817 and 1818. Byron uses specific places in the Italian states to frame discussions of European history: he describes the uniqueness of certain locations, especially Rome and Venice, but also uses them to construct a federal idea of Italian culture and history. Italy, in turn, becomes a symbol for understanding modern Europe, particularly the ongoing struggles of monarchy and "freedom," and the spread of a shared religion and classical heritage.

Part two builds upon the ideas about Europe elucidated in the first three chapters, especially regarding international politics, the classical world and experiences of travel. Percy Shelley uses these concepts about Europe for political ends: to articulate his interests in radical reform, and to generalize his interpretation of European culture into an ideal model for universal progress. Chapter four shows how, for the Shelley circle in 1817-18, ideas of Europe emerge from reflections on the French Revolution and its legacy. I also consider how the circle identifies border-zones between Europe and Asia (especially in Constantinople) and how America is both an "other" and a more perfect version of Europe. The chapter concludes by discussing how the Shelleys were attacked for being "uneuropean" because they held allegedly defective (sexual) mores. In chapter five, I turn to the texts in which Percy Shelley uses the word "Europe" most often: the *Defence of Poetry* and *Hellas*, both written in 1821. He writes about Europe in ways that are both totalizing and specific; in other words, he builds ideas of Europe on specific historical moments, but also

universalizes European civilization into an ideal for all places and periods. The chapter continues by considering the circle's concurrent interests in travel, translation and the (im)possibilities of transcultural communication.

Part three explores the Byron circle's engagements with actual political attempts to reshape Europe in the post-revolutionary period: the "congress system" and the Greek War of Independence. I discuss how Byron and other activists and politicians use discourses about Greece, revolution and (trans)nationalism to both advocate and critique practical models for Europe's future. Chapter six analyses the Byron circle's reactions to international diplomacy in 1822-23. While Byron and associates denounce oligarchical tyranny, the politicians responsible for the congress system use the language of peace and cooperation to construct very different ideas of Europe. Crucially however, as in chapter two, the word "liberty" is used to articulate and justify very different interpretations of Europe's history and future. Lastly, chapter seven deals with Byron's final trip to Greece in 1823-24. Greece and Europe come to be seen as inseparable concepts: support for the Greek War of Independence is intimately linked to enduring preoccupations with European cultural heritage and the possibility of radical change. Problematically though, differing interpretations of the War expose ideological conflict about the idea of Europe, the nature of "liberty" and the purposes of that radical cause.

These chapters therefore analyze a range of interweaving and competing concepts, which are particular to the circle itself, but also contribute to much wider debates about the future of Europe and the interpretation of its histories. In the face of this complexity, it might be tempting to conclude that Europe is "a mass of values" which "have simply accumulated without being ordered to form a harmonious synthesis."⁴⁹ But just because a complete "synthesis" is impossible, this does not

mean that identifiable positions and trends cannot be recognized and analyzed. Percy Shelley, Byron and their circle construct Europe using radical interpretations of “liberty” and “freedom”; they understand Europe through particular imaginings of ancient and modern Greek and Roman history; they define European spaces and cultures against Islamic and American others. As part of these processes, they identify both a flawed and aberrant Europe (of depots and restorations) and an alternative European future, mediated through their interests in radical politics and the prospect of revolution (or at least a process of reform). These Europes are entwined together, both conflicting with and conceptually dependent on one another. Most importantly, the Shelley-Byron circle uses the language of “Europe” in a particularizing and a universalizing manner. They identify specific historical events, places and writings which construct a uniquely European culture, whilst also generalizing that culture into a universal ideal for all humanity, a process which purports to disguise Europe’s particularity.

By exploring these ideas, this book reconsiders the circle’s ideas and politics, noting how its members engage with and use contemporary events for ideological purposes. Significantly though, Europe is both a discourse centered on political “debate and conflict” and has the “proportions of an unattainable idea.”⁵⁰ In other words, ideas of Europe are political programs and not just immaterial “ideas”; yet, at the same time, they have a utopian dimension, since they look for a social prospect beyond immediate material conditions. The language of Europe is a way to engage with (the frustrations of) political circumstances and to “go beyond” those restrictions by appealing to something more ideal. This tension is central, I think, to comprehending the politics of Percy Shelley, Byron and their circle. And nor do the implications of my argument end there. By showing how various texts engage with

ideas about Europe, I present an approach to the period outside the dominant language of nationalism and the potentially imprecise generalizations of cosmopolitanism.

“Europe” evokes a vocabulary able to articulate both transnationalism and the specificities of particular locations and cultures. For this reason, the study of the idea of Europe can enable new ways to understand the complexities of identity formation and the politics of community in the Romantic period and beyond.

¹ Peter Rietbergen, *Europe: A Cultural History* (New York: Routledge, 1998), xvii, xix.

² Mikael af Malmberg and Bo Stråth, eds., introduction to *The Meaning of Europe: Variety and Contention Within and Among Nations* (Oxford: Berg, 2002), 4, 10. See also Hayden White, “The Discourse of Europe and the Search for a European Identity,” in *Europe and the Other and Europe as the Other*, ed. Bo Stråth (Brussels: Peter Lang, 2000), 74.

³ See Bo Stråth, ed., introduction to *Myth and Memory in the Construction of Community: Historical Patterns in Europe and Beyond* (Brussels: Peter Lang, 2000), 19, 26.

⁴ See Hayden White, “Catastrophe, Communal Meaning and Mythic Discourse: The Uses of Myth in the Reconstruction of Society,” in Stråth, *Myth and Memory*, 49-50.

⁵ Gerard Delanty, *Inventing Europe: Idea, Identity, Reality* (London: Macmillan, 1995), 3, 7, 8.

⁶ Thorsten Botz-Bernstein, “Europe: Space, Spirit, Style,” *European Legacy* 8, no. 2 (2003): 179.

⁷ Eric Wolf, *Europe and the People Without History* (Berkeley: California University Press, 1997), xiv. See also J.G.A. Pocock, “Some Europes in Their History,” in *The Idea of Europe: From Antiquity to the European Union*, ed. Anthony Pagden

(Cambridge and Washington DC: Cambridge University Press / Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2002), 55-6.

⁸ Stuart Woolf, ed., *Nationalism in Europe: 1815 to the Present* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 2, 10.

⁹ Anthony D. Smith, *Nationalism: Theory, Ideology, History* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001), 87, 115.

¹⁰ Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 7, 1.

¹¹ Gerald Newman, *The Rise of English Nationalism: A Cultural History 1740-1830* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1987), 58-9, 50.

¹² Roy Porter and Mikuláš Teich, eds., *Romanticism in National Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 5.

¹³ Marlon B. Ross, "Romancing the Nation-State: The Poetics of Romantic Nationalism," in *Macropolitics of Nineteenth-Century Literature: Nationalism, Exoticism, Imperialism*, ed. Jonathan Arac and Harriet Ritvo (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania University Press, 1991), 75, 84.

¹⁴ Peter Mortensen, *British Romanticism and Continental Influences: Writing in an Age of Europhobia* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 8-9, 18. David Simpson also argues that British writers in the 1790s cultivated a "revolt against theory" or "culture of common sense" in reaction to the alleged rationalism of the French Jacobins. See *Romanticism, Nationalism and the Revolt Against Theory* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1993), 4, 40-2.

¹⁵ Jonathan Reé, "Cosmopolitanism and the Experience of Nationality," in *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling Beyond the Nation*, ed. Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1998), 83.

¹⁶ Steven Vertovec, "Conceiving and Researching Transnationalism," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 22, no. 2 (1999): 447, 456-7.

¹⁷ Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 4-7.

¹⁸ David Damrosch, *What is World Literature?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 4-6, 22. See also Azade Seyhan, *Writing Outside the Nation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 4-5, 9-10.

¹⁹ See Étienne Balibar, *We, the People of Europe: Reflections on Transnational Citizenship*, trans. James Swenson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), viii.

²⁰ Stuart Woolf, "The Construction of a European World-View in the Revolutionary-Napoleonic Years," *Past and Present* 137 (1992): 99-101.

²¹ Felicity Nussbaum, ed., introduction to *The Global Eighteenth Century* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 1, 3, 10.

²² Michael Scrivener, *The Cosmopolitan Ideal in the Age of Revolution and Reaction, 1776-1832* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2007), 1, 203, 209; Adriana Craciun, *British Women Writers and the French Revolution: Citizens of the World* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 9-11, 191-2.

²³ Margaret Cohen and Carolyn Dever, eds., introduction to *The Literary Channel: The Inter-National Invention of the Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 2-3, 19.

²⁴ Margaret Cohen, "Sentimental Communities" and April Alliston, "Transnational Sympathies, Imaginary Communities," in Cohen and Dever, *Literary Channel*, 106-7, 133.

²⁵ Karen O'Brien, *Narratives of Enlightenment: Cosmopolitan History from Voltaire to Gibbon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 1-2, 4.

²⁶ William Robertson, *The History of the Reign of the Emperor Charles V with A View of the Progress of Society in Europe [...]*, 3 vols. (Dublin: Watson, Ewing, Watson, 1769), 3:432-3.

²⁷ The word “cosmopolitan” derives from the Greek terms “*kosmos*” (world) and “*polis*” (city). According to Robert Fine and Robin Cohen, the word first referred to “someone who had no anchorage in any contemporary, real, city-state and was therefore a ‘citizen of the world.’” Fine and Cohen, “Four Cosmopolitan Moments,” in *Conceiving Cosmopolitanism: Theory, Context, Practice*, ed. Steven Vertovec and Robin Cohen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 137-39, 158-59.

²⁸ David Harvey, “Cosmopolitanism and the Banality of Geographical Evils,” *Public Culture* 12, no. 2 (2000): 529-30.

²⁹ David Simpson, “The Limits of Cosmopolitanism and the Case for Translation,” *European Romantic Review* 16, no. 2 (2005): 141-2. For a less skeptical account of the “conceptual and theoretical diversity” surrounding cosmopolitanism, see Steven Vertovec and Robin Cohen, introduction to *Conceiving Cosmopolitanism*, 1-22.

³⁰ Thomas J. Schlereth, *The Cosmopolitan Ideal in Enlightenment Thought: Its Form and Function in the Ideas of Franklin, Hume and Voltaire, 1694-1780* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1977), xii. See also Reitbergen, *Europe*, 459; Damrosch, *What is World Literature?*, 8.

³¹ Newman, *Rise of English Nationalism*, 39, 46; Dena Goodman, *The Republic of Letters: A Cultural History of the French Enlightenment* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 2.

³² See Schlereth, *Cosmopolitan Ideal*, 130.

³³ Balibar, *We, the People of Europe*, 10.

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- ³⁴ Bruce Robbins, “Actually Existing Cosmopolitanisms” and “Comparative Cosmopolitanisms,” in Cheah and Robbins, *Cosmopolitics*, 2, 258-60.
- ³⁵ Nussbaum, *Global Eighteenth Century*, 2-3.
- ³⁶ Goodman, *Republic of Letters*, 4. See also Roberto Dainotto, *Europe (in theory)* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 138-40; Martyn Thompson, “Ideas of Europe during the French Revolution and Napoleonic Wars,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 55, no. 1 (1994): 38-9.
- ³⁷ Simpson, “The Limits of Cosmopolitanism,” 146, 151-2.
- ³⁸ Denys Hay, *Europe: The Emergence of an Idea*, rev. ed. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1968), 116-20.
- ³⁹ Pocock, “Some Europes in Their History,” 65, 70. It was for this reason, says Pocock, that Burke feared the Revolution: the prospects of fanaticism and hegemony threatened to overwhelm the dominant view of Europe as a “civilization of states, commerce and manners.”
- ⁴⁰ M. E. Yapp, “Europe in the Turkish Mirror,” *Past and Present* 137 (1992): 143, 147.
- ⁴¹ Enrique Dussel, “Europe, Modernity and Eurocentrism,” *Nepantla: Views from the South* 1, no. 3 (2000): 468-9.
- ⁴² Biancamaria Fontana, “The Napoleonic Empire and the Europe of Nations,” in Pagden, *The Idea of Europe*, 127.
- ⁴³ Thompson, “Ideas of Europe,” 38, 58.
- ⁴⁴ Woolf, “Construction of a European World-View,” 74, 77-8.
- ⁴⁵ Dainotto, *Europe (in theory)*, 54-5, 62-3, 151, 8.
- ⁴⁶ Peter Burke, “Did Europe Exist Before 1700?” *History of European Ideas* 1, no. 1 (1980): 21.

⁴⁷ See Jeffrey N. Cox, *Poetry and Politics in the Cockney School: Keats, Shelley, Hunt and their Circle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 5, 8-9, 12; Cox, "Communal Romanticism," *European Romantic Review* 15, no. 2 (2004): 329-334; Greg Kucich, "Keats, Shelley, Byron and the Hunt Circle," in *The Cambridge Companion to English Literature, 1740-1830*, ed. Thomas Keymer and Jon Mee (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 263-79; Gillian Russell and Clare Tuite, eds., *Romantic Sociability: Social Networks and Literary Culture in Britain, 1770-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 1-20.

⁴⁸ James Chandler, *England in 1819: The Politics of Literary Culture and the Case of Romantic Historicism* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1998), xiv-xv, 39, 195-7, 102, 124, 250, 221-2, 207-8.

⁴⁹ Heikki Mikkeli, *Europe as an Idea and an Identity* (London: Macmillan, 1998), 209.

⁵⁰ Malmberg and Stråth, *The Meaning of Europe*, 4.