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**This Side of Paradise**

'Maastricht' and the Burden of European Unity

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Europe can be beautiful and dangerously stunning -- like a goddess, a *femme fatale* ... But that beloved Europe is Europe in the eye of the beholder; or more precisely: in the eye of an outsider, often coming from the East Coast of the United States.

Few can speak more engaging and seductive of Europe's attractiveness than American presidents and writers. They transform into 'Berliners' or portray Europe as the Paris of *rive gauche*, like Ernest Hemingway did; or Sinclair Lewis, one of Hemingway's fellow travellers, who described *their* Paris of the 1920s as, and I quote: a 'black web of an ancient and amoral European culture, in which they were caught'. And they loved it! This was something very different from American dreams. It was freedom.

But the scenery of their *années folles* was made up of the sinister aftermath of the unprecedented devastation of the Great War, to which decadent Europe had stumbled from the *fin de siècle*.

Hemingway's Europe may be exciting and sensual, but it also is *Europe in the eye of the beholder*. Many ordinary Europeans are afraid of this Europe, where things are not as they seem and paradoxes blind the eye.

Indeed, the clarity of 'this strange white light, this far-away blue sky' that colours the American horizon -- as described so strikingly by Henry James in his novella *The Europeans* -- is a light that is not to be found above the Old Continent. Europe's light is twilight. In Europe, dr. Faustus is never far away.

Within this European twilight, reflection, inaction and nostalgia lure. They represent an immense force: the force of *la durée*, 'la durée du temps perdu', 'the duration of lost time' -- and to that is connected the deep desire for conservatism and even melancholy, while adapting to change; a very European characteristic, so superiorly recorded by Henri Bergson and Marcel Proust.

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Europe is contradiction. This cradle of the Enlightenment, where the basic condition so often is a confusing surrealism; and one daunting and unanswerable question always lingers in the background.

What is Europe!?; this question, which was posed so provocatively by Margaret Thatcher in 1988.

And speaking of the Iron Lady in this regard, Thatcher herself had a rather clear-cut idea about what Europe was; and I quote her: 'these men!' -- as Margaret

Thatcher called her colleagues, heads of state and government, at European summits -- 'These men! All they do is anecdote away. Never get down to business. It so un-businesslike!' This was Europe to Thatcher.

Being a man myself, and an historian, what I will do for the next couple of minutes is anecdote away a bit on Europe's contemporary history ... this is an escape I have used before.

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It was in 1991, twenty-five years ago, when I was suck into this sphere of surrealism, in which the European politics live and the caprices of history rule.

It was a cold and misty day in early December 1991. I was a 15-year old boy in Maastricht. And I was unusually restless that day. And there was a reason. I knew that only a few minutes away from where I lived, the top dogs of European politics were gathering in a one-off effort to re-write European history against the backdrop of the fall of the Berlin Wall and German unification.

Given this, I couldn't bring myself to stay at home and do my homework. So I took my bike and headed to *Hotel Maastricht*, where the German Chancellor Helmut Kohl and his entourage were staying -- only one block away.

However, almost immediately after I had set off, fences blocked the way. From the position where I was halted, I could see only part of the Hotel and some

dark windows, packed in the fog of *high politics*. Hotel Maastricht had never been more distant.

After a short moment of dreaming at the fence, I quickly lost most of my interest in the epicentre of European politics -- which was bizarrely close, but turned out extremely distant at the same time. It was an estranging experience.

I was left puzzled by the seemingly lack of drama of the summit of Maastricht, and the writing of contemporary European history in action ... Although I remained intrigued by François Mitterrand, who kept emerging at unexpected places and at surprising moments in the 'Maastricht of television' of those days.

François Mitterrand, this 'fox from the Elysée', who spoke very few words, who gave the impression that he -- as the only one present -- fathomed what was going on really, and who together with Giulio *Il Divo* Andreotti had managed to manoeuvre Margaret Thatcher into the limbo of Brexit in the run-up to 'Maastricht', where the foundations for European Monetary Union were laid and Europe embarked on the path to a common currency.

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After my unsuccessful bike trip, I returned to my real world, informed by television and radio – and without the Internet.

My real world was not very European. It was mostly trans-Atlantic, American-oriented, consisting of the excitements of MTV, *Miami Vice*, the Gulf War, Helmut

Newton's supermodels and -- of course -- TV-channel *Eurosport*, where you could watch Michael 'Air' Jordan, Scotty Pippen and Karl 'The Mailman' Malone passing, dunking and shooting in the NBA; and that all for free on Saturday mornings, just before you had to leave the house for your own football match.

I realized this again only a few weeks ago, when I read the book *Between the World and Me*, written by Ta-Nehisi Coates, a correspondent of the American periodical *The Atlantic*. Coates is 40 years old, just like me, and just like this wonderful university, where we are gathered today.

Coates' book is a beautifully earnest and worrying letter to his almost adult son. It is about the place of a black man in present-day America. And it is a fierce denouncement of the make-believe and can-do logic that drives 'the Dream', which remains so eclipsing in his country.

As I read Coates' novel and became acquainted with his fearful and violent youth in Baltimore, I was struck by the familiarity of the adolescent world he sketched.

Matter-of-factly the world of Coates' youth differed greatly in almost every aspect from my own youth. But while reading Coates' *recherche du temps perdu* I realized that during my teens, I probably had been closer to this peer from the violent streets and fearful schools of Afro-American Baltimore, than I had been to any European peer from another European country.

Coates had watched the same sport games and listened to the same music, watched the same television. Moreover, I realized how deeply I knew about

Coates' struggle too. Before I read Tolstoy, Thomas Mann and Giuseppe Tomasi de Lampedusa during my student years, I had read Toni Morrison -- one of Coates intellectual mothers -- already during high school in Maastricht.

And at that time, in the early nineties, I was under the sincere impression that I understood what Morrison had written on Afro-American culture, while, at the same time, I couldn't grasp what Andreas Sinakowski was trying to say in his novel *Das Verhör*, in which he confessed having been a Stasi-agent in East Germany. This was telling ...

In the final part of his book, Coates tells about his first trip to Europe, to Paris to be precise -- his own version of Hemingway's European odyssey. A trip he did not make until in his thirties. He recounts how Paris has freed him. Why? Because in Europe people refrained from the self-deceiving in the name of a dream.

This is the inspirational Europe again: Europe in the eye of the beholder.

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In many aspects, my boyhood world of the nineties was closer to the 'projects' of Baltimore than it was to Prague, Pankow or Budapest, let alone to Belgrade or Sarajevo.

In that lucky in-between of history in North-Western Europe -- the period between the fall of the Berlin Wall and 9/11 -- our Western Europe seemed un-European untroubled.

This was a world of comfort, high Western hopes, carefree Western hubris, and even -- although fragile -- European dreams. Yet it also was the climax of a time, a time by then already lost.

The rape of Europe was never more benign than it was in the Western Europe of the post-war era. None of Europe's suitors has been sweeter to her than the United States: Europe's abduction during the *pax Americana* was like a dream; and the Western European successes of integration, peace and stability connected to that were very real and of unprecedented resilience.

But the fall of the Berlin Wall marked the beginning of the end of America as a foster parent of Western Europe, as it marked the end of Western Europe as such.

Now 25 years ago, the Treaty of Maastricht was Europe's first effort to deal with this totally new situation.

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It is our heavy responsibility today, to save the essential lessons of that very special and hopeful period in European history that was crowned by the Treaty

of Maastricht. And it is high time to realize how risky it will be to circumvent this responsibility, and the necessary exercise of self-study, any longer.

It therefore is very important to use the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Treaty of Maastricht as a moment to stimulate thinking and research that delves into the origins of today's Europe and its problems, through the looking glass of that landmark treaty, signed in this city.

Hence it is great news that the City of Maastricht and the Province of Limburg both seriously invest in this search for Europe, within the framework of the remembrance of 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Treaty of Maastricht. It is exciting, moreover, that the City of Maastricht is looking for ways to further strengthen scholarly work in this regard through cooperation with Maastricht University. Suchlike initiatives are urgently needed, as we urgently need a better understanding of where we came from and where we are heading.

What we also need very urgently is fresh and creative engagement with the old and daunting question that is popping up again these days: What is Europe? What should it be?

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As the 1940s progressed, the idealism inherent in many of the first and failed blueprints for a united Europe vanished in the wake of the Cold War, and its brute geographical logic of bipolarity, and its ultra-simple pattern of good and evil.

The reality of the Cold War was cruel in many aspects. Yet it also brought order and stability to an uncertain part of the world, full of fear, guilt and self-doubt. In a way, the Cold War gave 'Europe' the Europe it had deserved: split, fearful and subordinated.

However, it was against this backdrop of the Cold War, that Europe's most far-reaching project of hope and reconciliation took off, which would transform Western Europe into all sorts of new and renewed institutions producing stability, welfare and wellbeing. What was driving this European miracle?

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During those decades -- now and then -- particular self-confident men in West Germany, such as chancellors Konrad Adenauer, Helmut Schmidt, and Helmut Kohl recognized the mystifying European calls from the other bank of the river Rhine. This was the seduction of reconciliation calling. Its language wrapped in speeches and personal letters, and typified by utter non-violence; its choir of Sirens consisting of *les hommes politiques of la Grande Nation*.

At these moments of reciprocal brilliant weakness, those arrogant German leaders transformed themselves into men of passionate European action. Why?

Perhaps because they believed to have noticed a glimpse of realism that lived on an --up to then -- invisible moral high ground: a pan-European realism of a peculiar sort, romantic in nature, but just in feeling; a realism that overpowered

statistics and cost-benefit calculations: the realism of reconciliation and empathy; a realism that bordered a dream ...

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As the Cold War decades past, European integration became a surprisingly winning endeavour. But nobody knew what it entailed exactly -- what it meant. The Faustian question remained daunting. What was Europe? Was it a political project, or not? Was it Atlantic, or not? Who belonged to it? Was it morally driven? Or was it limited to the practicalities of the management of interdependence and globalization? Nobody knew.

After the implosion of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, the apparent success of European integration blinded out much of history and its caprices.

The historically overwhelming process of EU-enlargement, which kicked in during the early 1990s, was often perceived as the ultimate confirmation of European integration's enormous success. Although completely unforeseen, Europe's victory over history seemed very real indeed, and almost total in the eyes of many.

It sometimes was like Jean Monnet's dream come true. People saw the force of reconciliation reaching out further and further -- far beyond the boundaries of the Western European heartland of integration, going deeper and deeper into the Union's neighbourhoods.

But the enlargement-process transformed the EU into a potential major force of geopolitics too. And as the EU's unprecedented episode of enlargement unfolded, the simple and brute facts of geography set the stage for the return of history so few reckoned with.

At that moment in time, many Europeans still dreamed that the Faustian question about Europe's borders and 'we-and-them' could automatically go away, if time would allow the power of reconciliation to do its work, reaching out to the East and the South.

These dreaming Europeans were confident that time was on their side.

But this might have been a painful misperception, a form of wishful thinking, a tragic European mix of continental twilight and American purity.

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25 years after the signing of the treaty of Maastricht it is our responsibility to cut off the decade-long holiday of history and politics that we, Western Europeans, were allowed to enjoy. We must re-engage ourselves in the new old world of growing uncertainty, bluff, intimidation and geopolitics. And in doing so, we must do the utmost to re-discover the history of European integration as the source of strength that can help us to weather today's storms.

This is the heavy burden of 'Maastricht'; that we must practice what we have been preaching in the founding decades of European integration and in our European treaties -- but now in a world of escalating crises and growing European vulnerability and insecurity.

We must find new ways to safeguard the high hopes of human rights, the ideals of reconciliation, and the audacity of anti-totalitarianism on which the glory of the post-war West, and Western Europe, thrive. And we must search for innovative old ways to re-utilize these Western virtues to stimulate empathy and cohesion among Europeans and European member-states in today's European Union.

The impetus for winning the peace again has to come from those, who experienced the benefits of European integration most profoundly. That is us: the Europeans from the Western European heartland of integration, the Europeans of the Benelux and the Franco-German axis, the Europeans that form the core of the Eurozone and Wolfgang Schäuble's *Kern-Europa*.

We have to be creative and be brave enough to re-think and re-imagine our Europe in order to prevent it from transforming into a doomed *ancien regime*.

Moreover, it is up to us Europeans, to re-inspire that post-war Atlantis; that is anchored so deeply in the identity of our European generation and its outlook. And in this we can no longer allow ourselves to wait and see, entrusting that our American partners will provide guidance and security when need be -- the Europe in which we could afford that attitude has vanished; just like the days,

when that 'song you loved would have its moment on the radio and then disappear into the nothing'.

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*Lady's and gentlemen,*

Another fellow traveller of Hemingway in the Paris of the 1920s was the young and handsome David Bruce, later the first American ambassador to post-war Paris. In the 1920s Bruce, like so many Americans of his class, began 'his love affair with Europe'.

His European adventures formed the stepping stone for Bruce becoming the chief behind-the-scenes manager of the Marshall Plan *and* powerful facilitator of European integration through American ways and means during the 1940s and 1950s, and 1960s, first as the ambassador to Paris, then as the American ambassador to Bonn, and then as the ambassador to London.

A friend and contemporary of David Bruce -- and yet another fellow traveller of Hemingway in Paris -- was the famous American novelist F. Scott Fitzgerald, who had burst upon the American literary scene in 1920 with the daring novel *This Side of Paradise*.

Fitzgerald had used David Bruce as a source of inspiration for the main character in the novel, a young and handsome 'romantic egotist' with a curious desire for American *Europeaness*.

Fitzgerald became the prime interpreter of his generation: this American generation that would start a passionate love affair with desperate Europe and would make *building Europe* their post-war mission. The Treaty of Maastricht marked the closing of their time. Their leaving of the scene brings Europe closer to its old self again.

The Treaty of Maastricht marks this passage from *pax Americana* into a more 'European' European history again.

The encounter with the European *self* this entails, is far from an easy affair for us -- to put it very mildly. Indeed, it will be an enormous challenge for the Europe of integration, cooperation and reconciliation to survive this confrontation with this deeper 'European self', which has its roots in histories that predate the *pax Americana* and the Cold War; and brings the daunting question to the forefront again. What is Europe?

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*Lady's and gentlemen, I come to a close now ...*

European brilliance stems from doubt, and from the hunger for knowledge and insight that accompanies it. It stems from keeping on thinking and searching for roots. It stems from trying to better understand *la condition humaine* and figuring out how to counter-balance its cruelties. It stems from oscillating between enlightenment and romanticism. It stems from self-knowledge and

realism. It stems from both trans-Atlantic and continental inspiration. It stems from combating estrangement. And it stems from culture, and the art of politics.

The day that Europe becomes lazy or complacent in such matters will be the day that catastrophe comes a step closer again at this side of paradise; this side of paradise, where paradise still seems so close in many aspects.

What we need to ward off this doomsday scenario is cold realism about the facts, the figures, and people's needs; but on top of that -- and what we need above all -- we need imagination: *Fantasia* to speak with the 17<sup>th</sup> century philosopher Giambattista Vico -- because, ultimately, for Europe, grace comes through contact with the other side.

THANK YOU!