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3  Republics of Letters

WHAT IS EUROPEAN LITERATURE?

Which literature, whose world?
—DAVID DAMROSCH, *What Is World Literature?*

The concept of a republic of letters—ideal of “an intellectual community transcending space and time” (Dibon 26)—had been circulating widely in Europe for quite some time. Never before or after the publication of the monthly *Nouvelles de la République des Lettres*, however, had the republic seemed such a reality: from 1684 to 1687, Pierre Bayle had run and edited the journal with the purpose of transcending national boundaries and of creating an atmosphere of cooperation and mutual toleration among cosmopolitan and learned readers. The son of a French Protestant family, Bayle knew well how constricting national boundaries and laws could be for intellectual research and curiosity: with the revocation of the Edict of Nantes and the reimposition of state religion in 1685, Bayle had to renounce his faith in order to continue his studies at the Jesuit school of Toulouse. When, after the completion of his courses, he reconverted to Protestantism, he became the victim of utter discrimination and intolerance. His works were attacked and censored, and his brother was even jailed because of Bayle’s “heretic” publications. When he managed to flee to Holland to join the Protestant Academy of Sedan, Bayle soon started to look for ways of overcoming state censorship and intellectual silencing. His ultimate aim was the creation of a class of scholars whose reflection would be free and unhindered by any state: truly cosmopolitan scholars, in short. His main instrument to reach such goal was the *Nouvelles*.

In 1751, only three years after the publication of *De l’esprit des lois*, Voltaire reminisced (in *Le siècle de Louis xiv*) “that happy century” crowned by the *Nouvelles* as the beginning of a new era of intellectual cooperation that the journals, salons, and—last but not the least—the *Encyclopédie* were now to bring back to life:
A Republic of Letters was established imperceptibly in Europe, despite wars and despite religious differences. All sciences, all arts thus received mutual help. Academies have formed this Republic. Italy and Russia have been united by literature [unies par les lettres]. English, Germans, and French went to study in Leyde. The famous physician Boerhaave was consulted at the same time by the pope and the czar. His greatest students have attracted foreigners in the same way, and have become in a way the doctors of all nations. Those who really know, in any branch of knowledge, have tightened their bond with this great society of learning, scattered everywhere, and everywhere independent. (Oeuvres historiques 1027)

As utopia, the Republic of Letters represented the possibility of a free flow and exchange of ideas unhindered by religious, political, or territorial divisions: As Annie Barnes has remarked, academies, universities, journals, symposia, public debates, and even epistolary exchanges promised the formation of a cosmopolitan “ideal state” based on “international intellectual cooperation” (qtd. in Goodman 15). What politics and religions divided, lettres, said Voltaire, united.

A Theory of Literature

Literature: this word is one of those vague terms that are so frequent in all languages . . . . Literature . . . designates, in all of Europe, knowledge of works of beauty, an acquaintance with history, poetry, eloquence, and criticism.

—Voltaire, Dictionnaire philosophique

What Voltaire meant by lettres is probably best understood by making reference to the homonymous entry signed by Louis, the chevalier de Jaucourt for the Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers, par une société de gens de lettres:

Letters. This word designates in general the enlightenment [lumières] produced by study, in particular the study of belles lettres or literature. In this last sense, one distinguishes literate people [gens de lettres], who only cultivate the erudition of varied and amusing amenities, from those who devote themselves to abstract sciences, and to sciences of a more sensible utility. Yet one cannot acquire them [abstract and practical sciences] to
an eminent degree without knowledge of *lettres*. Derives that *lettres* and proper sciences have, among them, the tightest bonds, liaisons, and relations. It is the task of the *Encyclopédie* to demonstrate that . . . *lettres* are the key to sciences; that sciences, on their part, contribute to the perfection of *lettres* . . . Grammar, Eloquence, Poetry, History, Criticism—in one word, all the parts of Literature (*Littérature*)—will be seriously defective, if the sciences do not reform and perfect them . . . one must be a philosopher and a literate man [*homme de lettres*] at the same time. (Diderot 9.409)\(^1\)

For *lettres* one must then not only understand literature (grammar, eloquence, poetry, history, and criticism), which limits itself to “knowledge.” *Lettres* also includes the capability to translate such knowledge into practice and into things “of a more sensible utility.” Letters are the synthesis of the arts, the “amusing” literature, and sciences, which are eminently useful. Such a synthesis is possible only through philosophy—the abstract science—that draws from the otherwise useless knowledge of literature a method for its usability. What is important, however, is first of all the difference between literature and letters. Hence the question of erudition: literature, in and by itself, is only a sterile, unproductive amenity. Its pleasure, as Jaucourt seems to notice with some degree of matter-of-fact skepticism, is the pleasure of talking well and name-dropping: to what possible use?

Sure enough, literature is necessary—the key, as it were—to produce anything of some utility. We know the logic from more recent discussions: the workforce—Jaucourt’s “trades”—needs “literature” (I guess today we call it “literacy”) to read manuals, be flexible, on top of a world that changes rapidly, and happy. Literature, in other words, *is* necessary—as a means, however, not as an end. Jaucourt writes: “Literature (*Littérature*), s.f. (Sciences, Belles Lettres, Antiq.). General term that indicates erudition, the knowledge of Belles Lettres and of the subjects related to it. Look under *Lettres*, where they are praised, and where has been demonstrated their intimate unity with proper Sciences” (Diderot 9.594). As a matter of fact, literature’s “intimate unity” with the sciences had been hardly “demonstrated” under *Lettres*, which had in fact taken such unity apodictically, while leaving to the whole *Encyclopédie* the arduous task to prove anything. (Brilliant method, in fact, if you think about it: it is not that I cannot demonstrate anything—I have already done it elsewhere!) At any rate, Jaucourt’s point is that literature should
be (whether or not this can be demonstrated) intimately tied to the practical sciences: left by itself, literature is vacuous knowledge, “erudition” and, in one word, “pedantry.” How unfortunate, then, that many men of letters, “today,” have become such pedantic bores. The very expression man of letters has turned—vox populi!—into a “most offensive insult” (“injure plus offensante”) (Diderot 9:594). All this has happened not because of literature’s own faults, but because its pedantic clerks have betrayed literature’s true mission. And what is, exactly, such mission? To offer a key to praxis, no doubt; but also, and more important, to create, maintain, and improve the perfectly polite and urbane society of the Republic of Letters:

Despite the bitter criticism of ignorant buffoons, we dare to assure our readers that only the letters (lettres) can polish the spirit, perfect taste, and lend grace to the Sciences. However, to be profound in Literature (Littérature), we must abandon those authors who do nothing but embellish things, and rest on the sources of antiquity: on the knowledge of religion, of politics, of government, of customs, of habits, of ceremonies, of games, of celebrations, of sacrifices and spectacles that was proper to ancient Greece and Rome. (Diderot 9.595)

Apart from a continuous (and not always convincing) attempt at separating lettres from littérature, what is clear is that a modern notion of literature, overcoming a stale cult of Greek and Roman antiquities, is prescribed here for the reader of the Encyclopédie: not literature as erudition, then, but literature as key to practical knowledge; not literature as a cult of the past, but as praxis on the present and creation of a progressive future; not literature as knowledge for knowledge’s sake, in the end, but literature as the formation of citizens—of a society of polished spirits, perfect taste, and graceful sciences. This is literature, in sum, understood as the basis of the transnational Republic of Letters of poets, doctors, and mathematicians already praised in Le siècle de Louis xiv.

In the entry on Lettres, Jaucourt had in fact advised his reader to “look under Literate People.” Here we find, penned by Voltaire, a very clear statement regarding the cosmopolitan nature of littérature and lettres at the time of the Encyclopédie:

Literate People. This word corresponds to that of grammarians. For the Greeks and the Romans, grammanian was a man versed not only in grammar properly speaking, but in all branches of knowledge . . . . The
meaning of this word is today more extended than it was for the Greeks and the Romans. The Greeks only knew their language. The Romans studied only Greek. Today, the man of letters adds to the study of Greek and Latin also the study of Italian, Spanish, and, above all, English. (Diderot 7.599)

More sympathetic than Jaucourt to Greeks and Romans, Voltaire, too, is eager to stress the difference between literature—or, more precisely, the man of letters—of today and the one of the olden days. Once monolingual, this man has become today a true cosmopolite: he speaks in tongues! The knowledge he needs to possess is not simply that of his home country but that of the universe. Literature, in sum, is not national, but universal.

No matter if this man of letters was not a woman; and no matter if a hierarchy—“above all, English”—is already becoming apparent here: cosmopolitan in spirit, multilingual in language, Voltaire really saw the Republic of Letters as the true realization of a benign universalism—a multiculturalism of sorts already pitted against the yet unborn Nicolas Chauvin of Rochefort and against the already dead Jacques Bénigne Bossuet. Let me insist on this point: Voltaire believed in his own universalism. For its sake, he had (pitilessly) demoted Bossuet’s *Discours sur l’histoire universelle* to a “Discourse on a part of universal History” (Voltaire, *Oeuvres complètes* 11:158; emphasis mine). What was the problem with Bossuet? Voltaire did not have a word for it, but it was, undoubtedly, his Eurocentrism. How could Bossuet—Voltaire would complain at the opening of the *Essai sur les moeurs et l’esprit des nations* (1756)—dismiss the “powerful empire” of the Arabs as *un déluge de barbares*, an “overflow of barbarians” (*Oeuvres complètes* 11:158)? How could he fail to mention China—where, after all, silk, paper, glass, porcelain, gunpowder, and even the printing press had originated (11:171–72)? What kind of universal history was his, when it did not even refer to India—as if the most beautiful, intelligent, and human game, chess, had not been invented there, along with the idea of the popular state and many other things still (11:185–89)?

All this truly irritated Voltaire. A universal history, like an accurately cosmopolitan knowledge, *had to* extend beyond Europe. Even more so, since in comparison to such antique civilizations as the Chinese, the Indian, and the Arab, Europe was just a mere parvenu on the scene of universal history: “From any point we look at it, we must acknowledge
that we were only born yesterday” (11:215). The Chinese, the Indians, and the Arabs—those same Arabs that Montesquieu had condemned to a destiny of climatological barbarism—were civilized when the Europeans were still living in caves. They had literature when we had yowls! So spoke the voice of cosmopolitan conscience to Voltaire. After that, feeling certainly good about his enlightened refusal of Bossuet’s Eurocentrism, Voltaire could earnestly go on: yes, those people were civilized before we were, and developed their literatures before we did—but then they no longer progressed, as we did instead. All those civilizations, which came to history before Europe, have not managed to progress beyond a certain stage; whereas the Europeans, who came later, have continued, and continue still, to progress on the path of history:

We ask ourselves why the Chinese, having gone so far in older times, have always remained at the same stage; why their astronomy is so old and so dim-witted; why their music still ignores semitones. It looks as if nature has given that kind of men, so different than ours, organs made to find all at once what is strictly necessary, and incapable to go beyond that. We, on the contrary, developed our knowledge much later, and have since perfected it very rapidly. (11:173)

Bossuet has certainly been left behind by Voltaire’s more enlightened cosmopolitanism. A comparison with Montesquieu, however, still seems necessary. Rather than being “barbarians,” Arabs, Indians, and Chinese did possess for Voltaire beautiful and refined civilizations. This is not as blunt as Montesquieu’s Europeanism, then. Voltaire’s cosmopolitanism, however, comes to very similar conclusions to those of De l’esprit des lois: history is a teleology of progress that moves, “like the sun” (“en suivant le cours apparent du soleil”; Voltaire, Oeuvres complètes 11:184), from east to west. Whereas the east is the beginning of universal history, Europe is its modernity. If not history tout court, at least progress is the peculiar endowment of Europe—the only continent, in fact, where knowledge does not come “all at once,” but through stages of continuous evolution. As proof of Europe’s advancements and eastern stagnation, it is enough to look at literature; and since “one of the infallible proofs of the superiority of a nation in the spiritual arts is the culture perfected by poetry” (11:215), Voltaire starts looking at, and comparing, Arab and Chinese poetry, on the one hand, and European poetry, on the other. Conclusion: both Arabs and Chinese had poetry before Europeans did; but
it was only in the Europe of Augustus and of Louis xiv that poetry truly improved. If, from poetry, one then goes on to belles lettres, and from them—the key—to the practical sciences, one single truth seems to emerge from Voltaire’s cosmopolitan investigation: “they” came before “we” did; but they have remained “like we were two hundred years ago” (11:217). Two hundred years: counting backward from Voltaire, we can now understand the reason for the superiority of European literature—Francis Bacon and the scientific revolution. One understands now why, of all modern language, the man of letters needs to learn “above all, English.” What Europe had two hundred years ago, and the other continents did not, was the kind of literature prescribed by the Encyclopédie. The Arabs had their literary amenities, and the Chinese their erudites. But only Europe had the true wisdom of gens de lettres like Francis Bacon, who put knowledge and belles lettres to the service of Jaucourt’s “more sensible utility.”

In the meantime, the cosmopolitan overture to the universe predicated by the unwritten constitution of the putative Republic of Letters brought Voltaire back precisely to Montesquieu’s more frank (pun intended) Europeanism. If literature was now climaxing in Europe, this did not mean that the Republic of Letters could forgo the study of the Orient, which, pace Bossuet, was an origin of sorts (Orient, from Latin origo, or origin, as in the origin of the sun) and had had, as such, its own literary glories. But this did not mean, either, that Orientals could be part of the Republic of Letters: they could be objects, but never subjects, of study. In the words of Hans Bots and Françoise Waquet, the Republic of Letters “limited itself to territories identified with the values of [arts and sciences]—in fact to Europe only” (71). As the opening issue of the Journal des savantes (1665) assumed, authorship itself—the possibility of being the subject of writing, theorizing, historicizing, or philosophizing—seemed to be a peculiarly European characteristic: “The design of this journal being to inform of what happens in the Republic of Letters, it will mainly be composed of a precise catalogue of the major books published in Europe” (Bots and Waquet 71; emphasis mine).

The fact is that the universalism of the Republic of Letters, as well as its cosmopolitanism, remained, in Im Hof’s expression, “a purely academic and theoretical question” (104). In practice, the republic was a rather limited affair. It included not Europe tout court, but merely its courtly and mobile nobility, which recognized “the same rules of class every-
where: the military code of honor for the officers; duty and faithfulness; the matrimony with persons of equal standing only” (Hof 103). In this restricted sense, the Republic of Letters had become the figure of identity for Voltaire’s Europe: through publications such as the Gazette littéraire de l’Europe (1764), the republic managed to establish a “good taste” common in the courts all over Europe; it gave Europe one common literary canon shared “from Paris to Saint Petersburg” (Marino 13), and it provided courtly Europe with an imaginary “single body, a cultural and spiritual unity distinguished from the rest of the world” (Chabod 117).

Following Montesquieu’s hint about the fundamentally “Oriental” nature of the European south, Voltaire’s Essai had observed that “the Oriental climate, nearer to the South, obtains everything from nature; while we, in our northern West [Occident septentrional], we owe everything to time, to commerce, and to a belated industry” (Oeuvres complètes 11:158–59). The east, like the south, owes everything to a nature that, in Montesquieu’s words, gives “all the riches of life, and few wants.” Europe, western Europe, is produced instead by “time.” It is, as De l’esprit des lois had remarked, the transgression of “the laws that God has established.” Nature versus culture: history coincides, then, for Voltaire as for Montesquieu, with Europe itself. Consider for instance Voltaire’s entry for “History” in the Encyclopédie, where Europe, with France at its center, would be the degree zero of history, the one and only perspective of history into which any other needs to be translated:

If you make a history of France, you are not compelled to describe the course of the Seine and the Loire rivers; but if you give to the public the conquests of the Portuguese in Asia, it is necessary a topography of the discovered countries. One needs that you take your reader by the hand along Africa, the coasts of Persia and India. One expects from you some instructions about the customs, the laws, and the habits of these nations, which are new for Europe. (Diderot 8.221)

If Europe’s development is belated vis-à-vis the Orient, this is because the time of Europe is modernity—the only possible perspective from which history, the past, can be conceived qua past. Europe only can retroactively look at the past. The Orient, instead, is the past. Only Europe, therefore, can be the subject of history. What also emerges from Voltaire’s discussion of the “Oriental climate, nearer to the South,” is that Europe is divided into a western Europe—the antithesis of the Orient—
and a southern one—the dialectical negation and internal Other of the Occident septentrional. The south of Europe, very much like the exotic Orient, is a place of nature. It owes nothing to progress, history, or the arts and sciences. Like the Orient, southern Europe too developed early—but did not continue to do so.

Also in this marginalization of the south of Europe, Voltaire’s north-centric cosmopolitanism was confirmation of, rather than deviation from, the practice of the Republic of Letters. Bots and Wacquet, again, remind us that “Italy seemed [to the self-declared citizens of the republic] to be in an inexorable process of decline, which Spain sadly shared. Portugal did not deserve a mention. . . . The Loire river was a dividing line; it is in the north that one found the centers of importance: Rouen, Troyes, Lyon, and, above all, Paris” (74). In Voltaire’s words, neither the Italians nor the Spaniards—the south, that is—but, rather, the French were the “legislators” of this modern Europe of culture (“les Français furent les législateurs de l’Europe”; Oeuvres historiques 1002). Besides France, only the north—England, “above all”—could participate in the creation of Europe’s modern literature.

We have followed the theorization of French Europe in the previous chapter on Montesquieu. In fact, it was already by the middle of the eighteenth century, in the heyday of Bayle’s Nouvelles, that “French men of letters saw themselves as the leaders of a project of Enlightenment that was both cultural and moral, if not political. By representing French culture as the leading edge of civilization, they identified the cause of humanity [and certainly of Europe] with their own national causes and saw themselves as at the same time French patriots and upstanding citizens of a cosmopolitan Republic of Letters” (Goodman 4). “Far and away Europe’s greatest power” (Davies 579), France was certainly the seventeenth-century leading cultural force: its châteaux and gardens had become the object of imitation all over Europe, its cogito the method, its modernity the standard, its classicism the aesthetics, and its language the lingua franca of the European cultivated classes from Palermo to Amsterdam. As Timothy Reiss maintains in The Meaning of Literature, it was since the constitution of the Académie Française by Cardinal Richelieu in 1635 that France had taken his task to legitimize its own values—“increasing social tranquility, the growth of commerce, the settlement of military discipline, and the reform of finance and luxury expenditure” (70)—as the very logos of a modern Europe moving already, as Jean
Baptiste Le Ron D’Alembert would soon record, to a capitalist epistemology “greedy of utilizable knowledge” (“avides de connaissances utiles”; Diderot iv).

Accordingly, France had finished to consolidate, through the work of a centrally controlled academy, the status of French as “the ‘most perfect of modern’ languages” (Reiss 71)—one whose “genius” was to utter and incarnate the culture of modern Europe. Voltaire, in the preface to Oedipe (1729), was among those who believed that “each language has its own genius, determined by the nature of the construction of its sentences, by the frequency of its vowels or its consonants, its inversions, and its auxiliary verbs” (qtd. in Folkierski 227). Beginning already with Cartesian linguistics, the supposed genius of the French language was seen as an immediate propensity for rational discourse. As an index of its natural rationality, its logical construction—subject, verb, object—was most often mentioned (see Rosiello; Puppo 42–56; Mercier Faivre 176–79). Such theses had been abundantly theorized by Dominique Bouhours in 1673. The philosophes—the most authoritative of which would be Antoine Rivarol in 1785—had then further theorized the necessity for “French as the language of the Republic of Letters” (Goodman 21): “Since our language has spread throughout Europe, we thought that the time had come to substitute it for Latin, which since the renaissance of learning had been the language of scholarship. I must say that there is more excuse for a philosopher to write in French than for a Frenchman to compose verses in Latin. I would even agree that the use of French has helped to make the Enlightenment a more universal phenomenon” (Diderot xxx). As a corollary, even literary good taste, in the words of J. E. Spingarn, had to be judged against the standard of French: taste was “the result of the application of [Cartesian] reason to aesthetic pleasure” (18). Since French, as the naturally rational language, was also the most Cartesian, it had then to be the most beautiful as well. French, along with the literature written in it, had to be elevated to a model of good literary taste. As Paul Hazard wrote, “Beauty is reason; and reason is France” (Révolution 121).

French literature is the legislating literature; French history the perspective on universal history; and French language—which since the Treaty of Rastadt, 1714, was also the language of European diplomacy (Duroselle 234)—the language of the French Enlightenment as “a more universal phenomenon.” In the words of Louis Réau, eighteenth-century Europe was, fundamentally, a “French Europe”; and, as Louis-Antoine
Caraccioli’s 1776 treatise (obviously written in French) offered as an echo, this was the time best described as Paris, le modèle des nations étrangères ou l’Europe française. The Encyclopédie, in this context, was nothing more than a monument erected to this hegemony of France.

Montesquieu himself, who was not new to the collaborative ideals of the republic (Deuves 1:21), contributed to the Encyclopédie with an essay entitled “Essai sur le goût dans les choses de la nature et de l’art.” In 1753, D’Alembert had asked the president to contribute an essay on despotism and one on democracy. What D’Alembert in all likelihood expected was a recapitulation of the very arguments of De l’esprit des lois: Asia is despotic, Europe is democratic, and the head and heart of this Europe is France. Montesquieu, instead, wrote about taste, and the essay was published in 1757, two years after the author’s death (Shackleton, Essays 103–7). Sure enough, Montesquieu’s testament was not a masterpiece of originality: taste is the arbiter of beauty; beauty is that which gives pleasure; and what gives pleasure is unity in variety. Groundbreaking or not, however, Montesquieu’s essay intended, rather than repeating the argument of De l’esprit des lois, to now extend French hegemony from political to aesthetic issues. In this sense, the “Essai sur le goût” was symptomatic of an epochal shift in the understanding of Europe: Europe was to be defined not only in political and climatic terms but also in cultural ones. Prescriptive in tone—refrain from enjoying the voice of the Italian castrati; despise the “insufferable” arias of Italian opera (Montesquieu, Oeuvres 2:1261)—the “Essai sur le goût” educated the aspiring man of letters to develop good taste: and good taste was not only defined in a French book—the Encyclopédie—but dictated from France speaking on behalf of humankind. “In our present way of being”; “the pleasures of our soul” (2:1240–41; emphases mine): was that “our” the generalization of French taste over all humankind?

The presence of Montesquieu’s Europe in the Encyclopédie, in fact, went well beyond his actual contribution. At the entry “Europe,” Jaucourt, for instance, wrote that: “No matter what, Europe remains the smallest part of the world; yet, as remarks the author of De l’esprit des lois, Europe has come to such a high degree of power, that history has hardly anything to compare it to” (Diderot 6.211). Montesquieu had already sanctioned the wonderful uniqueness of modern Europe. And Montesquieu had prepared the promotion of France, recapitulated in Jaucourt’s entry about it, as the marvel of the modern Republic of Letters: “Around the last century, the Arts, the Sciences, Commerce, Navi-
igation, and the Navy appeared under Colbert, with such an admirable speed as to astonish Europe” (Diderot 6.211, 7.282). Jaucourt’s logic derives from Montesquieu, and the mention of *De l’esprit des lois* is debt paid. Yet the uniqueness of Europe is here not only its freedom but nothing less than what Jaucourt himself had previously called *lettres*: The arts, belles lettres or literature, and the more “sensible utility” produced by arts—commerce and navigation above all.

Letters, then, define the glory, unity, and uniqueness of Europe. What is Europe, however, for Jaucourt? As the geographer of the *Encyclopédie*, Jaucourt had a very clear sense of the way in which geography, after Montesquieu, confused itself with history, thus forming a spatial chronology of humankind’s progress. If France, with its *lettres*, was for him the unquestioned place of modernity, then Italy, on the contrary, as the entry on the country suggested, was a memento of a time that no longer is: “The good days of Italy have eclipsed, and its glory vanished. Its commerce is past, the source of its riches dried up” (Diderot 8.932). Under “Spain,” not altogether differently, we read: “This beautiful kingdom, which once impressed great fear on the whole of Europe, has slowly fallen into such decadence that it can hardly overcome” (5.953). Undoubtedly, neither Italy nor Spain represented modernity. Voltaire had made a similar point: “Spain is the country with which we are no better acquainted than with the most savage parts of Africa, and which does not deserve the trouble of being known” (*Oeuvres complètes* 1:390–91; see also Salvio). Spain is, then, preyed on by the Inquisition, a place arrested in a time of savagery that precedes not only modernity but also history itself: no doubt, it does not deserve the trouble of being known. Also Italy, once glorious, fails to enter that very century of Louis XIV that, with Descartes and the lesson drawn from Bacon, brought Europe into modernity: in that century, writes Voltaire, “there was no longer taste (*goût*) in Italy” (*Oeuvres historiques* 10002). As Jaucourt then suggested in his article on Europe, being European meant to belong to a part of the world “more important than all because of its commerce, its navigations, its fertility, its intelligence and the industry of its peoples; because of its knowledge of Arts, Sciences.” If neither Italy nor Spain, however, had participated in this progress of letters, could they be said to be Europe at all?

In the same way in which Montesquieu had theorized history, climate, and freedom as a way of theorizing Europe, Voltaire and Jaucourt were now theorizing letters, literature, and the arts and sciences to theorize the
Republic of Letters. Such a republic coincided with Europe, and at the same time was smaller, limited to the *Occident septentrional*, and bigger, universal, than the mere geography of Europe. Montesquieu's geopolitical argument—Europe is the difference of north and south—was reconverted by Voltaire and Jaucourt into a geocultural one (Dumont-Wilden 76): Europe was defined by its culture—in this sense, it was a Republic of Letters, a “grand republic divided into various states” (Voltaire *Oeuvres historiques* 620); but this culture had its heart in France. Its past, instead, was to be found between Italy and Spain. European culture as the culture of modernity was, then, the historic progress of letters from south to north, from Greece, through Rome, to the French age of Louis XIV, unveiled from France as the future of humankind.

A promising future indeed. Yet once southern countries had been dismissed as remnants of the past, and once France had been patriotically elevated to the rank of the “legislator of Europe”—once these steps had been taken, the universalistic claim of the *Encyclopédie*’s cosmopolitanism was doomed to encounter the difference of any parts of humankind, let alone Europe, that did not feel exactly French. Was it possible that, in order to become cultured, modern, and European, one had to become, also, French? Napoleon had not yet written that “all men of genius and all who have gained respect in the republic of letters are French, no matter what their country” (qtd. in Hazard, *Révolution* 116); but already by midcentury the sense was that the rhetoric of the arts and sciences was becoming the voice of French hegemony trying to define Europe in its image.

In 1750, Jean-Jacques Rousseau had already moved his attack against the arts and sciences with his “Discours” for the Academy of Dijon. The thesis of his speech was unequivocal: arts and sciences, taking humankind out of a “happy ignorance,” had corrupted its morals while introducing “luxury, dissolution, and slavery” (*Oeuvres* 3:15), and damning Europe in an undesirable modernity. Already there, Rousseau’s was not so much an attack against letters, but one against the *philosophes*’ understanding of the letters as the bearer of a certain kind of progress for humankind—Jaucourt’s “polishing the spirit, perfecting taste, and giv[ing] grace to sciences.” All this polishing, taste, and grace was seen by Rousseau as an attempt to transform women and men into Parisians—affected, unnatural, and artificial.

In a letter addressed to D’Alembert in 1758, the argument was re-capped on the occasion of D’Alembert’s suggestion—in the article on
“Geneva” for the Encyclopédie—to open a theater, similar to the ones in Paris, in Rousseau’s hometown. The suggestion was not received well by Rousseau, citizen of Geneva. Since the time of the revocation of the edict of Nantes (1685), Calvinist Geneva (along with Protestant England) had become a myth (Ramat) in Europe, standing for religious freedom and all northern, anti-Catholic virtues. As I noted in the chapter on Montesquieu, Catholicism and southern despotism were seen as two sides of the same coin. Paris, after Richelieu and Mazarin, was seen as nothing less than a betrayal of the northern cause for freedom—religious or otherwise. Although Montesquieu had tried, in De l’esprit des lois, to remind France of its northern and Protestant duties, the image of France one could draw from André De Murault’s Lettre sur les Anglois et les Francois (1761) or from Voltaire’s Lettres écrites de Londres sur les Anglais et autres sujets (1734) was that of a reactionary bulwark of anti-Calvinism. Calvinist Geneva, on the contrary, stood as the positive model of a modernity threatened by Catholic Paris.

Speaking as “a good citizen of Geneva” moved by “love of country,” Rousseau, in the letter, simply argued that the imposition of anything French would be pernicious for the moral tempter of the Protestant people of Geneva. If the Republic of Letters was centered on Catholic Paris, then it was high time to dispel the myth of its universality:

To ask oneself if Spectacles are good or bad in themselves, is to ask oneself a question that is too vague to answer. . . . Spectacles are for the people . . . there is, between one People and another People a prodigious diversity of habits, temperaments, and characters. Man, I agree, is one: but man modified by Religions, Governments, laws, habits, prejudices, climate, becomes so different from himself that one should no longer look for what is good for man in general, but what is good in a specific time and place. (Œuvres 5:16)

In other words, such theaters could be good for Paris, but not for the people of Geneva. The literary standards set in Paris around the Encyclopédie were not, for Rousseau, necessarily the same as the norms that existed elsewhere.

Peculiar, in this context, was Rousseau’s reevaluation of the south as the place of an original ancientness and of the past. No longer the commonplace of Montesquieu’s Catholic despotism, but, rather, the incarnation of a nostalgia for an older way of living that modern Europe,
with its arts and sciences, had long forgotten to remember, the original south, before being corrupted by the religion of the pope, was fragment of a paradise lost: “In the south the first familial ties were formed; there the first rendezvous between the two sexes occurred. . . . There were the first festivals; the feet were restless with joy . . . . [And] the voice accompanied that joy with passionate accents. Pleasure and desire melted together, and made themselves audible. There was, in the end, the true cradle of humankind” (Essai sur l’origine des langues 107). In Rousseau’s reevaluation of the south, there was the implicit attempt to theorize the essence of Europe again—after and against Montesquieu and the philosophes. The south, which Montesquieu, Jaucourt, and Voltaire had seen as the limit of Europe’s Republic of Letters, became for Rousseau, along with northern and Calvinist Geneva, a positive utopia. Yet in Rousseau as in Montesquieu, the south remained a distant fantasy of primitivism against which modern and northern Europe, with nostalgia or with pride, could still theorize itself. It remained the antithesis—nature; the past—posited by the spirit of a modern north eager not only to define itself but also to overcome its own discontents in some superior synthesis, or in a return to a hypothetical origin. In the meantime, however, the south was not silent and was writing its own theory of Europe to claim its own place, viva voce, in the Republic of Letters. If Voltaire, Montesquieu, and Jaucourt had theorized some kind of Europe in which certain standards of the arts and sciences immediately disqualified the southern countries, then a rehabilitation of the south could not be thought of without a rethinking of those same standards. Moreover, Voltaire, Montesquieu, and Jaucourt had theorized a Europe defined by its progress. Such a Europe was the modernity of history—its present and its end. Of this Europe, the south was at the same time margin and internal antithesis—its past. To reclaim the Europeanness of the south, to theorize a Europe not simply shaped in the image of Paris but capable of including the southern difference, what was necessary was, first, a rethinking of the arts and sciences, and, second, a new theorization of history. In other words, the south, striving to enter Europe with its Republic of Letters, needed now not only a new and more elastic and comprehensive theory of Europe but a new theory of history and of the arts and sciences within it. An expatriate Spanish Jesuit took this task on himself. It may have scared Hercules, but Father Juan Andrés did not seem to think that anything was too big for him.
Juan Andrés renounced his right of primogeniture on Christmas Eve 1754 in order to wear the robe and become a Jesuit. He could not have chosen a worse time. Since the order had been founded in 1540 with the implicit (though never stated) intent to stop the Protestant Reformation, Europe had already witnessed an ideological divide between Reformation and Counter-Reformation, Protestantism and Catholicism, Molinism and probabilism that had typically set Jansenists and Protestants against the Jesuit order.

Especially relevant for these pages were the quarrels concerning the status, limits, and ends of knowledge—quarrels that had immediate practical relevance in the restructuring of schools and educational systems all over Europe. As Alasdair MacIntyre has suggested, the Protestant Reformation had brought about a fairly new conception of what knowledge is: “Reason can supply, so these new theologies [Protestantism but also Jansenist Catholicism] assert, no genuine comprehension of man’s true end; that power of reason was destroyed by the fall of man.” In other words, these new conceptions consider knowledge of human-kind’s ultimate meaning an aporetic impossibility and limit the reach of human knowledge to some kind of “practical” reason capable only to assess “truths of fact and mathematical relations but no more” (53–54). Luther’s interpretation of Romans 1:17, concerning the justice of God, precluded any possibility for human reason to understand and know such justice. The latter could be acquired not by reason, studying, and knowledge, but by grace—and, to a lesser extent, faith—only. As the second article of the Large Catechism put it, “although the whole world with all diligence has endeavored to ascertain what God is, what He has in mind and does, yet has she [human-kind] never been able to attain to [the knowledge and understanding of] any of these things” (Luther 601). Luther thus limited the reach of reason, as Mark Painter echoes MacIntyre, “to manage earthly affairs of survival, state and law. But it is completely inadequate when applied to affairs of the spirit. With Luther reason becomes observational, calculative, managerial and limited to the working out of practical matters” (6). It becomes, then, a prelude to
Immanuel Kant’s practical reason, or, put differently, to Max Weber’s Protestant spirit of capitalism.

As for the consequences all this had for pedagogy, these are clear to be seen: post-Lutheran Europe soon began to witness the emergence of two separate educational projects. On the one hand, the Jansenists’ “small schools” of Port-Royal, whose model spread across “central and northwest Europe” (Ong, *Ramus* vii); on the other, the “colleges” of the Jesuits, which “produced a southern, Italy-centered ‘Christian Humanism’” (Scaglione 48). What knowledge was or meant arguably constituted the core of the endless controversies between the two pedagogical models. For Jansenism, knowledge, unable to attain metaphysical truths, had to be limited to the pragmatics of social living—it became knowledge of what constituted perfect citizenship; for the Jesuits, instead, knowledge could not be limited to pragmatics, but had to provide a metatheory of knowledge aimed at understanding the presuppositions that generated, in the last analysis, practical knowledge. In other words, on the one hand, we have the practical dialectic (*dialectica utens*) of the Jansenists, aimed at merely explaining what one knows, for instance, in medicine or law; on the other, there is the teaching dialectic (*dialectica docens*) of the Jesuits, which wanted to teach the pupil not what we know, but how we know what we know (Ong, *Ramus* 162).

What I have been calling the Jansenist model had its heyday in the small schools of Port-Royal and was already becoming hegemonic in Voltaire’s Republic of Letters. In 1763 (the same year, incidentally, of Rousseau’s *Émile*), Louis-René de La Chalotais published his truly influential *Essai d’éducation nationale* that rehearsed many of the Jansenist pedagogical tenets in a climate of general enthusiasm for reforms. For La Chalotais, education, to begin with, had to be national, modern, secular, against the “vice of monasticity” (read the Jesuits), and run by the state. Second, and in line with Luther’s distrust for papal Latin, schooling had to be done in vernacular French. Third, education’s goal was to form good citizens and to do so had to teach practical subjects, not the antiquated and useless humanities. Fourth, knowledge, being practical, was a commodity, produced by the school against the student’s tuition, and always quantifiable and measurable through written examinations (the “document” that begins the “humanist assault on oral disputation”; Ong, *Ramus* 155), grades, and promotions.

Two things must be noticed about La Chalotais’s influential model: first, that despite what his contemporaries saw in it, this model was less a
rationalization than a secularization of post-Lutheran pedagogy. Already Jean Duvergier de Hauranne, abbé de Saint-Cyran, founder of Port-Royal, had claimed that the goal of education was service “not only for God, for Jesus Christ and His Truths but also for the common good, and for the interests of the Kings of the land . . . because if Jesus Christ died for men, it is just that men will die not only for Jesus Christ but also for other men” (qtd. in Sirignano 25). And Luther (in the Discourse on the Utility of Sending Children to School) had attacked humanistic education for being antiquated and largely pagan. The second point to be made is that the Essai’s polemical adversary was most evidently Jesuit education. It was Jesuit schools that stuck to a predominantly humanistic curriculum—Cicero’s Familiares, Erasmus’s De copia, Martial, Caesar’s commentaries, Aesop, Aristotle, Livy, Lucia, Homer, Isocrates, and Virgil—with little interest, in fact, in the “morality” or Christianity of the books (Scaglione 78). Jesuit schools kept recommending, with disregard for national languages, that “all, especially the students of the humanities, must speak Latin” (Farrell 96). And Jesuit schools, always refusing the written test, with their endless discussions (the oral disputatio), with their “pedagogy of the spoken word” (Sirignano 82), and with their obsession with rhetoric and eloquence (Codina 40; O’Malley), were the major obstacle to the commodification and the measurability of knowledge. What is worse, the Jesuits’ refusal to perceive direct tuition, their willingness to have 60 to 65 percent of their students from “sons of the working class,” were at the same time inflating the price of the knowledge commodity, and establishing a true monopoly over it (the statistics are by Scaglione 118; for a different take on Jesuit schools’ elitism, see Martin).

The issue of education was in fact not marginal to the Jesuits’ first expulsion from a European state. In 1750, Sebastião José de Carvalho y Melo, the Count of Oeyras and future Marquis de Pombal, blamed the Jesuits for exercising economic control in the colonies, of accumulating immense (and untaxed) riches in Uruguay, of fomenting Indios’ revolutions in Paraguay, and, last but certainly not least, of monopolizing education in the home country. As Franco Venturi summarizes, Pombal had basically accused the Jesuits “of opposing the will of the mercantilist state, which had now [in its attempt to overcome its economic crisis] decided to control the economy and education, religion and culture” of the country (“Church” 224).

The Jesuits were expelled from Portugal in 1758. In France, in the
meantime, they were being accused not only of protecting their “feudal” privileges but also faced criticism for perpetuating a useless, backward humanistic culture hindering the modernization of the state (North-east). As Robert Palmer noticed in a clever essay of 1940, the expulsion of the Jesuits in France coincided with a growing interest on the part of school reformers to create a modern and national educational system for the preparation of *citoyens*:

Their general message was that education should be nationalized, and its object be to form citizens. Reformers complained that the schools were too secluded from civil life, that teachers in religious orders lacked patriotic spirit, that children were taught to see their true country in another world, and to place their allegiance too exclusively in God and religion. The old humanistic and literary education was condemned as useless in itself . . . La Chalotais held, against the cosmopolitan and humanistic tradition of the Jesuits, that education should conform to the national character, be controlled by the government, and conducted by men who, “not renouncing the world,” practiced the civic virtues that they taught, and had interests the same as those of the country. (“National Idea” 101–2; see also Mortier).4

In 1762, the Jesuit Order was expelled from France. The secularization and state control of both economic planning and national education was also central in the decision of Carlos III to expel Andrés’ order from Spain in 1767. Fanatically pious when in Naples (where he was king, too), Carlos III was a rabid secularizer in Spain. He had very good economic reasons (e.g., the expropriation of their lands) to expel the Jesuits from Spain (Renda *Espulsione*; Renda *Bernardo Tanucci*). He also had fairly convincing “cultural” motives for the expulsion: the Jesuits’ attempt—669 colleges, 176 seminaries, and a lot of private tutoring for young aristocrats (Domínguez Moltó 21)—to organize education against state monopoly (Brizzi 189). With the expulsion of the Jesuits, in other words, the traditional war of religion had translated into a new educational quarrel between the ancients and the moderns—between an idea of economic and cultural modernization centered on state schooling, on the one hand, and, on the other, the Jesuit Order as the perceived surplus, if not obstacle, to that modernization. An integral part of such a *querelle* was to promote, pretty much in Jaucourt’s vein, the development of useful sciences. The Jesuits, identified with an old intellectual order still busy studying an old, unmoving tradition based on the lesson
and imitation of the ancients, were perceived as the obstacle for a modern innovation of the curriculum requested by the new emerging bourgeois classes (Valero 192). Central to the political decision of expelling the Jesuits—in Portugal, France, and Spain—was, then, the cultural “question of national education” (Palmer, “National Idea” 100)—the choice, namely, between a pragmatically utilitarian national culture for the sciences and trades, on the one hand, and the Jesuits’ humanistic and cosmopolitan (if not otherworldly) culture on the other.

When the decree of expulsion was promulgated in Madrid on April 2, 1767, Juan Andrés had to leave his teaching position at the Royal and Pontifical University of Gandía, the first Jesuit college that, in 1546, was forced by the insistence of the population to open its doors to non-Jesuit students. Andrés had been teaching there, for three years, courses in Latin, Greek, and Hebrew under the general rubric of rhetoric. Education in Gandía followed the *Ratio studiorum*: “The disciplines were divided in the traditional manner: first the Humanities . . . beginning with advanced Grammar . . . Rhetoric, languages (Latin, Greek, and Hebrew) . . . Then Logic . . . and on to Philosophy proper” (Scaglione 70). Andrés left Gandía in the early days of April. Without food or clothing, he was put on a boat with other Jesuits from all over Spain. They were denied permission to land in Civitavecchia, Italy, and finally landed in Bonifacio, Corsica, where the patriots led by Pasquale Paoli, in the midst of their never-ending revolution for self-determination, fed the Jesuits and granted them temporary refuge. Andrés left Corsica for the more tranquil Italian mainland in 1768, when Pope Clement xiii, starting a full-fledged diplomatic war against Portugal, Spain, France, and the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, decided to offer asylum to the Jesuits in the Papal State.

Here, in Ferrara, he lived for five years, until, on August 15, 1773, the new pope Clement xiv, in the attempt to reconcile the papacy with the foreign powers (and “advised by the Holy Spirit”; qtd. in Del Rio 143), suppressed the order from his lands.5 Once he left Ferrara, Andrés moved to Mantua, where he arrived in January 1774. He stayed until the arrival of Napoleon in 1796. Here, in “that center of Italian learning and culture” (Mazzeo 39), Andrés achieved a rather prominent European status as a learned person and as citizen of the international Republic of Letters: he was visited by the likes of Johann Gottfried von Herder and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, exchanged opinions and courtesies with
learned Italians, befriended other Jesuits in exile, and carried out his research to write his magnum opus.

The way in which the conditions offered by Mantua helped Andrés to put together his learned and cultured work is obviously hard to quantify. Although it might be a bit of a stretch to call Mantua "that center of learning and culture," the city had witnessed, under the enlightened rule of empress Marie Therese of Austria, a significant cultural “reawakening” after the collapse of the Gonzagas (Quazza 229–30). Academies were being founded and financed—the Virgilian in 1752; the Theresian of Beaux Arts in the same year; the Philharmonic in 1761. Middle schools and universities, many under Jesuit control, had been reformed and modernized with a series of decrees between 1760 and 1761. The city library had been constructed with the marbles (and a few books as well) salvaged from the destroyed villas of the Gonzagas. In sum, although not a center of frenetic intellectual life, Mantua, like the nearby Milan ruled by the same tolerant absolutism of Marie Therese, had witnessed a number of political and cultural reforms that had introduced some measure of modernization while keeping at bay the more revolutionary implications of the French enlightenment.

It was in this climate of moderate Lombard reformism, in which trans-Alpine revolutionary ideas had been mixed with conservative Italian ones, and where great energies were employed for “the reorganization of the schools, of the universities, of culture in general” (Venturi, “Church” 218; see also Venturi, Utopia), that Andrés found his new home. Mantua was quite open to the new philosophies of modernization coming from beyond the Alps; and, at the same time, it appeared tolerant enough of the Jesuits, who were cherished for their cultural prestige and employed, both by the state and by private patrons, for the reorganization of the educational system: “There are so many Spaniards of merit here, that is impossible for me to list them one by one,” wrote Andrés to his brother Carlos (Andrés, Cartas familiares 1:4). A Voltairian Jesuit, Saverio Bettinelli (1718–1808), was the venerated cultural symbol of the town. In other words, the incandescent and polarized atmosphere of Rome, Naples, or Venice—where Jesuits and so-called modernizers were at each other’s throat (Del Rio 126–28, 136–37)—was far enough from Mantua to allow Andrés the intellectual distance necessary to absorb the lessons of Montesquieu, Voltaire, and, above all, Rousseau; it was so far, on the other hand, that acceptance of enlightened principles
did not need to be unconditional to the point of fanaticism. Mantua was the perfect meeting place for different ideas and diverging national prejudices to meet and discuss (see Menéndez y Pelayo). It was a little republic of letters whose enrichment of Italian culture has perhaps been underestimated and in which Spanish Jesuits showed “a wonderful capacity to adapt” (Batllori 514).

In sum, Mantua offered the perfect atmosphere for an intellectual trained in the humanities, and one knowledgeable of the so-called practical sciences as well, to reconsider the presuppositions of both. From “this beautiful part of Europe” (Andrés qtd. in Mazzeo 17), Andrés then meant to attempt a general assessment of nothing less than all sciences. He wanted to look into their origins and foundations. Most important, he wanted to trace their history and progress. In doing just that, he found something at the same time hopeless and peculiar: what the *Encyclopédie* had theorized and canonized as the literature, was, after all, just a French local phenomenon hypostatized as universal. Still, there were other possibilities to retheorize literature: Andrés, the Spanish Jesuit in Italy, chose to retheorize from the south.

A Theory of Literary Historiography: Decentering Europe

Arguably the son of an encyclopedic age that “had its roots in [Roger] Bacon, the *Encyclopédie*, and the British *Universal History*” (Arato, “comparatista” 1), Juan Andrés was not kidding when he titled his magnum opus *Dell’origine, progressi e stato attuale d’ogni letteratura* (Of the Origins, Progress, and Present State of all Literatures). Echoing D’Alembert’s program for the *Encyclopédie*—“to go back to the origins and generation of our ideas” (Diderot *na* 9)—but renouncing the collaborative framework of the Republic of Letters, Andrés, all alone, set out to study not only the origin of ideas but also their progress. Proud of introducing an undertaking that “no other author, I believe, has conceived so far” (Andrés, *Dell’ origine* 1:i), Andrés opened the first part of his seven-volume treatise, published from his Mantuan exile in 1782, with a master plan—“maybe too daring and bold” by his own admission—that would later gain him little of the glory he had dreamed of, but, instead, the unflattering nickname of “the presumptuous friar” (Carducci 2.45). He should have seen it coming. The very incipit of *Dell’origine* was an invitation to brag-bashing—like that pretentious claim to be
writing nothing less than “one critical history of the events that literature has suffered in all times and in all nations; a philosophical sketch of literature’s [letteratura] progress from its origin to the present” (1:1).

Literature, first of all: what did this term mean for father Juan Andrés? His understanding of it was, to say the least, quite broad: it encompassed not only the belles lettres but also history, geography, chronology, archeology, grammar, mathematics, mechanics, hydrostatics, natural science, nautical science, acoustics, optics, astronomy, physics (general and applied), chemistry, botany, natural history, anatomy, medicine, philosophy, jurisprudence (secular and canonical), theology, biblical exegesis, and ecclesiastical history. Literature, in other words, was something reminiscent of (but, we will see, rather different from) Jaucourt’s letters: not in the sense that Andrés saw the necessity to translate belles lettres into some “more sensible utility,” but in the sense that literature represented for him the synthesis and totality of human knowledge. Writing a history of the origin and progress of all of this was, one has to agree, quite a big task at hand. And then, “in all times and in all nations”!

It is easy to see how this gigantic effort, that only the daring few have claimed (and timidly at that) as the putative origin of comparative literature (e.g., Guillén 27), fostered in fact a whole thesaurus of self-righteous ironies. Esteban de Arteaga, for instance, another Spanish Jesuit in Italy, commented in 1785: “Yes, I confess I value myself only a literary pigmy, not a giant. I have not dared to face the Herculean task to cover the sciences and the literatures of all ages, all climates, and all nations. The Signor Abate Juan Andrés, bigger than me, and certainly more confident in himself, instead, has just done that” (Arteaga 1:178). To discuss all of this literature in all times and all nations, specialization in one field, to Arteaga’s discomfort, obviously had to be sacrificed. As the apologist Ettore Guido Mazzeo puts it, Andrés “was in essence the opposite of the specialist” (Mazzeo 69). He liked to think broad, and was, by and large, a cosmopolitan scholar (Bérkov; T ejerina). Like that other cosmopolitan Voltaire, he could not accept a universe shrunk to Bossuet’s Ile de France. True enough, Andrés’s cosmopolitanism, when compared to that of Voltaire, seemed much more dictated by petty and practical reasons: it was because of the necessity of exile, not because of aspirations to become a man of letters, that Andrés had had to learn to master languages and cultures other than his native Spanish. It was the new historical reality of exile, not studium, which had faced Andrés with the
comparatist’s problem of understanding not one culture—if we follow Adolfo Domínguez Moltó’s interpretation that “‘all literature’ equals ‘all culture’” here (67)—but, historically and critically, all cultures in relation with one another.∞ And it was, in the end, his allegiance to the Jesuit world with its ecumenical mission and its horizons “necessarily shaped by the supranational character of the Society” (Brizzi 188), not his commitment to the Republic of Letters, that had imposed on Andrés a cosmopolitan, transnational perspective, and perhaps a first understanding, however vague it might have been, of cultural differences.∞

All, alas, to no avail. While Voltaire’s universal history was canonized as the first true example of the genre (Fueter 358), Dell’ origine remained, even for the comparatist, a monstrous work “with no sense” (Wellek, Discriminations 25) and an “excess of encyclopedic gusto” (Getto 99).∞ Such strong reactions are curious—not so much because I believe Andrés’s was a better model for Weltliteratur than, say, Goethe’s; but because, despite so much insistence on Andrés’s alleged encyclopédisme, Dell’origine was the clear attempt, in more ways than one, to go beyond encyclopédisme and against all that the latter stood for. It is enough to see how Andrés, already in the first few pages of his preface, sets his tone of polemical sprezzatura against the philosophes in general and D’Alembert in particular. In the “Preliminary Discourse,” the latter, following Bacon’s taxonomy, had divided human knowledge into erudition (memory), belles letters (imagination), and philosophy (reason), as if one could be studied in itself and separated from the others. Also Jaucourt, as we have already seen, had divided knowledge between literature (belles lettres), philosophy (abstract), and (practical) sciences. Andrés responded:

This kind of division is correct if we consider the relations of the various sciences with the faculties of our mind; but it is not very fruitful if we want to follow the progress that has been accomplished in those sciences . . . . Surely, natural history and ecclesiastical history are branches of historiography; but how can we separate natural history from physics, and ecclesiastical history from theology? In sum, such division . . . can serve those who want to examine the genealogy of sciences, but not those of us who want to write their history. (Dell’ origine 1.iv)

In the Encyclopédie, the crisis of a traditional discursive system based on theological or Aristotelian notions of the unity of all knowledge had engendered a process of differentiation and fragmentation and produced a discreet series of self-regulating and autonomous disciplinary domains
(M. McKeon 17). As Voltaire had written in the *Encyclopédie* under “Belles Lettres,” “universal knowledge is no longer possible to man: the true men of letters move their steps in different fields, since they cannot cultivate them all” (Diderot 7.599). The temptation to see Andrés as a conservative obscurantist trying to reclaim a lost and untenable unity is strong. What such prejudice would betray, however, is the assumption of the fundamentally progressive nature of the French *philosophes*, and the regressive one of their opponents. Yet as José Antonio Valero suggests (187–89), Andrés’s attempt to preserve a measure of connection between the literatures was no more regressive than the *Encyclopédie*’s own attempt to preserve a unitary perspective—D’Alembert’s rational “system that is one” (Diderot na9). The difference is that the unifying principle was no longer, for Andrés, the philosophers’ universal reason.

Interestingly, if not surprisingly, such a unifying principle—which introduces an element of relativism to the otherwise objective universality of reason—is what Andrés called “critical history,” or “philosophical history” (*Dell’ origine* 1:i–v). Let us remember that history, for both Voltaire and Jaucourt, was a branch of the belles lettres (though for Voltaire the situation could be improved by applying “to the writing of history, what has already happened to physics”; see *Oeuvres historiques* 46). As such, history was not the end of knowledge, but just a key to the practical and useful sciences. Here, instead, it is history—Andrés’s goal is “to write their [sciences’] history”—that appears as the end and ultimate summation of all knowledge. This does not mean that history is no longer a branch of the belles lettres: on the contrary, history remains similar to poetry in so far as “illusion has to be created in history just as in poems” (Andrés, *Dell’ origine* 3:118); and it obeys the same narrative rules as the novella when its task becomes “to choose among the infinite facts only those that are worth narrating” (3:146). The difference between Jaucourt’s and Andrés’s history, instead, lies in the latter’s capacity of synthesis and abstraction that only philosophy, the science of reason, possessed for Jaucourt and Voltaire. History is the ultimate philosophy for Andrés, not only because it can discuss the origin and progress of *all* sciences but also because its method is inherently a philosophical one: “Not the vast erudition, but the philosophical zest and spirit is the only force capable of forming, out of a confusion of materials, a fabric convenient to the wonderful richness of the world” (3:96). History, selecting those facts alone that are “worth narrating,” is the only true philosophy.

Andrés’s concern with history is interesting (and unsurprising), first
of all because it follows what can be characterized as a general trend of literary studies in the eighteenth century. Earlier epochs had studied the corpus of a poetic tradition “not with a properly historical . . . interest, but from a rhetorical point of view” (Getto 2) by singling out authoritative examples, possibly to imitate, in a given literary tradition. Only in the eighteenth century is a predominant rhetorical interest abandoned in favor of a chronological organization (alternative, incidentally, to the arbitrarily alphabetical one of the encyclopedia). What Andrés thought to have found was that such novel interest in chronology was in fact not so general, and had instead its own geography: the French, under the spell of Cartesian reason and Montesquieu’s general spirit, had failed to develop chronology into true history. Jean Pierre Niceron’s Mémoires pour servir à l’histoire des hommes illustres de la République (1729–45), or Prosper Marchand’s Dictionnaire historique (1758–59), were for Andrés mere fragmentary and itemized collections of biographical details. Even the Histoire littéraire de France (1733), developed by the Benedictines under the direction of Antoine Rivet de la Grange and Charles Clemencet, arguably “the model [of literary historiography] that other nations have taken on themselves to imitate,” remained for him “farthest from the perfection that this kind of work requires. It is anyway mainly biographical; it follows with too much individuality the authors and their works; it fails to present with due precision the true picture of the general state of literature in the various ages it describes” (Andrés, Dell’origine 3:372).

A true sense of history, for Andrés, had to be found in Montesquieu’s south—notably in his adoptive Italy, where history, not modernity, was the leading glory of the country; where the archeological excavations of Pompei and Ercolano (begun in 1748), not the modern marvels of Versailles (Ange Jacques Gabriel had completed the Petit Trianon in 1768) gave a sense of place; and where Gian Mario Crescibeni, already in 1698, had produced an Istoria della vulgar poesia. Crescimbeni’s history had been followed by the literary histories of Giacinto Gimma (1723), Francesco Saverio Quadrio (1739–52), Francesco Antonio Zaccaria (1750), and, last but not the least, by the Storia della letteratura Italiana (1772–82), by the “wise” Girolamo Tiraboschi (Andrés, Dell’origine 2:xiv). What attracted Andrés to these texts was that they all presented, through history, an explicit defense of Italian culture against the accusations of Dominique Bouhours’s Les entretiens d’Ariste et d’Eugène (1671): that Italian modern poetry, starting with Petrarch’s taste for the
“embellishment,” and more so under the influence of the Spanish baroque, had become “unreasonable” (on this, see Maugain; Fubini; Puppo 33–36). Girolamo Tiraboschi, for instance, had prefaced his work by saying that “the desire to add new glory to Italy, and to defend it still, if necessary, against the envy of some foreigners, convinced me to begin this general history of Italian literature from its most ancient principles to our own days” (1:v).

Anticipating Andrés, Tiraboschi had strategized his “defense” as a “history of the origin and the progress of Science in Italy” (1:x). Tiraboschi’s historicist defense of Petrarch, and of his confluence in the rhymes of Marinismo and Secentismo, consisted in claiming that the significance of Petrarch had to be measured not on the basis of exogenous standards—say, reason—but as the manifestation of the particular cultural development of Italian literature in Petrarch’s own epoch. The advantage of such a method was that it could be immediately applicable in the defense of Spain against French accusations of Spanish ignorance, lack of culture, taste, and letters. In other words, historicism might have appeared to Andrés as the best instrument to settle some accounts with the French.

It had been a Frenchman, after all, Marc Antoine Muret, who in 1588 had blamed the Hispano-Latin writers Seneca, Lucan, and Martial for the corruption of Latin letters and already prompted a response from Andrés in 1776 (see Mazzeo 23; Domínguez Moltó 70–71; Andrés, Carta). And it was not so much Bartolomeo de Las Casas’s 1553 Brevísima relación de la destrucción de las Indias, but the “Huguenot translation” (Hanke 50; Keen) of the Relación in Dutch (1578) and French (1579) that had spread the “Black Legend” of Spain’s (incidentally true) inhumanity in the service of France’s colonial designs and against Spanish interests in the Americas. In the eighteenth century, when the Spanish empire had already crumbled, Muret’s indictment of Spanish aesthetics and the echoes of the Black Legend had persisted in the enlightened caricature of the Spaniard as inquisitorial, ignorant, uncultured, vain in the nostalgia of a lost empire, and religiously fanatical—the image, that is to say, of Spain’s baroque excesses. What was at stake in this novel wave of Hispanophobia was obviously no longer colonial expansion, but France’s hegemony as the cultural standard of Europe—as the center, any distance from which would be plain error.

Despite the fact that Italians were no less the victims of Bouhours’s and Muret’s Francocentric logics than the Spaniards were, the hegemony
of the French discourse had offered Italian intellectuals the possibility (or scapegoat) of blaming Spanish influence for its own faults. The Mantuan Saverio Bettinelli, but also the much admired Girolamo Tiraboschi, had in fact promoted yet another querelle: whose fault was the crisis, if any, of Italian letters (see Palazón 16)? Andrés had answered with a polemical letter to the Italian “brother” Gaetano Valenti Gonzaga: significantly, the title with which the letter would be published in 1776 hinted at an alleged reason for the corruption of Italian taste. In short, the alleged Spanish influence had nothing to do with a crisis (alleged, too) of Italian literature. The arguments that Andrés found in the letter, and which later would become part of Dell’ origine, certainly managed very well to “[defend] the honor of the [Spanish] Nation . . . from the offense that some Italians have advanced, when they have accused Her of having corrupted Italian taste” (Carta 4). Tiraboschi immediately retracted in front of Andrés’s “good taste,” and declared himself “sorry” for his own lack of judgment (Venturi, Settecento 1:262–66). Neither Saverio Lampillas nor Juan Francisco Masdeu, who had written with the same intentions as Andrés, had managed to achieve such retraction from the proud (and certainly authoritative) Tiraboschi. The fact is that Lampillas and Masdeu had advanced “a violent defense of the national cultural patrimony [of Spain] realized as an apologetic praise of Spanish literature said to have been an important contribution to Europe” (Micozzi 54); Andrés, instead, had forgone any apology and questioned the very logic—or “taste”—that allowed Muret, Bouhours, and Boilau—the French, that is—to order literature in a hierarchy in which France occupied the top, and Spain, but also Italy, the defective bottom. In other words, Andrés, differently than the virulent Lampillas and Masdeu, had managed to strike a strategic cultural alliance between the Spaniards and the Italians.

The strategy of the letter to Gonzaga was to produce the polemical backbone of Dell’ origine. Rather than attacking the Italian despisers of Spain, Andrés saw both Italy and Spain as a brotherhood of victims of French prejudice. He then went directly to the source of that prejudice—and he found himself in the midst of Montesquieu’s Lettres Persanes, whose seventy-eighth letter could, after all, be quoted in its entirety (it has already been done by José Cadalso) as a monument of French eighteenth-century Hispanophobia. An “invincible enemy of work” (Montesquieu, Oeuvres 2:249), Montesquieu’s Spaniard constantly affects a culture that—be it clear to all!—he certainly does not possess:
“The eyeglasses [that all Spaniards wear] show demonstratively that the one who wears them is a man enlightened by science and a profound reader—so profound indeed that his eyesight has weakened. [In Spain] any nose adorned or weighed by [glasses] can be passed off, with no one daring to question, as a savant’s nose” (2:248). For Montesquieu, the Spaniard’s is an inferior intellect, and it is devoid of culture—culture being, of course, that essentially French attribute otherwise known as raison: “Surely you can find some intelligence and some commonsense people among the Spaniards; but don’t look for any in their books. Take, for instance, their libraries, with their fantastic literature on one side, and the scientific works on the other. It is as if the whole thing had been arranged and collected by some secret foe of human reason” (2:250). Montesquieu’s Spaniards, quite unflatteringly, are also excesses of hypocrisy. “So devout that you can hardly call them Christians,” they possess “little formalities which in France would appear out of place; for example, an officer never strikes a soldier without asking his permission; and the Inquisition always apologizes to a Jew before burning him.” Sure enough, these monstrous Spaniards, devoid of culture, empty of intellect, and clear of a moral sense, must have something to distinguish them, at least, from the beast. And in fact, Montesquieu concedes: “They are always in love. In dying of languor under their mistress’s windows they have not their match in the world . . . . They are, firstly, bigots—secondly, jealous . . . . They allow their wives to appear with uncovered bosoms; but they would not have any one see their heels, lest hearts should be ensnared by a glimpse of their feet” (2:249–50). Yet passion, as we know already from De l’esprit des lois, only “multiplies crimes” and is hardly the decorous attribute of the reasonable honnête homme! To have a clear example of the latter, on the other hand, we only have to look at France, the “most ancient and powerful kingdom of Europe” (2:279), the center of a new reasonable sociability whose example needs to be extended to the whole continent: “One says that man is a sociable animal. In this sense, I believe the Frenchman is more a man than any other—he is the quintessence of man since it seems he acts only for society” (2:261).

It is not this immediate level of Montesquieu’s Hispanophobia, however, that Andrés was determined to tackle. Compared to the philosophes’ sclerotic insistence on a suprahistorical, universal reason, Montesquieu presented for Andrés the added danger of seeming capable of reconciling such universality with history. Climate had given Montesquieu opportunities both to theorize difference within Europe and to order differ-
ence hierarchically by measuring it against the standard of a French “good” weather. It is this “too strong influence of climate” (Andrés, Dell’origine 5:609), therefore, that Andrés had to eliminate as the effective cause of cultural excellence:

It is quite common to attribute to climate an influence on everything, and especially on artistic taste and on the perfection of literature. I certainly agree that climate also has some role in all that pertains to the strength of the spirit. But to claim that the influence of climate determines the true origin and essence of the culture of various nations seems to me an assertion not backed by experience, and unconfirmed by facts. Under the same climate, with no great planetary change, the Greeks, brutes at first, became then for an extended period the wisdom of the world; and that same Greece, which was for many centuries the garden of Europe, has lately become a sterile [intellectual] desert. (Andrés, Dell’origine 1:26)

In other words, what Montesquieu—and, by implication, the French—had done, was more than attacking Spain. While hypostatizing their own men as “more men,” they had indicted the whole south. The reason they had alleged for their indictment, once again, was climate: “‘Cold,’ says Montesquieu, ‘tightens the pores, and makes the body stronger; at the same time, makes the nutritional juices coarser, and the spirit becomes less lively.’ The fame of the author would deserve a longer criticism than the one needed by the weakness of his reasoning. I would only like to ask Montesquieu if, France being colder than Spain, we should conclude that the French have stronger bodies and less lively spirit” (Dell’origine 1:27). In this sense, Montesquieu had little to do with universal reason, and was the mouthpiece, rather, of a merely French reason eager to declare itself superior and universal: De l’esprit des lois, for instance, “is not for other nations than France a reason to envy France” (Andrés, Dell’origine 6:385). Only the French, who gain from it, can see in Montesquieu’s theory any universal truth: for the rest of humankind, “I have to say, I do not find that work too engaging, let alone instructive” (3:126).

For Montesquieu’s climatological and spatial logic (whose alleged causality, in truth, Andrés had to exaggerate a bit), Dell’origine substitutes a historical one: there is hardly any “necessary relation”—no “law”—between natural and social facts; same climates and same places—say, Greece—have known different stages of success. The law of reason must
be replaced by history, a critical understanding of differences in taste and habit that have little, if anything, to do with natural causes. And—just to hit the French where it hurts—submitting history to geography and climate is nothing less than unreasonable. History, which Andrés declares to have learnt from the Italian, thus emerges as the discipline capable of undoing French Europe from its climatological basis. As such, history is said to have a hermeneutic potential that no other science does: history can explain what climatology cannot.

Far from being the uncultured border of Europe, and far from representing only Europe’s cultural past, the present south of eighteenth-century Italy became then for Andrés the very capital of Europe’s most powerful science—history. The French have their climatologists, seemed to say Andrés; but Italy has, in the present of today, its literary historians: “Other writers have written biographies, have compiled factual details, have collected monuments, which have greatly served to enlighten literary history; but only Tiraboschi has given us a literary history. France and Spain have their literary histories, but theirs are still imperfect; only Italy has a complete and finished one—Tiraboschi’s” (3:385). This was only marginally a praise of the Italians, as it was, in a deeper sense, the attempt to depict the south as a place in which culture was still active, and not merely a thing of the past. Most important, this was the attempt to find in history an alternative method to reason for the study of literatures.

This brings me to the second reason why Andrés’s historical turn (so to speak) is at the same time interesting and unsurprising. In his 1948 Harvard lecture titled “Vico and Aesthetic Historism,” Erich Auerbach had already observed that historicism “practically originated in the second half of the eighteenth century, as a reaction against the European predominance of French classicism” (185). For Auerbach, historicism had emerged as “the conviction that every civilization and every period has its own possibilities of aesthetic perfection; that the works of art of the different peoples and periods, as well as their general forms of life, must be understood as products of variable individual conditions, and have to be judged each by its own development, not by absolute rules of beauty and ugliness” (183–84). In truth, we should not exaggerate the range of what Auerbach calls “every civilization and every period” here. Certainly born within Europe, and certainly short-circuited in the attempts to articulate “variations on a master narrative that could be called ‘the history of Europe,’” as Dipesh Chakrabarty has maintained in Pro-
vincializing Europe, eighteenth-century historicism can hardly be seen as some kind of multiculturalism aimed at going beyond the strict confines of a Eurocentric universe: Europe, writes Chakrabarty, “remains the sovereign, theoretical subject of all histories” (27). What the emergence of historicism signals, however, is that the very center of this Eurocentric vision becomes a contested site of theoretical discourse around the eighteenth century: against a fixed notion of European culture promoted by French classicism and rationalism, historicism pits its own alternative centers. The history of historicism is, then, the story of a battle for the definition of Europe and its culture that a homogenizing notion of Eurocentrism unfortunately runs the risk of obliterating.

Put bluntly, historicism had emerged, by the second half of the eighteenth century, as the ideology and methodology of a subaltern Europe—Vico’s Italy, Herder’s Germany, and Andrés’s Spain—pitted against the unbearable hegemony of France. Historicism was a theory of history radically opposed to the linear universal history of Montesquieu and Voltaire. Progress was not a line that went simply from east to west, or from south to north. For Andrés, who had Giambattista Vico’s Scienza nuova under his belt, each place had a history of its own—and had to be judged on the basis of this local history, not from the perspective of a putative end of history located in a western and northern modernity. “Progress” was to be understood not as a teleology of continuous perfectibility, but rather as the simple passage of cultural hegemony from one nation to another, after the new nation had “inherited” from the previous one the lights of its culture. For instance, if the Romans had come after the Greeks, and had inherited from them some ideas about rhetoric and metaphysics, this did not mean that the Romans had to be better: literature had “progressed” from Athens to Rome—but a comparative judgment of the two was simply beyond the point of history. Progress was for Andrés a movement toward a different place, not a movement forward to an ultimate end.

In this context we should understand Andrés’s insistence that France had no histories: certainly, Bossuet had produced an entire Discours sur l’histoire universelle. Yet Bossuet’s was only a pseudohistory, “monologic” (Greenblatt) and centered only on “what Europe is in the universe” and on “what Paris and the Ile de France mean within Europe” (Bossuet 4). Even Voltaire, who had avoided Bossuet’s simplistic Franco-centrism, and who Andrés had praised as a “Prometheus . . . who found a new way of treating Universal History” (Dell’ origine 3:89), had been
unable to produce more than a collection of “mostly false or altered chronicles, impious reflections, and scandalous doctrines” (3:90). Moreover, Tiraboschi’s difference between biblioteca and storia—between the erudite collection of biobibliographical data, on the one hand, and a true history of origins and progress, on the other—was still valid for Andrés: French history, for him, remained “anyway mainly biographical.” Yet Andrés was more willing than Tiraboschi to see anything positive in French historiography (Palazón 30).

Andrés’s difference from Tiraboschi may be of some importance here: the Italian had denied France any historical sense—French histories were wrong and bibliographical. In this sense, Tiraboschi was applying an essentially French logic—there is one universal reason and therefore one reasonable way of doing history—against France itself. Arguably, Andrés was trying to go beyond Tiraboschi: France’s spirit of scientific inquiry that Cartesianism had helped to promote was not necessarily antihistorical, but could establish, instead, some kind of empiricist historiography. This was the case, for instance, of Montesquieu’s geographical and climatological history. In what ways did that history differ from the one Andrés was proposing? For Montesquieu, there was one reason, which took different shapes and degrees of perfection according to different geographies and climates. History was, then, the advancement of this single reason, and was, therefore, representable as a single line of progress from one place to another (Barraclough 84). For Andrés, instead, reason itself was historical, and relative, therefore, to a time and place. Each place, accordingly, had a history; and each place has some kind of historiography—even France. However, such admission of a French capability to write history constituted, paradoxically, a more radical criticism than Tiraboschi’s of French rationalism: for the French, history was submitted to reason; for Andrés, reason had to be submitted to history.

Still, not France, but “Italy really leads . . . in literary historiography” (Andrés, Dell’ origine 3:383). Historical relativism—I will come back to this point—did not preclude for Andrés the possibility of passing judgments and organizing hierarchies of value. While Italy produced historians, rationalist France could only produce a prescriptive and normative “modern code of good taste, not only in poetry but in the Belles Lettres in general” (2:204). Not that this was such a great achievement either. Nicholas Boileau’s Art poétique (1674), to which Andrés was referring, had submitted literature to reason—verisimilitude, clear and dis-
tinct phrasing, normative rules of action and conduct, decorum of characters. This was for Andrés symptomatic of a more general, and utterly wrong, French attitude, theorized for instance by Jaucourt, to submit aesthetics—the key—to the superior relevance of practical sciences.

Andrés did not mind the progress of the sciences, which he considered, on the contrary, a “document of the sublimity, and I would dare say of the divinity of human spirit” (Dell’ origine 4:1). Assuming the Jesuit’s resistance to the new scientific spirit would mean to buy into the commonplace concocted for polemical reasons by the philosophes themselves. As Aldo Scaglione remarks: “The Jesuits were trying their best to teach both [science and the humanities]. Nonetheless, since the Jesuits’ pedagogy has often been criticized for disregard toward the sciences and the practical or technical arts, it must be pointed out, as a symptomatic detail, that of the 130 astronomical observatories in existence in Europe in 1733, 30 belonged to the company” (87). In the specific case of Juan Andrés, it should suffice to say that he had been granted access to the Academy of Mantua thanks to his prizewinning dissertation on hydraulics. Neither ignorant of, nor predisposed against, the practical sciences, Andrés only minded the submission of the belles lettres to that scientific and mathematical language whose hegemony had been abundantly theorized in France by the likes of Bernard le Borier de Fontanelle and Maupertuis (Venturi, Settecento 1:355; Palazón 87–90):

One could lament with good reason the promiscuity, and the abuse, that goes back and forth between these two kinds of literature [i.e., experimental sciences and belles lettres]. Perhaps, the determination to use the rhetorical figures of the belles letters in the sciences will spoil, eventually, the exactitude and just precision of the sciences; it is certain that the belles letters are already damaged by the habit of ruining them through the use of geometrical expressions and scientific idioms; and by the misuse of many words that are proper to mathematics, physics, chemistry, and other sciences into eulogies, academic prose, and even poetry. (Dell’ origine 2:18–19)

Despite the lamenting tone, the defense of poetry against the practical sciences occupies here a philosophical, more than a merely polemical, dimension. The encyclopédistes, and D’Alembert in particular, were ready to see in the belles lettres the key to the superior practical sciences: the student-citoyen, as we have seen, needed to learn to read before being able to become a scientist. In this logic, the belles lettres occu-
pied a subordinate, instrumental role vis-à-vis the practical sciences. To D’Alembert’s pedagogical argument, Andrés added a genetic one: “The first written document extant to us belongs to history and poetry, not to philosophy” (*Dell’ origine* 1:1). The argument, already familiar to sensism (Palazón 62), had been used in Italy by Vico as a way to show not the superiority, but the very limit of science. What did it mean, for Andrés after Vico, to declare poetry the origin of a literature that then progresses with science? It meant to illustrate the blindness of a science, stuck in its dependence on alleged empirical facts and observable certainties, to even face the problem of its origin. Can facts arise outside of the language that constitutes them? Can certainties exist outside the words that verify them? Can science ever escape its own origin in language?

Science had symptomatically marginalized the question of language as irrelevant for the purpose of “natural philosophy” (Chovillet). However, the fact remained that science had to use that very language to whose origin it remained programmatically blind. To say, as Cartesian formal logic did, that if \( A = B \) and \( B = C \), then \( A = C \), was to formulate something that could be true only within a linguistic convention in which the possibility that \( A \) “is” \( C \) was not a paradox but a “fact.” The definition of a scientific law (as the Copernican one, which Galileo Galilei expounded in the rhetoric of a *dialogue* on world systems in 1632), or the very demonstration of a mathematical theorem, were as much a matter of syllogisms and enthymemes as they were of algebra (Goetsch 49–87). Andrés’s “discovery” of the poetic origin of literature, echoing very closely Vico’s project of a new science, seemed, then, to suggest the idea that all knowledge—Andrés’s literature—originated as/through rhetorical figures. For both Vico and Andrés, whereas Cartesian and encyclopedic sciences had found their legitimization in the facts of the physical world, a new science was fundamentally a metaphysics, a science of the language that founded the knowledge of the physical world. Just as history had “to choose among the infinite facts only those that are worth narrating,” so had science to choose, among the infinite epiphanies of the real, those that were worth considering as facts. We thus have Descartes, on the one hand, whom “the French want as the creator of a good physics”; and, on the other, Galileo, for whom “figures, numbers, and algebraic signs are the language of the Universe” and whose “profoundest reflections . . . give birth to metaphysics” (Andrés, *Dell’ origine* 1:419, 1:490). Or, in another antithesis deriving from the same rhetorical structure, we have Isaac Newton’s physics, on the one
hand; and, on the other, John Locke, “the Newton of metaphysics,” whose only goal was “to reflect over himself, and over his own thoughts” (6:326). This difference between adherence to the facts and linguistic (self-)reflection of what constituted a fact was fundamental for Andrés’s elevation of literary historiography to a metaphysical, systematic theory of the “literatures of the whole world.”

The rationalist paradigm is thereby inverted. It is not language that is subordinated to reason, but reason to language: “Contrary to popular belief, reason has more dependence on and greatest need of the faculty of the imagination; if philosophers want to make progress, they must, whether they want it or not, sit next to the poets” (Andrés, Dell’ origine 1:41). The theoretical consequences are impressive: Boileau’s submission of belles lettres to reason implied a universality of reason—the idea that “human nature was permanent and unchanging, wherever and whenever it was found, and . . . therefore . . . norms could be prescribed to it” (Reiss 71). Such universality of reason, however, was untenable for Andrés, since reason itself depended on the original poetry of languages. Reason was, accordingly, relative to any specific language. What Boileau recommended as reason was therefore something originating within a French linguistic culture, which, in turn, was imposed by a hegemonic state on the periphery of Europe under the assumption of its own universality. This was a rather original way of restating the question of the genius of languages, which had traditionally granted France the hegemony of civilization: in Andrés’s version of it, the genius of French language was not so much its propensity for the rational discourse, but rather, if tautologically, a propensity for a discourse perceived as rational only within the same language. In other words, neither reason nor enlightenment were for Andrés “an impressively unified process across Europe, indeed a remarkable demonstration of the essential cohesion of European history” (Israel 137). There were many reasons, many enlightenments, and many histories as well.

This left Andrés with a major problem: if historicism is the relativism of judging “each by its own development,” how can a hierarchy between, for instance, the “good” histories of the Italians and the “bad” ones of the French still be maintained? More seriously still: once such a principle of relativism is introduced, how is it possible, even in eight quite lengthy volumes, to cover “the origin and progress of all literatures in all times and in all nations”? It is for this reason, I believe, that Andrés continuously qualified history with adjectives such as critical and philosophical.
To begin with, it is interesting that for Andrés critical and philosophical are not at odds with each other. In the article on “Belles Lettres” for the Encyclopédie, Voltaire had written that “criticism today is not necessary, and the philosophical spirit has replaced criticism” (7:599). Andrés insists, rather, that there is no philosophy without criticism.

What criticism meant for Andrés was the selection (giusta censura) of the representative works in each single literature. Critical was the interpretation of those works (attenta lettura) in the context of their place and time, and not according to allegedly universal criteria. Once its literature was then judged “each by its own development,” what remained to be assessed was what, within each literature, had contributed to the general advancement of literature in the world. No matter how important a work or an author could have been in her or his historical and national context, what remained to be done was to select those that had contributed to universal language. The notion of universality thus reenters the theorization of literature, but is no longer limited to the geography of France or any other single nation: “Who on earth are Leon and Villages—Italians will say—compared to Costanzi and Speroni? And who cares about Philips and Canitz—will say the Spaniard—compared to Erera and Schilace? All nations will find my text lacking in promoting their own authors, and too prolix in discussing others. I beg the readers who will bring such an accusation against me to remember that I am discussing universally all literatures, and not particular national ones” (Dell’ origine 2:xii–xiii). In order to assess which works and which authors were indeed relevant to universal literature, a philosophy, a unitary conception and idea of the progress of all literatures, was needed. Philosophical, in other words, described a principle of hermeneutic coherence, one opposed to the cumulative method of erudition and of national literature, that could trace the idea of progress (“che descriverà filosoficamente i progressi in ogni sua parte”) in “such a cornucopia of facts” (1:v). The philosophical was the power that could abstract, out of all the infinite literatures of all times and nations, one single, metaphysical history, with an origin and an end not yet in sight:

In general, I believe that we can consider Asia as the true motherland, the cradle of literature. Because Asia was the first country to be populated after the Flood, it was the first to cultivate the sciences. It can also be said that the light of letters, like that of the sun, began to enlighten the Oriental quarters, following then its westward course, casting light first on
Egypt, and then on Greece, and after that illuminating our western regions [i.e., Europe]. God willing, this light will stay above us a little longer, or maybe will stop its course in our hemisphere, rather than keep moving toward the West transferring the splendor of sciences to America and leaving Europe in the same darkness of ignorance that nowadays casts a shadow not only on the Asiatic nations, but also on Egypt and on the eastern parts of Europe. (1:19–20)

A critical and philosophical history was, then, the key for Andrés to begin to “vindicate his native land” (Mazzeo 45), “oppose the implantation of the restraining Gallic literary tenets and precepts of the neoclassical school of thought . . . [and] counteract the influence of Encyclopedism” in Europe (Mazzeo 45).²² Looking at literature not from Jaucourt’s utilitarian perspective, but from a historicist one, Andrés had already achieved two objectives: first, his contemporary south emerged not as a cultural wasteland, but as the active producer of a vibrant historicist culture; second, southern literatures were different than the French ones (southerners write literary histories while Frenchmen compose the *Arts of Poetry*), and they could not be measured with the same standards. There was still one problem that literary historiography now needed to solve: where did modern Europe begin? Was it, really, in Montesquieu’s Frankish woods that an ancient cycle of literature was historically transcended into modernity? Or did European modernity begin in the south after all?

The Discreet Charm of the Arabist Theory

But now, having brought to your attention this synthetic picture, with its many details, I fear a question may be raised:
Is then all our civilization of Arabic origin?
—A. GONZALEZ PALENCIA, “Islam and the Occident”

Who were the fellow Muslims Abd al-Rahman found in al-Andalus, and how had they come to be there?
What was that place, Europe, where they lived?
—MARIA ROSA MENOCAL, *The Ornament of the World*

The image of a light of culture moving from Asia to Europe as if following the sun and stationing over the Iberian peninsula before “moving to-
ward the West transferring the splendor of sciences to America” sounds so enlightened and Voltaire-like, that the reader, who at this point is only at page 19 of Dell’origine, is almost led to believe in Andrés’s encyclopédisme. Like Voltaire, Andrés was following the same biblical story of post-Adamitic civilization beginning in Asia, and then moving westward along with the sun. What Voltaire could not have possibly imagined was the Jesuit’s (historicist) presentiment that the light of culture, perhaps, would not stay in Europe forever. Whereas history was for Voltaire a teleology leading to Europe, Andrés’s historicism, instead, was based on the assumption that no place and no time was the ultimate end of history.

At any rate, in Andrés’s account the light of literature has not yet transferred to America: it has just abandoned the eastern parts of Europe in the dark and is now moving toward the Atlantic. Where do we find, then, the light of culture now? Without being exceedingly surprised, we find the light exactly around Spain and Portugal, where it is hesitating (and why would any light like to abandon beautiful Iberia!) to jump to the other shore of the ocean. The image is halfway jingoistic tastelessness and sheer beauty: by reclaiming the importance of Spain as the last Thule of Europe’s culture before light would move to the New World, Andrés is already hinting at where modern literature really is. Paris is passé; New York may be the future. Madrid, no doubt, is the present.

The image does, in fact, summarize quite well the scope of the eight volumes of Dell’origine, progressi, e stato attuale d’ogni letteratura. As a transnational (and transcontinental) literary history, Andrés’s book offers a look at various national literatures, but, above all, a chronology of the world’s great literary epochs—those epochs in which the culture of one nation became patrimony of all literatures to follow. Briefly, this is Andrés’s chronology, already sufficiently summarized by the cited image: the first great epoch of literature is in Asia after the Flood; literature then moves westward, first to Egypt (for the satisfaction of Martin Bernal), then to Greece, where it knows exemplary perfection (2:26–31). It then moves to imperial Rome; and then . . . Then where? Chronology is of the utmost importance here because to understand where the light of literature moved after Rome meant nothing less than understanding in which language, and in which nation, resided the cultural origin of modern Europe. Voltaire had already said that “modern history . . . follows the decadence of the Roman Empire” (Oeuvres complètes 11:157); and August Wilhelm von Schlegel would soon canonize that same esti-
mate for the Romantic generation: modernity, he wrote in the Vorlesungen über dramatische Kunst und Literatur (1809), is born out of the “encounter of Latin with the ancient German dialects,” which, following the fall of Rome, inaugurates a “new European civilization” (13).

So, where does the light of culture find refuge after the fall of Rome? Montesquieu’s answer had been unequivocal: after culture had but disappeared in the immediate and darkest years following the demise of the empire, it was in Charlemagne’s Frankish schools and monastery that “Arts and Sciences seemed to reappear. One can say that the people of France was destroying Barbarity” (Oeuvres 1:1095). For Jaucourt, it was in French Provence that modern European culture begun: “In a word, all our modern poetry, comes from Provence” (Diderot 12:840). Whether it was Charlemagne or the troubadours, one thing was certain: an origin of modern Europe was to be located somewhere in France.

It was this certainty that Andrés intended to demolish. First of all, if Charlemagne had managed to make anything reappear, it was only the pseudoculture of mediocre theologians, ignorant clerics, and illiterate priests (Andrés, Dell’ origine 1:110): “Because in fact the Emperor, Alcuinus, Theodulf, and all those who were working for a reformation of studying had only one goal: service to the church. Accordingly, their great schools taught little more than grammar [useful only to read the psalms] and ecclesiastical singing” (1:108–9). In Frankish Europe, in other words, “Schools were created; but only to teach reading, singing, counting, and little more. Teachers were formed; but it was enough that they knew some grammar, and if one was ahead of his peers enough to know also a little bit of mathematics or astronomy, he was considered an oracle. But a Terence, a Cicero, a Quintilian did not exist in all France” (1:111).

Boileau had submitted literature to reason; Jaucourt to science; and Charlemagne to religion. They all had “drowned Europe in so much dialectical nonsense” (1:182). There had to be something rotten in France! Moreover, as we know from Aldo Scaglione, mentions of Alcuin’s schools were often a veiled criticism of Jesuit education, accused of straying away, by teaching all the heathen Greeks and Romans, from proper knowledge (51). So if culture survived or revived in Europe, this could scarcely be the merit of Charlemagne and his educators.

As for the claim of a Provençal origin of modern literature, this was, as Andrés probably learnt from Vico, just the “arrogance” (alterigia) (Andrés, Dell’ origine 2:11) and “pretentiousness of the French, who brag about monuments of superior antiquity both in prose and in verse”
First of all, Provençal, the idiom that “so much ado created all over Western Europe” (1:292), originally was not the French of Languedoc, but, in case, Catalan (1:294). Second, and more important, what has French Provençal poetry ever achieved if not much bragging about such a mediocre poem as the *Roman de la rose*, “where absolutely nothing happens but the picking of a rose” (1:338)? Rather than creating modern poetry, the French had drowned Europe in the darkness of scholasticism: “None of the first scholastics was a Spaniard. None of the early controversies that excited the scholastics excited Spain. And none of the early scholastic sects was born in those places. Spaniards got scholastics from the Gauls” (1:168).

If the French had not invented modern poetry, then who did? There was only one answer for Andrés: Arab literature had been the central influence in the rebirth of modern Europe (1:x). With a prose reminiscent of the *One Thousand and One Nights*, Andrés described Baghdad as the very light of modern culture—as the locus, namely, where a shift from classical languages to the vulgar ones “accessible to the people” had been transacted: “One sees hundreds of camels entering Baghdad, charged only with paper and books; and all the books, in whatever language they were written, were immediately translated into Arabic” (1:120). From Baghdad, the hegemonic center of the ninth century, literature had then been exported to the entire world—and had reentered Europe to cast some lights in its dark ages: “So, throughout the vast Arab domains, in all the three parts of the world [the ones known at the time: Asia, Africa, and Europe] where their empire had been extended, we see Saracen letters enter triumphantly, and dominate, like their armies, the globe. Since the ninth century of our era, the light of Arabic literature began to shine, and for six or seven centuries it kept glittering brightly” (1:124). Not unaware of the consequences of such an assertion, Andrés conceded that

[this is] a truth that many will take as a ridiculous paradox; namely, that modern literature, not only in the sciences, but also in the Belles Lettres, recognizes the Arab as its mother. Paper, numerals, gunpowder, the compass came to us from the Arabs. Maybe also the pendulum and the law of gravity, and other recent discoveries... were known by them long before they came to our philosophers. Universities, astronomical observatories, academies, literary institutions do not think they have an Arab origin, and perhaps they will not be very grateful to me for having refreshed their memory with the remembrance of such an old event. (1:xi)
Accordingly, Andrés would devote to what will later be known as the Arabist theory the lengthiest and most problematic chapter of his entire treatise—a chapter he was not even sure how to title in order to render it more palatable to his European readers: vaguely, *Della letteratura degli arabi* (*Of Arabic Literature*) in the Parma edition; programmatically, *Dell’influenza degli arabi nella moderna coltura delle belle lettere* (*The Influence of the Arabs in the Modern Culture of Belles Lettres*) in the Venetian and Prato editions; hiding the Arab, *Dell’introduzione della lingua volgare nella coltura delle lettere, particolarmente nella poesia* (*The Introduction of Vulgar Languages in Literature, especially in Poetry*) in the Roman and Pisan editions.

Andrés was not the first to formulate the Arabist theory. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, in fact, this theory was a rather common (if not uncontested) one (Menocal, “Pride and Prejudice” 67; Mazzeo 156–57; Monroe 67). In England, hermetics and Rosicrucians had already recognized Arabic as “the linguistic medium through which much of the Hermetic corpus had been transmitted to Europe in the medieval period” (Matar 89). Even in France the thesis of a Provençal origin of both rhymed poetry and the novel (*roman*) had been questioned in the name of the Arabist theory. Pierre Daniel Huet, the bishop of Avranches, had begun his 1670 letter to Monsieur de Segrais by saying that “it is neither in Provence nor in Spain, as many believe, that one can hope to find the first beginnings of this pleasant amusement of honest relaxation [i.e., the *roman*]” (4). Such beginnings, instead, were “due to the Orientals—namely, Egyptians, Arabs, Persians, and Syrians” (11). Similarly, as far as modern poetry was concerned, “it is the Arabs, in my opinion, who have given us the art of rhyming” (15). But it was especially in Italy, where Andrés was exiled, that the question of an Arab influence in the development of European “wisdom” had been tackled—since Nicolò Cusano’s *De docta ignorantia* (1440)—with the “patriotic” aim of pointing to Pythagoras’s school of Crotone as the Italic origin of Western philosophy (Casini). Vico had impugned the same thesis, with clear anti-Cartesian intentions, in *De antiquissima italorum sapientia* (1710).

In the domain of the belles lettres, Giovanni Maria Barbieri, whose *Rimario* (1570) Andrés had read through Tiraboschi (Palazón 19), had already proposed an Arab origin of rhymed poetry: because the Arabs liked to sing more than write and recite poems, they had replaced Greco-Roman prosody, based on the length of the syllables, with the more musical rhyme. Following Barbieri, Ludovico Muratori’s *Dissertazioni*
sopra le antichità italiane (1751) had singled out the much-despised Arabs as the unexpected preceptors of “our Elders”—the Tuscan Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio. Subsequent chronologies and histories of Italian poetry had thus seen the origin of a secular lyrical tradition not in the courts of Provence, but in the Sicilian school of Fredrick II, whose court “between 1225 and 1250, nearly two centuries after the Arabs had been politically deposed by the Normans, was as brilliant and refined a center of Arabic learning as any in the Middle East or in Spain” (Menocal, “Pride and Prejudice” 74). The Sicilian school had not only introduced the secular topos of love (Boase 62–75), which would later become central in the early-thirteenth-century stil novo (the new style) up to Dante and Petrarch; it had also brought rhyme in Italian versification, and, more important, the sonnet form, which was the likely modification of the zajal, an Arab stanza of six verses popular with the Arabs living in Sicily and rearranged in the final sextet of the Italian (not the later English) sonnet (Oppenheimer; Wilkins, “Invention”; Wulstan). It is from this Italian tradition of patriotic Arabism, not from Huet or the Rosicrucians that, in my opinion, Andrés developed his own Arabist theory. His interest was not a philological but a (geo-)political one: to remove the centrality of France in the history of modern Europe.

For Andrés, it was “unreasonable [to suppose] that the use of rhyme began with the French, and from them was spread all over Europe” (Dell’origine 1:307). Instead, “both French and Provençal must recognize the Arabs as their teachers” (1:301). Arab was the “invention” of rhyme (2:35–38) and the origin of the roman: “Fantasy drove the Arabs to pleasant descriptions and gracious fables, and to every kind of works that come from imagination and good taste. The roman was particularly consistent with their genius, and they were received with such expectation from both learned men and the people that one commonly believes them born out of Arabic ingenuity” (1:139–40). In short, the Arabs had invented two of the pillars of modern European culture: “Maybe their language . . . presents to the creative genius words and expressions, which generate ideas” (2:8).

Arabic, also, was the origin of literary historiography (1:137), modern philosophy (1:141), mathematics (1:147), astronomy (1:148), medicine (1:150–51), and jurisprudence (1:153)—all of modern literature, in fact, with the only exception of modern theater, which originated instead in Europe’s south between Italy (Angelo Poliziano’s Orfeo) and Spain (Fernando de Rojas’ Celestina), came to “us” from “Arabia”: “Arabia, this
inglorious Asian peninsula; Arabia, barbarian country, place of ignorance and wilderness—Arabia gave shelter to the lost literature [of the ancients], and offered sacred asylum to the gentile culture that Europe had rudely cast away” (1:116).

As suggested above, Andrés did not invent the Arabist theory. He was, however, taking it away from the restricted domain of Arabists, theorists of national literature, and critics of literary genres. What for Huet was a mere philological question had become for Andrés a more radical re-orientation of the putative origin of modern Europe. By rearticulating an old theory within a new comparative perspective, he was positing the rather controversial hypothesis of a non-French, and non-European, origin of Europe’s modern culture—let alone the debt Christian Europe had contracted with the Islamic world (Arato, *Storiografia* 437). The question is how to interpret correctly Andrés’s controversial proposition. In 1941, Ramón Menéndez Pidal had liquidated any opposition to the Arabist theory as “a very rooted prejudice: the belief in the lack of intellectual communication between the two worlds, the Christian and the Islamic” (34). In more recent times, Maria Rosa Menocal has claimed that the Arabist theory “first ceases to be discussed and then becomes altogether taboo” in the second part of the nineteenth century, when “a European sense of self emerged . . . which was the height of the colonialist period, and the prevailing attitudes precluded, consciously or sub-consciously, any possibility of ‘indebtedness’ to the Arabic world . . . it would have been inconceivable or very difficult for most Europeans to imagine, let alone explore or defend, a view of the ‘European’ as being culturally subservient to the ‘Arab’” (“Pride and Prejudice” 67–68).

The introduction to the present book has made clear (I hope) that a European sense of self did not need to wait for the nineteenth century in order to emerge. Moreover, I am inclined to believe that an attempt to undermine the theory of an Arab origin of rhymed poetry begins in fact long before Andrés’s own theorization of such origin. Michele Amari, for one, considered seriously the possibility that already the (Christian) scribes and copyists of the thirteenth century, when transcribing the early Arab-Sicilian rhymed poetry, were so ashamed of even quoting that material that they minimized the Arab influence in that poetry (*Storia* 4:759). What needs to be added at this point is that it would be a gross misreading of the Arabist theory (and of Andrés) to suppose that its goal was to “view the ‘European’ as being culturally subservient to the ‘Arab.’” Although Adolfo Domínguez Moltó imagines Andrés as an “ad-
mier, defender, and popularizer” of Arab culture (73), nowhere does Dell’ origine show much sympathy toward the Arab, that “itinerant and nomadic nation” (Andrés, Dell’ origine 1:116), the pyromaniac of Alexandria’s library, and the one bamboozled by Mohammad, “that famous impostor” (1:131). Arab literature, after all, often fell short of that “naturalness of feelings, simplicity of concepts, truth and propriety of figures” that characterized Andrés’s own European standards of good taste: it lost its balance in “excessively daring metaphors,” “endless allegories,” and “excessive hyperboles” (1:134–35).

That Andrés was not concerned with the destiny of the Arab in particular, or with the destiny of multiculturalism in general, is evident from his total disinterest in trying to learn the language, and his reliance on the Spanish translations of the Escorial. Arab literature was treated by him only insofar as it meant something for the history and genesis of European culture. Not that Europe was for him, as for Bossuet and Montesquieu before, the necessary end of history. The progress of literature, however, was now “above us . . . in our hemisphere, [before] transferring the splendor of sciences to America.” A philosophical history of literature had, then, to be written in view of such progress. Sure enough, Montesquieu’s and Voltaire’s Eurocentric prejudice was repeated here: it never occurred to Andrés that making present literature climax in Europe (though a more southern Europe than Montesquieu’s and Voltaire’s) could constitute a mere error of perspective. At any rate, Europe still represented modernity for Andrés—the nowadays of progress. Accordingly, Chinese and Indian literatures (Andrés, Dell’ origine 1:13–14) could be liquidated in the space of one paragraph each because unimportant for the progress of literature. Besides the Arabs, only Caldeans “can stay in our memory, because from their doctrines the Greeks drew many notions” (1:14); and Egypt “only deserves, from the whole of Africa, our consideration, Egypt having been the school of the Greeks” (1:17).

Absolutely uninterested in establishing any “subservience” of Europe, disinclined to claim Arab literature as the origin of European modernity, Andrés only wanted to promote Spain, and, at most, southern Europe, as origins. What operated on Andrés was, in this sense, the discreet charm of the Arabist theory. The Arabs had sowed the seeds, but southern Europe made them bloom: “Where Arab science bloomed more, where the light of their knowledge shined brighter, where the reign of their literature got fixed, so to speak, was in Spain” (1:122). In sum, “the first flashes, which gave blinded Europe some light, came from Spain; there-
fore, we can reasonably say that the origin of modern literature derived from Spain” (1:174).

Answering the Hispanophobic prejudice, in Menocal’s words, that “as an appendage of the Oriental world of Islam, the civilization of Spain did not constitute an integral part of Europe” (“Close Encounters” 50–51), Andrés restored the crumbled empire to its old position of glory. Spain, marginal south of a northbound Europe, came out of his pages as the synthesis of world culture—as the topos, namely, where east and west met. Spain was the last Thule, moreover, of European culture, before the light would move to the New World. Even more important, Spain was depicted as the very origin of all that is modern in Europe—the origin of rhymed poetry, of the roman, and of modern theater (nuovo teatro) (2:400). The paradigm of northern European hegemony was, at least in Andrés’s intentions, flipped upside down: Pierre Corneille had to learn from Spain how to build “the magnificent edifice of French theater” (2:401); the modern epic had to be copied from “southern poetry” (2:134); and Spain was still to rule as the light of a new Europe.

Eager still to imagine itself as the ideal center of Europe, Spain was certainly ready to salute the work of its exiled child with the greatest euphoria: “Charles III, the very monarch who expelled the Jesuits from Spain, was so favorably impressed by the scope and quality of [Andrés’s] work that he instructed the authorities at the Real Colegio de San Isidoro and at the University of Valencia to adopt it as the official text in the course of literary history given at those institutions, thus making them the first European centers of learning to offer a course on the history of universal literature” (Mazzeo 45). The work that was supposed to decenter a profoundly Francocentric Europe; the work that was supposed to undermine the presuppositions of a nationalistic way of looking at literature through the magic of a nascent comparativism—this same work became a nationalist monument to Spain’s nostalgias and ambitions. In truth, only Andrés was to blame. Incapable of extending the implications of his historicism to a critique of any centralism, Andrés was in fact the historical product of Auerbach’s “individual conditions” of his own place and time—a time, I will argue in the next chapter, during which ideas of Europe had started to merge, if not wane, into theories of nationalism.

A fundamental blindness had prevented Andrés from seeing the full consequences of both his historicism and of his Arabist theory: that historical relativism could hardly be reconverted into a theory of Spanish
(or southern) centralism; and that the Arab origin of European poetry could hardly justify his commitment to keep east and west as cultural antitheses of each other. Southern Europe, it is true, was promoted by Andrés from Montesquieu’s past of European history to the very origin of Europe’s modernity. A south conceived as *causa prima* of Europe, however, was hardly a south understood as *causa sui*: the Europeanness of the south was still claimed as the putative beginning of what Europe is “today.” In this, rather than representing any solution, Andrés remains for us the allegory of the problems and difficulties that we may still face when attempting to provincialize Europe from its interior borders—problems and difficulties, however, that should not justify any uncritical embracing of monolithic notions of Eurocentrism. As for the question of European studies, the prevalent assumption that Europe took permanent shape in the writings of Montesquieu and the *philosophes* should seriously be questioned, lest that Europe, which emerged from the historical circumstances of French hegemony, be not mistaken as a truth of universal validity. Against that Europe, Juan Andrés had begun, in 1782, to theorize a different one: it was a Europe seen from the south; it did not end “where Christianity ends,” but began where the Orient began.